

Education or Exploitation?

Navigating Design Internships in a Field of Precarious Work

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Abstract

The role of internships is becoming increasingly dominant in design education as the primary way for design students to bridge the gap between their formal education and professional work. Moreover, internships have become a typical arrangement for young and not-so-young designers to start—and sustain—their career. Yet, design interns' reports show that for many, internships tend to be exploitative opportunities for employers rather than educational experiences for students, who often end up uncredited, overworked, and underpaid. Additionally, educational institutions offer little guidance on navigating this precarious world.

By analyzing higher education policies and crowdsourced experiences and working conditions of interns in the European design field, this thesis examines the role of internships in learning, including various design specializations such as product, graphic, and fashion design. Based on this examination, the thesis shows the causes and implications of exploitative internships and offers guidelines to help interns make more informed decisions for more educational experiences. Though they are directed at students, the guidelines are also useful for design schools and employers who care to ensure that their internship programs are educational in essence.

Lastly, through reflections on the notion of critical design, theoretical texts on labor, and the writer's personal experiences, the thesis explores the internship as a critical design tool for shaping desired labor conditions and presents nonmonetary exchange as an alternative model for learning. Acknowledging that internships are a step towards establishing a design practice, the thesis concludes with examples of alternative models of organizing work against and independent from exploitative labor relations.

Keywords: internship, design education, learning by doing, higher education policy, employability, exploitation, labor, guidelines, critical design, nonmonetary exchange, self-sufficiency, alternative economies

Dear intern-to-be, or, Dear me some years ago,

So, you want to do an internship. Maybe because it's required by your school curriculum, which tells you that you should use and develop your skills out there in the world without giving you much guidance on how to ensure that your learning goals are met under fair conditions. Or maybe you think that an internship is the only way you're going to find work in the field, and your self-worth and survival depends on that. Or that that's what people do; it's just something that you have to go through. It's only for two or six or twelve months. If you're passionate enough about the field, you shouldn't be thinking too much about getting paid.

Offering unpaid or low-paid skilled work does not constitute an educational experience, and it's unlikely to get you anywhere. Being exploited is a good way to start a working life that is misaligned with your personal interests and laced with alienation and burnout. Even you will start to perceive your own skills as underserving of proper compensation. Skills that you put so much time and work into growing. The commonplace work ethic demands your full commitment and turns away from the question of how to sustain a livelihood.

You need to take a position, better sooner than later. Here are three things you could do that can help: Come up with a set of rules or code of ethics for when to go for and when to run away from an internship "opportunity." If you do an internship, sharing your experience helps others know what they're getting into. If you decided you will not do an internship because you didn't find one that matches your values or you didn't find one at all, then you have a chance to do a self-initiated project and explore alternative ways of working against and outside the framework of wage labor—alternatives that center your well-being and values and that provide safety in meaningful social connections rather than professional networks. You don't have to go at it alone or in competition with others.

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Introduction

Why Internships?

As part of the graduation requirements for my undergraduate architectural education, I was obliged to do at least three summer internships for a total period of six months. The stated objectives of these internships were to strengthen design skills such as CAD drawing, apply learned knowledge, and acquire professional experience. Yet, in contrast to a typical university course, we were given no guidance on how to achieve these objectives. We were, however, given some advice on maintaining professional behavior, like being punctual and respectful to our superiors. I ended up doing four different internships of varying lengths and depending on my employers to meet the learning objectives and to compensate my work fairly. Needless to say, they did not all do that.

The quality of the internships varied widely. One internship was a fulfilling experience where I developed the drawings of a project that I was interested in. I was fairly paid, and I learned a lot along the way about what life would be like working at an architecture office and about taking a project from a preliminary conceptual phase to a developed one. I worked independently with the careful guidance of my employer. In another internship, I was given the most cumbersome tasks imaginable for a project that I believed was doing no good for my city, and I learned next to nothing. I was not paid; my parents covered my living expenses. I was sometimes expected to work overtime to meet a deadline. But perhaps the worst aspect of this internship was that I thought what I was doing was normal. I was interning at a well-known office, and I thought that if I made a good impression, I would improve my chances of finding work in the field later. I implicitly believed that making a good impression entailed making serious compromises regarding my personal values, learning goals, and means of livelihood.

Indeed, I made connections with workers at the office, and was able to get employed there after I graduated. I got a job, a means to practice my profession and to pay bills. I was prepared to make the personal compromises needed to practice, as I trained to do during my internship. I traded unfair working con-

ditions and the suspension of my interest in the public good for the possibility to work and collect money, all at a well-respected office in the field.

This thesis is about design internships, their educational use, their exploitative misuse, and their critical potential to test out imaginaries around work. In my exploration of this topic, I chose to include several design disciplines, including product, graphic, and fashion design. I found it useful to take lessons from the art world as well. The reason for that is partly personal: my background is varied as I have studied and worked in the fields of architecture, art history, and product design. More importantly, when it comes to political issues like this one, I believe that we can benefit from cross-disciplinary solidarity and exchange of experiences and information. I found that the struggle for fair working conditions is shared across various creative disciplines. The young designer, cultural worker, and architect often talk about similar problems when it comes to internships. Moreover, I chose to geographically focus the scope of the study on Europe. International student mobility is emphasized in European higher education, and internships are an integral part of mobility. For example, many design students and graduates from Finland are likely to travel elsewhere in Europe for their internships. I also found that interns' experiences across Europe, from Italy to the UK, expressed similar educational, professional, and socioeconomic struggles.

I researched this thesis as an exercise in self-education, and in writing it I hope to communicate what I learned so that others can make use of it. So, I structured the text thematically, as a sort of guidebook, rather than in a typical academic sequence of literature review, data analysis, and discussion, though these components are present in each part of the thesis. I believe that I would have benefited from this text as a student entering the world of work through internships. It is important to me that a reader finds in this text thought-provoking ideas and useful applications for their work life.

The thesis aims to show the conditions and implications of exploitative internships and to assert that internships should primarily be learning experiences. To do that, I look into three areas. In the first part, I explore internships in relation to education. Since the terms internship and temporary work are often confounded, I wanted to understand the role of internships in learning. This part looks at one of the historical roots of the internship model, the apprenticeship of the medieval workshop. It then explores the role of the internship in current university education through a critical analysis of European policy concerning the issue. This part concludes with suggestions to improve the learning agreement that is signed by the intern, the educational institution, and the receiving institution participating in the Erasmus+ program, a popular grant that supports internships for students in Europe.

In the second part, I investigate the problem of exploitation in design internships. Based on interns' experiences reported online, I look at the labor conditions that design interns are faced with to see when internships are useful to designers and when they become useless, if not harmful. I also speculate on the motives that compel designers accept exploitative conditions and what could be done to mitigate those motives. In addition, I look at the consequences of exploitation on individuals and the design field at large. This part concludes with a set of guidelines that can help interns-to-be make more informed decisions on selecting a fruitful internship opportunity and steering their experience in a beneficial direction.

In the third and final part, I explore whether internships could be experimental platforms to test out alternative models of work rather than gateways into the often-exploitative status quo of the job market. Taking the concept of critical design popularized by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby as a starting point, I argue the importance of critically looking at the role of designers as producers in the economy. I then describe my experience living homeless one summer

on the outskirts of a Finnish city to reflect on the value and meaning of work. After that, I recount and evaluate my experience volunteering for a month in an ecovillage on an island on the southwestern Finnish coast. To close this part, I propose principles for a “critical internship,” an internship that centers mutual aid, learning, and well-being. I conclude the thesis with reflections on the future of labor and examples of design and art collectives that organize their work against and independent from capitalist modes of production. An earlier version of some segments of this thesis were published on June 4, 2020, as *Dear intern to be, or, Dear me some years ago*, a text written for the *Artist At Work* online exhibition organized by Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah, Palestine.

Part 1

Internships and Education

Hands-On Learning: From Apprenticeship to Cooperative Education

It is useful to look at the history of learning by practicing with professionals because it might carry insights for internships today. The current design internship model has roots in the medieval apprenticeship, where novices would work under a master craftsman to learn a trade. The word apprentice, first known to be used in the 14th century, shares its roots with the word apprehend from the Latin *apprehendere* that literally means to seize.¹ While the word intern, first known to be used circa 1879, has its roots in the French *interne*,² meaning a student housed and fed in an educational institution where they study.³ While the meaning of the first word is based on learning, that of the second is based on placement in an institution.

The medieval workshop was an early home for the students of crafts in Europe. In his book, *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennet describes its history. We might look at workshops today as a romantic counterpart to the modern factory and a space of humane work. Workshops were craftsmen's homes, where they slept, ate, raised a family, and worked.⁴ But Sennet defines the workshop starkly: "a productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority."⁵ The workshop is a place of tension between autonomy and authority. While autonomy is seductive, one cannot learn a complex craft while working alone. The authority of the workshop master then derives not merely from his social status, but rather from his ability to set the standards of the craft and to train others. Sennet argues that authority that is based in contractual duties rather than skill and experience leaves workers demoralized and resentful.⁶ This is an important point to consider when choosing an internship today. While an internship at Big Name might catch the eye of a recruiter or client scanning one's CV in the future, the status of Big Name might not translate into a positive or educational

experience on the ground.

The hands-on transmission of knowledge in the workshop sustained it from one generation to the next. This transmission operated within the hierarchy of the medieval guild, which consisted of three tiers: apprentices, journeymen, and masters. An apprenticeship usually lasted seven years at the end of which the apprentice presents a showpiece that demonstrates the skills he acquired, typically by imitation. Upon success, the apprentice is elevated to the status of journeyman, who would travel and work for five to ten years until he could demonstrate his competence with a masterwork. Masters ultimately decide if one is worthy of a higher title.⁷ In Stradivari's musical instrument workshop, for example, young workers did the rough preparatory work, journeymen the finer cutting and assembly, and the master the final installation and varnishing in addition to supervising every step of the production.⁸

The workshop formed a sort of family home for the apprentice, as the master is given the role of a surrogate parent. The master takes a religious oath to effectively teach the young learners he is entrusted with, while they in turn swear not to divulge his secrets. The relationship between master and apprentice thus centered learning and relied on a sense of mutual honor and not mere obedience.⁹ While we cannot expect a present-day employer to take a religious oath, a written contract that describes mentorship and learning outcomes is important to ensure learning during an internship. Goldsmithing guilds formed a tightly knit community by providing contacts for traveling workers and through fraternities that helped poor workers with matters including organizing social events and buying burial plots.¹⁰ Yet, there were masters and journeymen throughout the Middle Ages who wished to work independently as entrepreneurs rather than members of a community and who hired assistants rather than trained apprentices.¹¹

The medieval apprenticeship ensured the participant's learning through

the master's skill and ability to pass down tacit and explicit knowledge and through the master's vow to develop the skills of his apprentices. While the tension between authority and autonomy was maintained by hierarchy, the workshop and guild created social ties that sought to foster the apprentice's learning and to provide stability and support for experienced workers. As learning in many craft disciplines later moved into institutions of formal education, a split formed between learning and labor. While those two activities were practiced in tandem at the workshop, they now took place at the school on one hand, and in industry on the other.

An early form of the internship emerged between higher education and industry at the turn of the twentieth century in the USA with the concept of cooperative education developed by the Dean of Engineering at the University of Cincinnati, Herman Schneider. The goal of cooperative education was to bridge a gap between education and employment by providing academic credit for doing work within a student's field of study.¹² In a city with an emerging automotive industry, a demand for qualified engineers, and an established school, the program took off and was adopted in other universities. Periods of class instruction alternate with periods of work experience. In the early years of the program, the school and work periods shifted week by week, and nowadays, semester by semester. The work is long-term and paid, which helps ensure that companies do not hire beyond their needs and that students have meaningful work.¹³

That was not the only way educators envisioned the relationship between learning and industry. From the 1930s to the 1970s in France, Celestin Freinet along with other educators developed the idea of education through work, which rejected that learning by doing is a method of career development. For them, school is a space to create ways of life and work that emerge from people's needs and wants. Cooperative learning entailed the collective production of newspapers, food, and spaces by students, teachers, and members of the com-

munity, who would engage in collective decision-making to create anti-capitalist forms of life, work, and education.¹⁴ Freinet believed that authority should be a result of the mastery of work, and that the main goal of education is to arouse interest in learning such that students come to see work as a privilege rather than an assignment.¹⁵

Internships in European Higher Education

Employability and the Bologna Process

One of the driving forces behind the popularity of internships in education is employability, a notion promoted in Europe by the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process was launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999 to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), an effort to make European higher education systems more compatible with each other and to enhance their competitiveness internationally. One of the main objectives of the Bologna Process is to promote the employability of graduates, which is defined as their “ability of finding, fulfilling, and keeping work,” either employed or self-employed.¹⁶ It aims to help graduates find relevant opportunities based on their higher education and promotes combining academic quality with employability in study programs to meet the needs of the employment market, which necessitates a dialogue between employers and educational institutions. Ministers meeting in London in 2007 said, “Building on our rich and diverse European cultural heritage, we are developing an EHEA based on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles that will facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe’s attractiveness and competitiveness.”¹⁷ That means that values like academic freedom should not simply serve learning, but economic ends, such as employability, as well.

A working group on employability was active between 2007 and 2009 to

report on how to improve the employability of graduates. In its final report,¹⁸ the working group investigates graduate unemployment. It says that this problem goes back to a perception among graduates and employers that bachelor level education is not adequate for employment and to a possible mismatch between employers’ requirements and course content that does not focus on relevance to the labor market. That leads to an oversupply of graduates in subjects for which there is no direct market demand. Moreover, young graduates who complete their studies without any integrated work experience tend to be less competitive in the market. Based on the employability problem, the report asserts that a core mission of higher education should be to equip students with competences that employers require in the workplace, which include both subject-related skills and general employability skills. Education institutions should thus create and reinforce connections with employers to make education more responsive to the labor market and should also offer career services to students. Study programs should offer students employability skills by including entrepreneurial competences in the curriculum, offering work placements as part of the study workload, and training students on typical working styles and values, such as loyalty and working under pressure. For educational institutions to be able to do that, the report says that increasing employers’ involvement in education is key. Employers should weigh in on different educational processes, including course content, curriculum design, and program accreditation.

The problem with centering employability in education is that it puts the interests of employers first. Sometimes, those interests may overlap with the interests of students. For example, when it comes to bridging the gap between studies and work, employers prefer graduates who are better equipped with the skills needed for the workplace, while students want to understand how their skills apply outside the boundaries of their school. However, employers often have interests that are irrelevant, if not detrimental, to the goals of

higher education, the interests of students, and the interests of society at large. The primary interest of a business is to maximize profit and not to enhance the chance of a student to get employed, let alone have decent working conditions or thrive. This fact is made obvious by indications that interns are replacing paid employees and that employers make use of interns systematically without offering job opportunities upon the completion of internships,¹⁹ which is in total contrast to the claimed employability goal of internships. Moreover, the goal of maximizing profit is at odds with providing interns with quality mentorship and working conditions. Thus, giving too much importance to preparing students for the workplace entails training them to accept whatever conditions an employer sets for them, whether those conditions work in their benefit or not. For example, the report by the working group on employability suggests that working under pressure is a “working style” that students should get accustomed to during their studies (adverse health effects notwithstanding), when it is a harmful habit that ought to be questioned, specially within an academic setting. While being able to find paying work after graduation is important for financial security, training students to be appealing to employers can hinder their critical thinking, independent learning, and well-being.

Internships in University Curricula

One of the ways in which universities have taken up the employability standard is by having professional experience integrated into the curriculum. For example, bachelor and master design programs at Aalto University offer the possibility of gaining elective study credits for an internship. At the Politecnico di Milano, internships are a mandatory part of design programs. One common platform for internships for higher education students in Europe is the Erasmus+ traineeship program. Note that the word traineeship is used, even though a trainee is commonly understood as someone being trained for a particular job

and not someone who is simply gaining temporary professional experience. The program financially supports university students and recent graduates to do two to twelve-month internships abroad.²⁰ The trainee, educational institution, and the receiving organization must sign a learning agreement²¹ in advance. The agreement includes important information about the internship, such as the expected learning outcomes, number of working hours per week, and possible remuneration. The agreement makes it clear that payment by the receiving organization is optional and thereby normalizes unpaid work. After the internship, the receiving organization is expected to fill out a traineeship certificate that describes the tasks carried out, achieved learning outcomes, and evaluation of the trainee. The trainee on the other hand must fill a participant report,²² which would contribute to the development of the program. The report thoroughly surveys the student’s experience, from motivations to do a traineeship, to the quality and costs of the experience, to personal development and prospects. Regarding costs of living, the report asks about sources of funding but does not list payment by the receiving institution as a possible response, as if that is not to be expected. That too normalizes unpaid work, albeit implicitly.

The Erasmus+ platform improves the chances for students to do quality internships, but it has its shortcomings. Interns’ feedback reports show that most students found the learning content of the internship is not demanding enough, while others found the tasks given unmanageable.²³ This shows that the learning agreement signed by the various parties is not sufficient to insure a useful learning experience. While conditions such as working hours and pay are quantifiable and easy to specify, perhaps the parts of the agreement relating to the internship content leave room for ambiguity, that is, a mismatch between expectations and the actual experience. Since earning credits and receiving a grant depend on committing to the agreement, perhaps the stakes are higher for the student than for the employer. Thus, the student may feel obliged to stay

in an internship position even when it is of no educational value. Moreover, the grant offered by the Erasmus+ program is partial. Most students are not able to top up the Erasmus+ grant from other sources, while some cover the rest of their living expenses from payment by the employer, a national grant, or other sources.²⁴ This makes even this sort of supported internships inaccessible to low-income students, which reinforces the importance of paying interns.

As a response to the lack of clear quality standards for internships, the European Youth Forum, a platform for youth organizations in Europe, created the *European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships*²⁵ in 2011. The document outlines standards around learning content, rights, and remuneration. It targets institutions and employers and aims to establish a guiding framework to ensure that internships are useful learning experiences for young people. Employers can sign the charter to show that they commit to the criteria.²⁶

Most importantly, the charter stresses that internships should have a tangible educational value, and interns should not be expected to cover living costs. Some of the main points brought up are:

- **Learning content:** An internship should primarily be a learning experience. It should not replace employment and should help young people acquire knowledge and skills and orient themselves professionally. Internships should be carried out with mentorship and should be evaluated for quality.
- **Rights:** An internship should be based on a contract that outlines the amount of credit points, learning objectives, and tasks. Internships taking place after education should be regulated with restrictions such as minimum payment and a limited number of interns per organization. Student organizations and trade unions should support interns.
- **Remuneration:** Interns should receive compensation for living costs

including housing, food, and public transport.

Internships can be valuable experiences for students because they offer an opportunity for learning by doing. Employers, educational institutions, and students are responsible for contributing to their educational value. Organizations should plan internship content, provide mentorship throughout an internship, and offer tasks that help emerging professionals build their skills and knowledge base. Schools should offer guidance to students to help them have worthwhile experiences and should support them throughout an internship to ensure quality standards are met, while noting that mandatory internships can compel students to settle for subpar options. Students should be proactive in negotiating internship conditions with their employers and should, on a collective level, turn down “opportunities” that do not offer clear learning outcomes. Like the apprenticeship at the workshop, internships should center the hands-on transmission of knowledge, which requires a sense of autonomy for the intern, mentorship by a skilled practitioner, and a relationship based on mutual respect and commitment.

Tool #1: A More Robust Learning Agreement

Recognizing that the lack of clear quality guidelines compromises the educational role of internships, the following is a proposed supplement to the Erasmus+ learning agreement for student mobility for traineeships. Drawing from the *European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships* by the European Youth Forum, the supplement covers conditions that are not mentioned in the learning agreement but are essential components of an educational internship.

Learning Agreement Student Mobility for Traineeships

Supplement

Orientation. At the beginning of the internship, the intern will be introduced to the receiving organization, including an introduction to the staff, organization procedures and culture, health and safety standards, internship responsibilities, mentorship arrangement, and labor rights.

Content. The receiving organization will ensure that the internship is a learning experience that will help the intern gain knowledge and skills relevant to their subject area and orient themselves professionally. The tasks given will be relevant to the expected learning outcomes specified and appropriate to the intern's capacity and working hours. The intern will be able to negotiate the tasks.

Mentorship. The supervisor will provide guidance throughout the internship. The intern will be able to ask questions around their rights and responsibilities and will receive feedback on their work.

Evaluation. Meetings will be held with the intern in the middle and at the end of the internship to evaluate the internship content according to the expected learning outcomes and to discuss the possibility of employment.

Compensation. The receiving organization will provide travel and lunch expenses when a wage is not given.

Part 2

Internships and Exploitation

Labor Conditions

A Look at Internship Ads

Internship adverts give an idea of what sort of qualities and duties companies expect from interns and what companies are willing to offer in return. These expectations and offers can then be assessed in relation to the educational role of internships. It is also important for students to read internship ads critically in order to evaluate their potential value or lack thereof for their education and career. Let us look at the internship ads that were circulated among Aalto University design students between the years 2017 and 2019. Twelve positions from various companies were advertised and were available at one Japanese and nine European companies for students from several design fields, from interaction and experience design, to industrial design, to furniture and interior design. Let us consider the ads from the European companies (three of those were sent from the same company, so only the latest one will be considered). Typically, the ad would describe the company profile, the requirements for the position, and the internship period, which ranged from two months up to one year. Regarding remuneration, five out of nine ads mention that the position is paid, and one out of those five specifies the benefits and payment amount. None specify the number of working hours per week. Regarding requirements, most ask for basic skills such as software proficiency. Two require a bachelor's degree in addition to highly specialized requirements such as: "Must be able to carry out a project from concept to finished drawing" and "Fluent in graphic design (print / web)." Two ads mention specific tasks to be done, and only one mentions learning outcomes. Two ads state that hiring for a permanent position is a possibility after the internship.

While the company profile and work requirements are often laid out clearly in the ads, there is typically little to no information on tasks and educa-

Junior Graphic Design Voluntary Internship at

Design Studio is looking for a talented, enthusiastic junior graphic designer to join the team as an Intern. This new position is a great opportunity for you to experience a wide variety of design projects at . This voluntary position is offered for a six-month period, three consecutive days a week (preferably Wednesday – Friday), commencing at the beginning of March.

YOU HAVE TO BE AVAILABLE ON THOSE DAYS

SMILE AND JUST SAY YES

→ MORE DAYS REQUIRED

We are looking for an individual with flair and flexibility. Working closely with Graphic Designer, you will need to be an engaged, collaborative, friendly team player, who will be able to assist and contribute to new and existing projects.

→ DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD

You will help with the design for exciting creative projects for a range of departments within . Projects may include posters, invites, programmes, flyers and other branded material. You will also be providing general assistance and support to Design Studio.

→ COPY AND PASTE LAYOUTS

You will need to be educated to graduate level in a relevant creative field, with demonstrable experience of design for the arts, good typographic skills, attention to detail and extensive familiarity with Adobe Creative Suite.

→ FREE LABOUR THEY DO NOT WANT TO EMPLOY

Although unpaid, this opportunity would provide someone with both an interest in art and design the chance to join leading professionals in the sector and to develop their skills. You will receive a travel and lunch allowance and additional benefits including free entry to exhibitions for the duration of your placement and additional benefits from being a member of staff.

→ NO TIME TO SEE EXHIBITS AS YOU WILL BE WORKING

Please note that this internship is offered as a volunteer activity and as such is understood to be outside the scope of the National Minimum Wage legislation.

→ COVERING THEIR BACKS

How to apply

DO YOU TICK THEIR BOXES

To apply for this placement please download the application form from www.

→ NO STUDENTS ALLOWED ONLY PROFESSIONALS

We will only accept applications via email. Please send your application form along with a PDF showing a range of work (five to ten projects) that you consider relevant to this position. Note only PDF examples of work will be accepted – do not send hard copy prints. Email to @

Only successful applicants will be contacted for interview. Due to the demands on the Design Studio, increasing postal costs and our constant need to make the best possible use of our resources, we will be unable to respond to each applicant, so if you haven't heard from us within two weeks of the application deadline, please assume that you were unsuccessful in this attempt.

→ CANT BE BOTHERED TO SEND A REJECTION EMAIL

The closing date for the return of completed application forms with PDF samples is Friday 5 February by 17.00. If you are shortlisted, we will invite you to meet us for an interview and to take a short test.

Unfortunately is unable to make an offer of permanent employment at the end of the programme.

↓

THIS MEANS THEY WILL KEEP ON EMPLOYING UNEMPLOYED PROFESSIONALS FOR FREE TO SAVE COSTS

tional content. We might expect that such details would be discussed between the employer and candidate in an interview. Still, these ads represent a typical employer's perspective on internships: An internship is a form of temporary work in which a student or recent graduate can gain work experience in exchange for a tentative stipend or the hope for a job. It may require skills that are typically required from a job position and thereby replaces the services a company gets from a stable worker. For example, rather than hiring a graphic designer, an employer would look for an intern that is "fluent in graphic design." Most important, an internship is not considered to primarily be educational experience. While skill development should be one of the main goals of an internship, most of the ads only require a list of skills without mentioning what the intern will be learning. In short, the ads demonstrate a gap between the intended educational purpose of internships and employers' expectations. A comprehensive internship ad should include information on, at least, the organization profile, work tasks, learning outcomes, mentorship, working hours, and compensation.¹

Interns' Experiences and Recommendations

A look at interns' experiences in firms across Europe can also help us understand whether internships deliver on their educational promise. Design Interns Club is an initiative by graphic design students and professionals that aims for more transparency regarding design internships. The group sees great variation in the quality of internships among different studios and little information available on how to get a good internship. Following the example of an internship transparency spreadsheet from the art field,² they created a public spreadsheet³ where interns anonymously share their experiences, with the hope of raising awareness on the issue and helping those seeking internships make better decisions.⁴ Through an online form, former interns can submit information on their experiences, such as payment, working hours, pros and cons, and suggestions for improvement. The spreadsheet has over one hundred entries

Carrot Workers Collective, *How to read internship ads*, in *Surviving Internships: A Counter Guide to Free Labour in the Arts*, (London: Hato Press, 2009), 19, https://carrotworkers.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/cw_web.pdf.

on design companies in Europe and North America. Eighty-two of the entries describe experiences across various European cities. Reading through the descriptions with the intention of conveying an impression of the data, I identified five themes around which interns had either positive or negative experiences and suggestions for change around internships in the future. Those are learning, professional development, relationship with the work team, working conditions, and travel.

When it comes to learning, interns reported positive experiences when they had mentorship, which includes someone to talk to and discuss with projects to work on, the possibility to ask questions, and a helpful and supportive team that provides feedback on interns' work. Positive learning experiences also include gaining insight into the different stages of the creative process, working on a variety of projects, and having opportunities to gain new knowledge through communicating with clients or working with a technical process like printing. Interns who learned from their experiences had clearly defined, adequately challenging, and creative tasks that helped them apply and improve their skills. They also appreciated autonomy, creative freedom, and the possibility to work on self-initiated projects. Having a sense of responsibility and trust and being able to decide what to work on and to manage one's own time were also mentioned as pros. On the other hand, interns that reported negative experiences around learning said that they had no mentorship: no full-time designers to refer to, no training on basic technical procedures, unclear communication, and little feedback. They were either overwhelmed by work or had little to do. They were not part of the creative process and had many tasks that were unclear, tedious, repetitive, or irrelevant to design altogether, like running errands and cleaning. They did not learn anything new. Unsurprisingly, respondents suggested that internships should have an educational focus and include one-to-one mentorship, regular feedback rounds, and clear, challenging, and

interesting tasks. Additionally, internships should be planned ahead, and interns should be part of the entire work process. One intern described a good balance between learning and implementing tasks: "It was usually 1 day per week for learning stuff like Git and Terminal. The other 4 days were implementing, developing and designing for the web. I learned a lot, but also worked on real projects." Another intern suggested that an internship might not be the most effective way to learn, "It might be better to found your own small studio alone or with friends, you'll probably learn and earn more doing that."

Within the area of professional development, positive points included gaining insight into how a studio works, experiencing what a designer job is like, and making professional connections. Some interns clarified their professional direction by knowing what areas of design they are drawn to or away from. One designer pointed out getting experience on their CV as an advantage. In contrast, interns who did not benefit in this area said that the projects they worked on were not suited for their portfolio, and that they were not credited for their work. The responders suggest that offices should credit interns' work and should be transparent about the availability of a long-term position after an internship.

The reports also show that an intern's relationship with the work team is essential. Among positive internship qualities, responders listed working as a full member of the team, having their ideas and personal approach valued and implemented, and being involved in meetings with clients. Interns also mentioned as advantages good communication with colleagues, a cohesive team, and skilled and passionate colleagues. Interns appreciated a friendly atmosphere and social activities such as cooking together, interesting discussions, and getting to know other team members. Interns reported negative experiences relating to their team when they had unfriendly colleagues and felt excluded, undervalued, and disrespected, for example by not being allowed to partake in client meetings,

being bossed around, or dealing with inappropriate behavior from their superiors. A tense team environment, lack of communal activities, and rapid turnover of employees also contributed to negative experiences. Interns thereby suggested workplace orientation, open and clear communication, and friendliness as important elements. It is valuable for interns to be involved with the team and to be respected as a team member with their own individual potential and experience. Interns asked that they are trusted with responsibility and are not treated as cheap laborers who, for example, could be asked to rework a task any number of times. Even though many interns reported disrespectful treatment, only two said they made the decision to leave because of that. So, it is important that interns do not feel obliged to accept exploitative conditions and feel confident to terminate their internship if they are not respected. If they are receiving payment or academic credit from their internship, being able to leave entails that they have alternative means to secure their livelihood or get credits. While that is not always possible, it is important to consider that before an internship, especially one abroad.

Unsurprisingly, working conditions is one of the factors common to interns' reported experiences. Interns appreciated a light work schedule with specified working hours and flexibility around off days and working from home. It was important to be given a reasonable amount of time and not be put under pressure. Only one intern out of eighty-two mentioned that their pay was good, while another said that they got a small payment, but that was acceptable because the studio owner was transparent about earnings and kept working hours limited. A pleasant studio space and a good location were mentioned as pluses. In contrast, interns did not appreciate a stressful atmosphere and pressure to work quickly. Some reported overwork and burnout. Unspecified or late working hours and late-night communications (calls, messages, and emails) were listed among the negative points pertaining to working conditions. Low pay, lack of

overtime payment, and lack of flexibility with working hours were commonplace experiences. Some noted that their internship was merely a poorly paid full-time job and that the business model of their employer relied on poor payment, with interns making up half the team or more. Lack of equipment, namely, having to use one's own laptop and a messy or run-down office space were also listed among negatives. One intern said, "I got the internship for a program but ended up being put on projects that had nothing to do with said program or my skills; the interns were basically hired for a full job, but with intern pay. No one to mentor or teach you. I was put in positions way beyond the scope of my contract and had to deliver art and design work etc (that you'd normally charge for or hire someone to do) for free." Numerous suggestions for the future of internships revolved around working conditions. Many interns asked for better payment, free accommodation, or flexibility with working hours to allow interns a secondary source of income. Some suggested that there should be regulation around payment and limits on internship length. Other recommendations included prior clarity on expectations, internship conditions, and tasks in relation to studies. It was noted that designers should value themselves more and that unfair payment is disrespectful towards design work. In thirteen out of eighty-two reports, the pay offered by the employer covered or exceeded living expenses. It is notable that a majority of seven of these thirteen responders only had positive points to say about their internship—compared to a minority of twenty-two of eighty-two in total—while six out of thirteen listed both positive and negative points. So, the likelihood of having negative experiences was less when the pay was better. This might be attributed to companies giving interns more responsibility when they are better paid. One intern said, "I accepted this internship without any previous work experience and under pressure of finding a place somewhere cool in very little time. Now, having almost finished my internship, I would never accept an offer with that little salary again. What I'm trying to say is, don't sell yourself

for cheap just because you have no experience. Rather wait a little longer than accept to work for almost nothing.”

Some interns listed benefits and suggestions relating to travel. Among the pluses were the possibility to be in a pleasant city, improving foreign language skills, and traveling for projects. There was one notable suggestion around travel, namely that international interns should be offered practical support pertaining to their stay.

To sum up these findings, it is probably most useful to recap design interns’ suggestions for change. Internships ought to have an educational focus, which can be achieved through mentorship and useful tasks. Interns should be appreciated and treated as part of the team by respecting them, giving them responsibility, and crediting their work. Internship conditions and tasks should be clarified upfront, and interns should receive a living wage and work during reasonable hours. Those suggestions largely overlap with the recommendations of the *European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships* discussed earlier. One theme that came up repeatedly in design interns’ experiences that was not addressed in the charter is the importance of the intern’s treatment as a team member that is respected, given responsibility, and credited. The charter could benefit from assessing and responding to the subjective experiences of interns, as these contribute greatly to the quality of an internship from an intern’s perspective. A useful and fair internship experience would provide, at least, guidance and fulfilling tasks that result in learning outcomes, a supportive environment conducive to learning, and reasonable working hours and compensation that account for living expenses.

Motives for Accepting Exploitation and How to Deal with Them

Designers are responsible, in part, for accepting their own exploitation. There are conceptions that contribute to internships continuing to be popular despite increasingly exploitative conditions. To support taking a position against these conditions, the conceptions need to be addressed.

Making It: Experience, Exposure, and Success

Internships are generally considered the primary means to gain experience in the field before becoming a professional designer. Yet the internship experiences discussed earlier show that many interns end up doing tasks that do not advance their learning or are unrelated to their subject area altogether. Moreover, the reported experiences show that interns are often not credited for their work, which means that their internship will not even grant them exposure in the field. So, the tenet that an internship is a kick-starter for practice matches less and less with interns’ actual experiences. In their publication *Surviving Internships: A Counter Guide to Free Labour in the Arts*, the Carrot Workers Collective say that unpaid internships in the cultural sector in the UK only became common in the 2000s. It was more likely in the past to get a job at the end of an internship, but now, public spending in the arts is systematically decreasing while graduates in the creative industries are increasing. They claim that recent graduates can do several consecutive internships and still end up unemployed or in a low-paid position.⁵ This questions the idea that an internship is a steppingstone into a career. In a sense, agreeing to a temporary precarious position, like an unpaid internship, is only setting one up to yet another precarious position. Despite that knowledge, one can still find that an internship, even if precarious, is the only option in sight to be able to work in the field. Here, it is

important to recognize that accepting precarious conditions is not a sustainable option for the designer and the design community at large, as competing to gain experience or exposure forces designers to lower the standards of working conditions and compensation in the field.

The image of the individual genius designer fosters designers' aspiration for success. This image is rarely attainable, yet it can lure designers into accepting unfair working conditions in hope of living up to it one day. In its permanent collection exhibition *Utopia Now – The Story of Finnish Design*, running since February 2017, the Design Museum in Helsinki dedicates a space named “Icon Room” to certain products of Finnish design, such as the Kimara 2744 tumblers designed by Kaj Franck. Design is utilized in the construction of a national cultural identity through the field's creative individuals, at times, as we see in interns' reports, at the expense of not crediting essential contributors like interns. The image of the designer as a creative individual that crafts icons by virtue of their genius persists strongly today. Yet, the context in which those icons are created is often disregarded, as in the Design Museum's Icon Room. It is important to note that Kaj Franck and others worked within a context of thriving local design production. Product designers had the benefit of stable employment in Finnish companies where they worked in teams and experimented with materials and production techniques.⁶ During the 2010s, local production facilities of major Finnish design brands such as Fiskars, Iittala, and Arabia were shut down, and the production was moved to various countries in Eastern Europe and East and Southeast Asia. Thus, local designers working for those brands are now disconnected from the process of production. In addition, they are nowadays hired on a freelance basis, which leaves them in a precarious position. The economic structure in which designers created Finland's icons is different today; that may well be part of the reason why new ones are not being made, and icons from the last century are simply reproduced. This requires new ways of working that sup-

port designers' security and creativity. Thinking about an internship as simply a way of paying one's dues to achieve a successful career is not realistic. As the Precarious Workers Brigade collective puts it in their publication *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education*, “A student's fear and anxiety of failing to achieve an abstract version of success, as well as their desire for a career in something related to their studied subject, fosters acceptance of the low and no wage economy as a desperate measure to secure any competitive edge.”⁷ It is important that any effort exerted by an aspiring designer be exerted towards aspiration based on an image of success that is rooted in reality and that springs from the designer's intrinsic ambitions and values. Finding one's own role models, that is, design practices that suit those ambitions and values, can provide helpful examples to emulate.

The Creative Work Ethic: Passion, Self-Worth, and Social Contribution

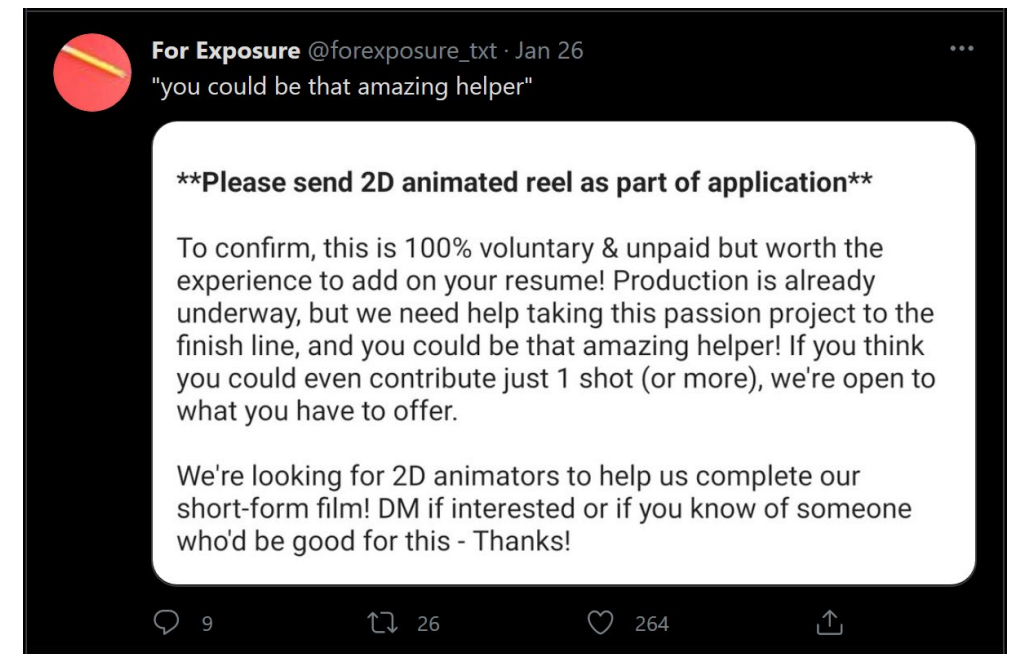
Another main conception that contributes to accepting exploitation is the commonplace work ethic among designers. People in the “creative industries” are particularly expected to do their work because they love it, not because they need income to secure their survival. Creative work is assumed to be inherently satisfying and self-actualizing such that it deserves unique commitment from designers, who should be willing to sacrifice their livelihood for the work in which they find their passion and self-worth. However, even though designers are willing to make this sacrifice, they often find themselves doing uncreative work. A study of the labor conditions in the Milan fashion scene⁸ shows that this “creative industry” is largely driven by precarious, poorly paid, and overworked laborers who have limited control over their work, which tends to be monotonous and generic. Regardless, most laborers say that they are generally satisfied with their work. The study claims that they are to a great extent motivated by the *idea* that their work is creative. While the workers abstractly

describe their work as autonomous and creative, their concrete experiences describe a high level of top-down control and repetitiveness in their typical working day. The “creativity” lies in the lifestyle that one gets access to as a worker in fashion. Plodding in the Milan fashion business means that you get to be part of a scene, get some access to parties and events, and share consumption interests with peers. In other words, you get to identify with the world of fashion design.

The survey indicates that most respondents had a high level of satisfaction with their work, even though most have low satisfaction with their salary. Livelihood seems to be an overlooked aspect of the value of work among designers and overshadowed by the sense of identity one gets from working in the field. Besides the social lifestyle aspect discussed in the Milan study, another factor contributes to that sense of identity. Design is marketed as a field that is valuable for the health of the environment and the economy. Ornamo Art and Design Finland, a professional organization for designers, reports that design companies, compared to others, consider factors like sustainable consumption as the most important part of their corporate social responsibility scheme. Ornamo also reports that design companies consider ecology to be an important competitive factor in their products and services, and that the design sector’s “indirect impact on ecology is significant” (without specifying what that significant indirect impact is).⁹ Moreover, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, through a national design program, aims to make wider use of design competence in companies and the public sector as an intangible investment that boosts competitiveness, economic growth, and social well-being.¹⁰ Design is endowed with a special role that makes the world a better place, and designers are its agents who should not be expecting remuneration for their heroic work.

Doing work passionately does not absolve a client from paying for it. Accepting exploitative conditions does not prove that one is committed to one’s

field, but rather only that one is readily exploitable. If design can really contribute positively to the environment and economy, then its workers are worthy of proper compensation. It is important that one does not entangle one’s entire personal identity with a single discipline of work and that one finds self-worth in practices outside of specialized work. Part of the remuneration problem in design is an overidentification with a discipline that normalizes poor payment. The workers’ movement that pushed for the eight-hour workday touted this slogan: “eight hours labor, eight hours rest [meaning sleep], and eight hours for what we will.” What this simple and powerful slogan reminds us is what is formally considered to be work is not all there is and should not be taking over our lives. Not only do we need to rest, but we also find duties and pleasures in other areas of life such as family and leisure.



Twitter post by For Exposure (@forexposure_txt), an account dedicated to sharing quotes from people who expect artists to work for free/for exposure. https://twitter.com/forexposure_txt/status/1354174124298391552.

Free and Underpaid Labor: An Unsustainable Model

Free and underpaid labor has repercussions both on the lives of designers and on the design field at large. The issue should be understood as a collective problem that is unsustainable for the well-being and livelihood of individual designers and that impacts the economic value and social role of design.

Illness: Burnout and Anxiety

Perhaps the most direct, visceral impact of precarious labor on workers is the one on their health. In the Design Interns Club survey, one intern reported burning out, another said that they overworked themselves to the extent that they had to quit and see a therapist, and a few others said they were constantly stressed at work. Those experiences were at times coupled with feeling disrespected, having too many tasks, working overtime, and having no or low payment. Moreover, the anxiety that interns face while doing unpaid work extends to employees who feel that they are more easily replaceable. In their *Surviving Internships* guide, the Carrot Workers Collective quote an anonymous cultural worker: “I’m worried that my job might be turned into an internship—interns are so much younger and often have loads of skills and academic qualifications that the workplace needs—so I work even more unpaid hours than I did before, just in case they get any ideas.”¹¹

Moreover, health issues that emerge in internships seem to continue throughout designers’ working lives. *Designers’ Inquiry*, an investigation carried out by the “Construction site for non-affirmative practice” collective on the socioeconomic condition of designers in Italy, surveyed 767 designers through an anonymous online questionnaire in 2011. The designers’ profiles included a broad range of disciplines, from graphic design to architecture to design research. Around 70% of the participants had done internships. Many reported

harmful working habits and health issues. Half of them keep working late quite often, a third eat while working, and 45% go on holiday only once a year. More than half said they have physical and psychological problems related to their work. Back pain and problems with eyesight are the top two physical issues reported, whereas stress in addition to anxiety and panic attacks were the top two mental issues. About a quarter said they went through a period of unease after graduating, with the most important reasons being difficulty finding work, disorientation and insecurity, and job dissatisfaction.¹² Internships ought to be an opportunity for designers to begin building healthy working habits that sustain a healthy body and mind and a rewarding career.

Income Insecurity: Reliance on Family Wealth, Debt, Secondary Work, and Grants

Another major consequence of unpaid and poorly paid labor, which is strongly connected to anxiety and burnout, is income insecurity. Sixty-nine out of eighty-two (around 84%) of respondents from the Design Interns Club spreadsheet were either unpaid or were paid an amount less than their living expenses, which were typically less than 1000 euros per month. That means that designers often need a secondary source of income to be able to do an internship. One respondent, for example, was able to get by with a student loan and an Erasmus grant combined with a stipend. The *Designers’ Inquiry* study indicates the same issue. Most designers who did an unpaid or underpaid internship had to rely either on family or friends for support (41%) or on money from savings or earned by a second job (25%). Other less common sources included bursaries and bank loans.

If one needs to rely on secondary income to support poor payment or lack thereof, and if that sort of payment is the norm, then the possibility of doing an internship is limited to people who are able to secure secondary income, that is, people who can get money from their social networks, savings, secondary

work, debts, grants, or a combination of these. Relying on parents' support excludes people from low-income backgrounds, while relying on secondary work might put an intern into a situation where they are working for seven days a week. Since internships are often key to beginning a career in design, their exclusivity results in design becoming a more exclusive field. In addition, with internship tasks requiring more and more skills and knowledge, interns should expect that their employer at least cover their living costs, especially when their work is essential to profit-making projects and the continuity of the company. Interns should not be subsidizing companies with free or low-cost labor.

Devaluation of Design Skills and Work

The third important consequence of the prevalence of free and underpaid labor is its impact on the value of design production. The swarms of design students and young professionals providing highly skilled labor for free are knowingly or unknowingly implying that their work is worthless. Design skills require massive resources to acquire, including tuition fees, equipment, time, and effort. Offering skills for free on the job market unavoidably strips away their value and the value of the resources that went into building them. This has repercussions not only on the payment of interns, but also on that of employees. The availability of highly skilled labor for cheap diminishes the necessity for hiring long-term workers. Internships thus replace stable work. Paradoxically, rather than offering designers a competitive advantage for stable employment, mass participation in unpaid and underpaid labor is reducing the need for stable employment altogether. Working for free and without any sort of security, interns put themselves and their colleagues in a precarious and competitive position. The free and often skilled labor of the intern is easily replaceable by another, and the paid skilled labor of the employee is replaceable by that of the intern. This also causes designers to undervalue their own work, which in turn impacts the public perception of the value of design work and thus the antici-

pated fees from independent designers. Clients expecting design work for free are commonplace. Thus, the entire design field and all its workers are impacted, to varying degrees, by free and poorly paid internships. As one respondent from the Design Interns Club spreadsheet put it, unfair payment is “disrespectful towards the work.” So, it is important to consider what is one’s work worth before offering it. To reiterate, two main concerns should be taken into account: design skills require valuable resources to acquire, and a designer working full-time, as an intern or otherwise, should be able to secure their livelihood from their work. Moreover, designers who care for social causes and find themselves in precarious positions are less likely to have leeway to uphold their values and more likely to take on commercial projects regardless of their social impact to sustain their survival. On a wider scale, that diminishes the capability of design to be an agent for social change.

The unsustainability of the prevalent internship model raises the question: Is an internship worth the massive personal sacrifice and negative impact on the field of design? Guidelines are needed to help students and young professionals navigate internships in an increasingly precarious world of work.

Tool #2: Internship Guidelines

What to Consider Before an Internship: The Threefold Rule

If you are considering doing an internship, you could use the following sets of questions to consider important issues regarding your needs and rights as a practitioner. Those will hopefully help you make an informed decision on whether the internship is worth it or not. If you know that you will be doing an internship or if you are already doing one, reflecting on these questions could help you steer it in a better direction or leave it if necessary.

The questions are categorized into three aspects essential for a decent internship experience, or any sort of employment for that matter: values, goals, and livelihood. Values refer to the issues you care about. For example, are you interested in designing products or services for commercial gain or for the public good? It is important that you find practitioners who are aligned with your interests. Goals are the things you expect to achieve by doing an internship, which should hopefully support your ambitions as a practitioner. You may want to strengthen certain design skills or explore the workflow of a studio that you like. The third important consideration is livelihood, which refers to how you cover your living costs, as taking on unpaid and poorly paid work carries implications for your life, the lives of your peers, and design work culture.

An ideal internship would satisfy your needs regarding all three aspects. Of course, life conditions push us to make compromises. You might find that to secure your livelihood now, you need to set your values or goals aside. On the other hand, you might find that an internship matches your values and goals but that the organization cannot pay you a living wage and is transparent about the reason, so you might opt for covering your living expenses by some other means. Most important, an internship should be an educational experience and should not replace typical employment. As a rule of thumb, an internship that

satisfies two or three of these aspects is a keeper. If an internship only fulfills one aspect, you might want to look elsewhere.

These are also good questions to reflect on before an interview with an employer. An interview is a conversation in which you should be able to get to know your employer as much as they get to know you. It is a chance for you to know more about the internship and whether there are grounds for a meaningful collaboration between you and the organization. After an interview, you should be able to tell whether you are a good match for the organization community and the work they do, whether an internship will be useful for your goals, and whether the work is fairly compensated. It is then a good idea to clarify these issues during an interview if they are not clear already.

Values

What do I care about? What causes do I support? What are my values, e.g., regarding society and the environment?

What sort of organization am I interested in supporting? Are the values of the organization I will intern at aligned with my values?

Can I see myself reflected in the projects I will be working on? Will I enjoy the work? Do the working conditions and environment of the internship support my well-being?

Goals

What are my personal goals and ambitions as a practitioner? Are they in line with my intrinsic interests, or am I merely conforming to how things work in the field?

Why do I want to do an internship? How will this internship help me achieve my goals? Is an internship the best way to achieve my goals? If it is, then how can I ensure that my goals are met? If I am doing an internship to find work, am I certain that an internship will lead to employment?

Will I be doing the sort of work that I want to do? Can I plan the internship with the employer ahead of time? Will I be receiving guidance during the internship? Will the work team respect my contribution and support my learning? What have other interns said about their experience?

Livelihood

Is the internship paid? Does the payment cover my living expenses? If not, how will I support myself during the period of the internship? Are these means of support available to others? Does the internship position exclude people based on their class?

Are the required internship tasks similar to those of an employee, i.e., am I offering skilled labor for substandard compensation? Am I contributing to undermining the value of design work and education by doing that?

What resources (e.g., time and effort, tuition fees) did I put into building my skills? Are the projects that I will be involved in for profit? Will I contribute to keeping the organization up and running? With that in mind, is my contribution properly compensated? Are the conditions of the internship set out in a written contract?

An Example from Art History: The Artist Placement Group

In the UK of the 1960s, informal learning became popular through reading groups and independent publications, and many artists' work took place within collective political action.¹³ The Artist Placement Group (APG) was founded in London in 1966 and sought to reposition the artist from the studio and gallery to the wider social context, namely industry and government. The group began in the St. Martin's School of Art, and it organized placements for artists in commercial and governmental institutions by arguing that this sort of collaboration is mutually beneficial.¹⁴ In their placements, the artists carried out research and created artworks, giving more importance to context than object-making.¹⁵ The idea for the APG came to artist Barbara Steveni while she was collecting unwanted industrial materials for herself and artist friends for assemblage and performance. She decided it was not enough that artists use materials from industry in their work, rather, they should work within industry.¹⁶ This sort of collaboration might seem commonplace today as artists and designers often work with institutions to find applications for their skills in service of commercial and governmental challenges. The approach of the APG, however, was particular. APG placements were negotiated by Steveni based on the principle of the "Open Brief," which defined the expectations of the artist and organization but did not define an outcome for the placement. For the APG, "the context is half the work," so the placement would allow the artist to become part of and explore a context unknown to them.¹⁷ This opened up the possibility for a collaborative relationship between both parties, and for artwork to develop throughout the placement *in interaction with* the context of business or government, in contrast with today's typical model of design *in service of* business or government. Moreover, placements were paid and began with a feasibility study during which the artist would identify their field of work within the institution. In addition to placements, the APG's work took the form of exhibitions and conferences to

engage a wider public.¹⁸

The first arrangement by the APG was sculptor Garth Evans' two-year placement at the British Steel Corporation (BSC), the parent company of the nationalized steel industry. The placement was organized based on a fellowship program at the corporation, a position that was until then set up to connect the corporation with scientific researchers at universities and polytechnics. Barbara Steveni convinced the company to offer one fellowship position to an artist. The contract was signed with St. Martin's School of Art, where the artist taught sculpture, and the placement was paid. Evans had never worked with steel, so this placement was an opportunity for him to explore the qualities of the material and ways of shaping and finishing it. He also felt a sense of unease towards being a successful artist who reinforces the status quo, and this collaboration was an opportunity to break away from that. The corporation hoped that the artist's work would demonstrate applications for the material beyond industry. The artist was not obliged to produce any tangible artwork but rather committed to writing a quarterly report on his experience working with steel. Again, this lies in contrast to today's outcome-oriented industry collaborations with designers, who are often expected to exhibit their work and prove the relevance of design to justify the collaboration. Evans began the placement by visiting locations where steel was made and used around the UK. He took a series of photos to familiarize himself with the industry and to explore the aesthetic possibilities of the material. He did not produce sculptures until the second year of the placement. Although Evans was interested in spending time in an industrial setting to think about producing artworks, he was not allowed to stay on site without accompaniment or a specified task due to the complexity of safety issues. He thus worked in his studio, and the money from the placement allowed him to get a bigger one appropriate for steelwork. Towards the end of the placement, Evans became interested in the conditions of work at the corpora-

tion. Even though the industrial context was inspiring from his perspective as an artist, he saw that the corporation did not support workers to connect with their labor through a meaningful experience and did not foster the motivation of workers and their sense of ownership of the work. In response, he wrote several concept papers that addressed the issue and discussed them with representatives from the BSC. The representatives did not receive these papers positively as they did the sculptures and said that they did not have time to think about this issue. Nonetheless, the artist explored a field of activity that was outside of conventional art mediums by addressing a political issue within the context of his work.¹⁹



Contact sheet of photos taken by Garth Evans during his British Steel Corporation placement. Courtesy the artist / Leeds Museums and Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive). Photo: David Cotton. Original background removed. <https://www.henry-moore.org/archives-and-library/archive-of-sculptors-papers/archive-collections/garth-evans#gallery>.

Part 3

Internships and Criticality

Building on the “Critical” in Critical Design

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, professors of Design and Social Inquiry and fellows of the Graduate Institute for Design Ethnography and Social Thought at The New School in New York, introduced and popularized the term critical design in the mid-nineties as a counterpoint to conventional or “affirmative” product design. In their book *Speculative Everything*, they say that affirmative design resolves the variance between aesthetics, production, usability, and costs, and its success is measured by how well it sells. It thereby reinforces the status quo. Critical design, on the other hand, offers alternatives to restrictions imposed by the market and looks instead at the impact of design on everyday life.¹

In their view, the power of critical design lies in its ability to belong to our present everyday life and at the same time to an alternative world with an imagined, different value system. The physical form of a critical design object anchors it in the everyday, yet its function does not offer a solution to an everyday problem but presents new perspectives on how the world could be. Carrying elements from both, the object then is caught between the current world and an alternative world. This creates a dilemma for the viewer: is this product real or not?²⁶

The main purpose of critical design is then “to make people think.” It explores social issues through design ideas turned into prototypes, which are circulated via exhibitions and publications.³ Dunne and Raby warn that one of the possible dangers facing critical design is that it becomes less concerned with critique and becomes “a form of sophisticated design entertainment.”⁴ This danger lies latent in their definition of critical design, which takes up social issues as subject matter in order to stir up conversation but leaves the possibility of actual social impact unexplored.

There are two shortcomings in Fiona and Raby's definition that can tell us why. First, the main goal that they advance is debate. They believe that the way to a better world is "an intellectual journey based on challenging and changing values, ideas, and beliefs,"⁵ yet they do not map out how that change could materialize. Second, their description of critical design does not call into question its own methods of production and dissemination. Where does the designer's role fall within the class relations of the production process? If the primary method of dissemination is through exhibitions and publications, who will the work reach? What will then be its impact?

In her text *Artistic activism in dangerous times: Teaching and learning against the grain*, Dipti Desai makes a clear distinction between political art and activist art. Political art is based on representation. It is socially concerned self-expression that takes on politics as subject matter and aims to raise awareness and provoke public conversation by allowing for interaction with an audience in a gallery, museum, or public space. Activist art is based on action. It is socially involved art that also aims to raise awareness on political issues but goes further and takes on political injustice through direct action in a public space or by working in collaboration with a community. Both political and activist art tackle political subject matter, but they differ in their goals and as a result differ in the way they are produced and disseminated. The goal of representation and raising awareness goes hand-in-hand with individual self-expression and display within a gallery, while aiming for mobilizing action towards change entails collaborative work and action within a community or public space. While political art is concerned with commentary, activist art is concerned with efficacy: what sort of action an audience should take after becoming aware of a certain issue and how the groundwork for this action is laid.⁶

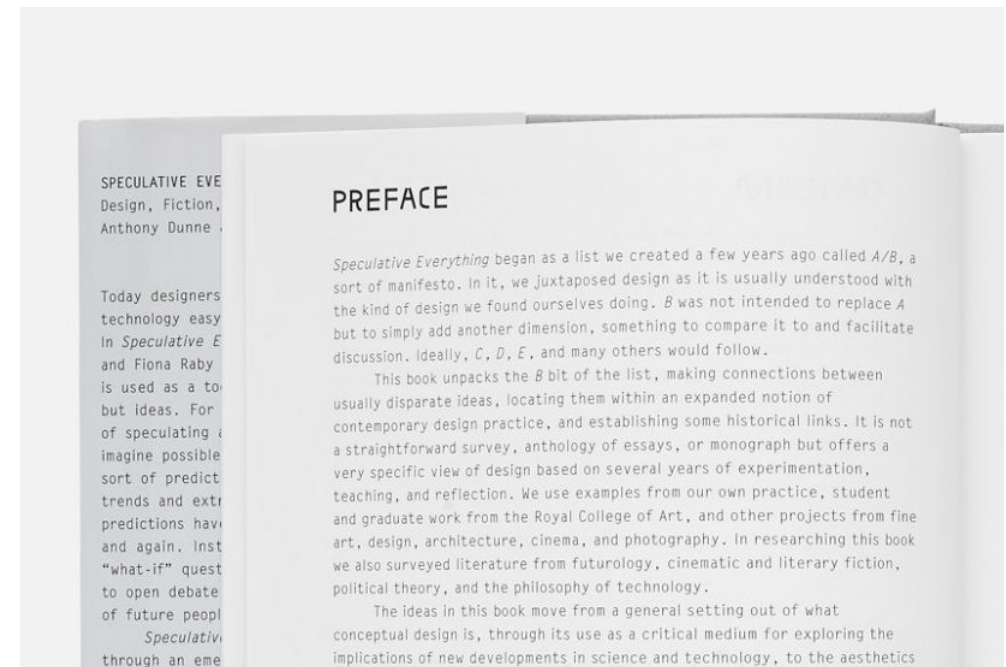
Dunne and Raby's definition of critical design as design for debate aligns with Desai's description of political art. By drawing from Desai's concept of

activist art, the definition of critical design can thus benefit from broadening its scope to include design that is geared towards action. This sort of (activist) critical design employs collaborative methods, channels of engagement beyond galleries and publications, and ways to assess the impact of a project after completion. In other words, it is concerned with who it engages, who it serves, and what its effects are.

Dunne and Raby do not call into question designers' own role as producers. They assume that in today's economy, the power to change lies in the hands of consumers rather than workers, who are less able to withhold their labor and thus have less leverage. They also assume that designers are immersed in consumerism and thus have to operate within it by creating products that offer an image of alternative social or economic values.⁷ This overlooks the class relations in which designers work and the role of designers as producers—actors within their own field that have agency to build alternative economies to operate within. Writing in 1934, Walter Benjamin reminds us that authors inevitably work in the service of certain class interests and should decide in whose interest they direct their work.⁸ Benjamin demands that the author takes a position in the process of production: it is not enough that they grapple with political subject matter in their work and supply artistic production with political material, but must strive to change the means by which artistic work is produced. Otherwise, political subject matter is co-opted into an unjust process of production that is not called into question, and social conditions requiring change can become objects of representation and enjoyment.⁹ Dunne and Raby's warning about "sophisticated design entertainment" mentioned earlier resonates with the latter statement. This tendency could be resolved if the author reflects on their position in the process of production and carries through the social issues they address not only in the product of their work, but also in the activity of work itself.¹⁰ It is not enough that critical design offers commentary on a particular

social issue: it should also assess its position as an activity within its social context and assess its impact on the issue addressed. How does a design project come into being and who does it serve? Is turning a social problem into subject matter for contemplation an effective way to address the problem?

Criticality should include design practice itself. When a designer does an internship, it is inevitable that they uphold the work culture in which it is taking place. So, if a designer is interested in critical design, they should consider what values they are supporting by participating in a certain mode of working. Further, as creative producers, designers can experiment with alternative ways of working that address exploitative working conditions. The space of work becomes a channel of engagement to tackle exploitation through fair labor relations, as the gallery is one that tackles a social issue through the display of a design object. The precarious conditions of internships can be taken up as subject matter for critical design investigation by exploring ways of learning by doing within alternative economic relations that keep exploitation in check and connect people based on mutual aid. This sort of investigation could be called a critical internship.



The preface of *Speculative Everything* describes how the book began with a list of descriptors that juxtaposed design as it is usually understood with the sort of design the writers do. The text invites new iterations of the list. Photo: Kellenberger-White. <https://kellenberger-white.com/project/dunne-raby-speculative-everything/>.

A

Affirmative
Problem solving
Provides answers
Design for production
Design as solution
In the service of industry
Fictional functions
For how the world is
Change the world to suit us
Science fiction
Futures
The “real” real
Narratives of production
Applications
Fun
Innovation
Concept design
Consumer
Makes us buy
Ergonomics
User-friendliness
Process

B

Critical
Problem finding
Asks questions
Design for debate
Design as medium
In the service of society
Functional fictions
For how the world could be
Change us to suit the world
Social fiction
Parallel worlds
The “unreal” real
Narratives of consumption
Implications
Humor
Provocation
Conceptual design
Citizen
Makes us think
Rhetoric
Ethics
Authorship

C

Critical
Holistic problem solving
Asks questions and provides possibilities
Design for change
Design as medium
In the service of ourselves and our environment
Actionable fictions
For how the world could be better
Change us to suit us and the world
Social fiction and action
Alternatives
The potential real
Narratives of work
Impact
Intent
Advocacy
Contextual design
Producer
Makes us think and act
Economics
Ethics
Labor

Building on Dunne and Raby's A/B list that positions their work (B) in relation to what they call “affirmative design” (A). Taking into account designers' role as actors and producers, the added C list either retains or edits Dunne and Raby's B list items. Original text in *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), vii, ProQuest Ebook Central.

We Can Wander through the Forest

I looked for an internship for the summer of 2019 and did not find one. I had brushed up my CV and portfolio and ran them through the university career services. I wrote several cover letters, honestly expressing my interests, abilities, and expectations for doing an internship at the places I contacted. Without any response, I felt lost. How will I make use of my time? How can I advance my career as an architect and designer? How will I be ready for the job market after I graduate? It is easy to get tangled up in the conceptual vines of identity. I am a(n) *blank*. Once the word that fills that blank is threatened, our self-worth, which we have trained to rest on a successful profession, collapses. People can get gravely upset after hearing that they have not been chosen for an internship or job position, feeling that they cannot actualize their potential or contribute to their community. I was lucky that a friend came along and asked me a powerful question, “If you could do *anything* this summer, what would you do?” No one, including myself, had asked me this question before.

The question of what we would do if we could do anything is an important mental exercise. Social expectations impose standards to live up to, which start to censor any thoughts about our future that do not fit them, sometimes before those thoughts are even put into words. We could think, for example, that the only options we have are ones related to advancing our careers. A question like that can begin to untangle those limitations and make some room for authentic intrinsic desires to materialize. “I would sit by the sea and read, and spend time with you.”

Frithjof Bergmann says that many suffer from a “poverty of desire,” a condition of not knowing what one really wants and of viewing life apathetically, without any true passion for anything, like a block of wood that has no energy of its own and is tossed around by waves on water. Rather than continuing to feel

tepid about our work, Bergmann claims that we are at a historical moment when many people can choose to pursue doing what they passionately want, that is, work that energizes them. Really wanting enables really living. We can make effort to achieve a condition free from the poverty of desire by taking steps to find what we really want to do and structure our lives around that. What we really want is no less than something that we would die for, and finding what that is requires a process of training: continuous testing and asking again and again, perhaps even once every three weeks, “Am I doing something that I really want or that is less than that?” Once we reach that point of discovering our true passion, we should be open to it changing.¹¹

In that spirit of exploration, my partner and I decided to do a little experiment in living that summer. We would stay in a tent in the forest with little belongings, little money, and ample time for personal interests. We would be independent from paying rent for our own shelter, but at the same time dependent on the support of friends. Our survival would then rely less on being able to spend money and more on being open to try a new way of living and to receive support. Equipped with a sixty-euro tent, a garden tarp, sleeping bags, and a few other camping supplies, we moved from Helsinki to Tampere, leaving behind all our furniture and whatever did not fit the suitcases that we could carry on a bus. I thought that creating a setup where I would be worrying less about making ends meet and would be more focused on my own interests in a healthy environment free from the demands of career and the clutter and distractions of apartment life might help me figure out a direction for my next steps. I would have time for meditation, reading, drawing, conversations with friends, swimming, and exercising (I found pair acrobatics particularly exciting. It allows you to stretch the limits of your body’s physical ability with the support of and trust towards another. It is a kind of physical practice of codependence). I would keep a journal of my thoughts to be able to better reflect on the experience.

At first, we camped in the forest for a few days at a time and regularly visited our friend, who generously opened their home nearby for us to use the kitchen to make food to take with us, wash our clothes and ourselves, and hang out. We would also stay over in case of a thunderstorm. We were thankful, and we cleaned and organized the house, cooked, and took care of the house cats, dog, and plants when our friend was away. We also paid the water bill for the summer. As we gained more experience and gathered more gear, we were able to spend up to two weeks at a time in the forest, making use of public facilities to get water and the nearest store to buy food ingredients, which we cooked at the campsite.

It is important to take a distance to cultivate personal values and ambitions separate from the demands of the market and to carry those values and ambitions through into working life. The job market wields a monopoly over survival and self-worth and in turn shapes our values and ambitions to serve its interests. This experience allowed me to live out, on a small scale, values that I care about. It allowed me to exchange some resources without money and to cultivate a sense of dependence on others—a sense of autonomy through community. It allowed me to take care of myself. I gave more time and value to activities like cooking together, sports, and meditation, not as tools for stress management or improving productivity but as ways to cultivate well-being. Cultivating well-being is valuable work. Throughout the experience, I was anxious about not doing any productive work in the typical sense, that is, lucrative work. The compulsion to do productive work loomed in my mind while doing other activities, no matter how worthwhile I believed they were. In retrospect, it is even clearer that the personal growth and learning that I received from this experience were invaluable and that the worry was only a product of habit.

At the core of this worry lies the limiting definition of work as employment. Wilhelm von Humboldt says that the value of action is rooted in human

nature, and that action is more valuable than mere possession, on the condition that it is spontaneous action. He considers spontaneity to be so essential to the degree that idleness should be preferred to compulsory work. Freedom is the key condition for any human endeavor, and work that one does due to instruction is alien to one's true nature and is performed mechanically. Additionally, learning is achieved by one's own activity, creativity, and ways of applying knowledge. Yet, one can become inclined to let go of that drive for spontaneous action and simply follow the directions of an authority. What explains this inclination is that it absolves one from taking responsibility regarding one's shortcomings and simplifies one's duties to those imposed by the authority, which provides relief from the pressures of aspiration and guilt. Von Humboldt advises that activity should spring from inner impulses and not the attainment of external goals and that one should live in a way that follows one's character. Based on that view, he proposes that peasants and craftsmen are akin to artists, who do their work for its own sake and use it to nurture their intellect and character. Not only must one's inner life be the main source for one's activity, but the development of inner qualities must also be the primary goal of one's work. Work that one finds valuable in itself nurtures love, while work done as a means to a future benefit nurtures self-interest. Von Humboldt gives the example of agricultural work to illustrate this idea. By sowing seeds and gathering harvests, field workers depend not only on their own work, but also on natural powers beyond their control, for a good harvest. This allows them to cultivate qualities such as patience, humility, and peacefulness. The collective participation in beneficial work and the attainment of rewards from the land also fosters bonds among the workers and between themselves and the environment. In this way, work should be pursued for its own sake.¹²

For Karl Marx, labor is not merely a means to be able to exist but a central activity that characterizes human beings as a species. Humans produce even

when they have met their survival needs, thus labor is their “life activity” and should consist of free and conscious action. A person can only truly produce in freedom from survival needs. But working for a wage under capitalism entails a particular relationship between the worker and production, which Marx calls estranged labor. Estranged labor turns life activity, the “essential being” of humans, into a mere means for their existence. Because the product of labor is not the worker’s own but someone else’s, it becomes an object alien to its maker. Additionally, the worker becomes a servant of their work, and the work external to the worker. Work is then not part of the inherent nature of the worker, who is unable to affirm their identity through their labor or to develop their physical and mental skills. The worker is satisfied only when they are not working, as the work is not satisfactory itself but is only a way to fulfill needs external to it, i.e., survival. This still rings true in the twenty-first century: Analytics firm Gallup estimates that only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged in their work, while 63% are not and 24% are actively disengaged.¹³ Since nature constitutes the means of survival and the object of intellectual and spiritual nourishment for a person, depending on wage labor rather than nature to fulfill these needs disconnects a person from nature. The disconnection of the worker from themselves and from nature leads to estrangement from their “species-being,” because their own body, human aspect, and environment become means for individual existence. Since the worker is estranged from the product of their labor, their life activity, and their species-being, the worker becomes estranged from others, as the relationship with oneself is projected onto relationships with others. Marx says that labor should be an end and not a means to a wage, so he considers that better payment does not restore dignity neither for the worker nor for the labor. The universal freedom of human beings depends on dismantling this relationship of workers to production.¹⁴ If we are to produce as human beings, without alienation, work would be satisfying for both the worker and others.

The worker puts their individuality and specific character into the work, which in turn tangibly asserts them. When others enjoy or make use of the product of labor, the worker takes satisfaction in the fact that they were able to create an object that fulfills a human need. The worker then acts as a mediator between others and human nature and becomes part of the experience of others, which in turn affirms the communal aspect of the worker’s nature. Labor then becomes a “free manifestation of life” and an “enjoyment of life.”¹⁵

The distance provided by the camping experience allowed me to question what sort of design is worthwhile. It was easy for me to get too focused on the content of school courses or on work opportunities that come my way, and forget about my own values and interests, in other words, the question of why I am doing what I am doing. The answer was obscured by the desire to fit the image of a successful designer by aiming to do well at school, participate in exhibitions, win competitions, and get commissions. Richard Sennett defines craftsmanship as “an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake.”¹⁶ It is not limited to skilled manual labor and includes activities such as programming and parenting. However, social and economic circumstances interfere with the discipline and dedication required to pursue a craft. A school or a workplace may not offer the tools needed or may not value a craftsman’s desire for good work.¹⁷ I am concerned with public interests: How can we share our resources? How can we take care of our environment? How can we make spaces more accessible? Courses, exhibitions, competitions, and commissions, in my experience, have rarely addressed these concerns, and when they do, they often do so on a superficial, visual level: How can we produce images and packages that show that we are concerned? Because I made a considerable change to the way I was living during that summer, I was able to ask myself this question: What are my own values and interests, and how can I live and work in a way that allows me to meet them? This became a fundamental question that I ask myself when I

make plans. It makes planning an enjoyment because I am deeply convinced that the goals are worthwhile. Seeking refuge in a forest kept the limitations of social expectations at a distance and allowed me to better trust my intuition.

The forest is a wealth of perceptual experiences. The scent of pine (there were mainly pines, spruces, and birches; young, old, and fallen), countless bird-songs, and a texture of earth, roots, rocks, grass, and damp, dead leaves at your soles. Waking up and stepping out into that is a delight. It made me think about the kind of place I want to live in. I grew up in a capital city, but I realized that this is the sort of environment that will allow me to be well and to thrive. When I told a friend that I will be staying in the forest for the summer, one of the first questions she bewilderedly asked was, “Where will you put all your stuff?!” While we had some of our stuff stored in our friend’s apartment, staying in a tent of two meters by two meters and carrying only the stuff that fits in two backpacks made me recognize how our apartments are as much a shelter for us as they are a shelter for all our stuff. Before moving from Helsinki, we already got rid of a lot of our belongings, especially the bulky stuff. Even then, we still had stuff that we did not need to sustain our lives either outdoors or indoors. Among those were product design course projects that I had no use for anymore. After adopting a minimalist approach to owning things, it felt awkward being part of an industry of making stuff. At that point, I decided that I will not make anything anymore unless I am willing to commit to its presence in my life.

We imagined being joined by more people to create a little bundle of tents and small group of people that would move around in a caravan. A naïve idea, perhaps. But we wanted to think about ways to be close to nature within a community and in the long-term. For now, we had to get back to our school responsibilities and return to apartment life.



Index photo of a film shot in the summer of 2019.

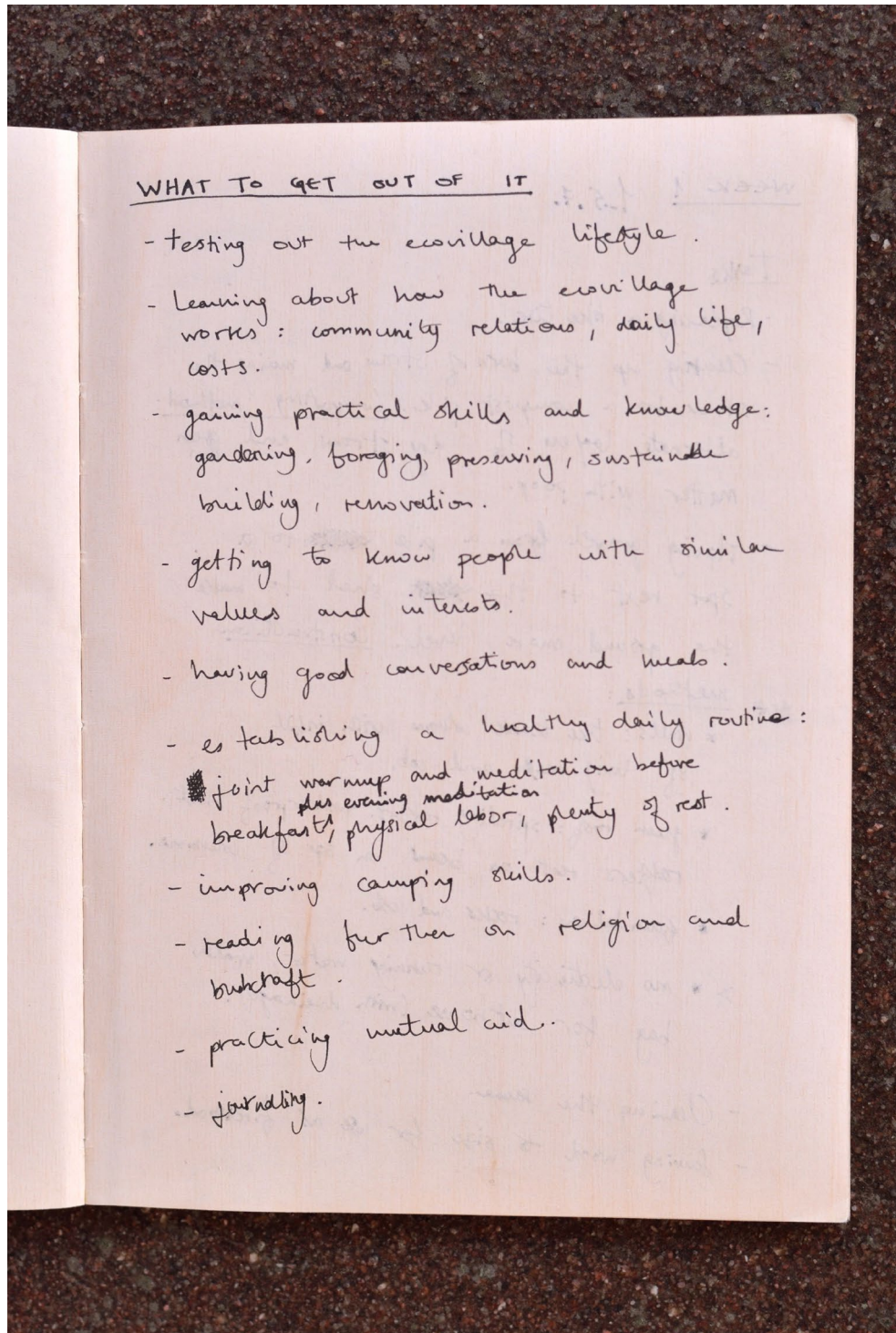
Volunteering Experience at Livonsaaren Yhteisökylä

As a learning experience that bridges formal learning and work, an internship can be an opportunity to test out new modes of design practice. If we are interested in social change and environmental sustainability, it is not only important to find ways in which design products can advance these values, but also modes of practicing design that are in line with them. After the camping experience in summer 2019 and wondering how this kind of life can become collective, my partner and I got interested in visiting an ecovillage in Finland. So, we planned to volunteer in July 2020 at Livonsaaren Yhteisökylä (Livonsaari Community Village), a rural community of people interested in self-sufficiency, including sustainable building and organic farming. I wanted to explore if design practice can fit into this sort of life and how learning and social connections, things that are sought after in an internship, can happen outside the scope of employment.

We sent an email to the community's general address, describing ourselves and our expectations and offering to volunteer. One of the village residents, Catie Fleming, responded by saying that she is interested in hosting us. Initially we wanted to meet with her to see the place and have a conversation but that did not work out on our end, so we only communicated by email. The basic agreement was that our host would provide a room in her home and three meals a day for the month, and, in return, we would provide work for around five to six hours a day, including a lunch break, for five days a week. The work would involve construction, gardening, cooking, and cleaning. The terms of the agreement were clearly described on a web page that she shared with us by email. In the absence of a formal contract, that was an important reference concerning the conditions of work.

Having reflected on my own internship experiences and those of oth-

ers and having considered what makes an internship worthwhile enabled me to approach this volunteering experience with the mindset and tools to make the best out of it. Before I set out for the month, I wrote down a list of the things I would like to get from the experience. First, I wanted to test out if a rural life is suitable for me. I wanted to learn about how the ecovillage works, gain some skills and knowledge relating to sustainable building and gardening, and get to know people with similar values and interests. I also wanted to have good conversations and establish a healthy daily routine. Not least, I wanted to practice mutual aid. I wrote this list of goals on the first page of an empty sketchbook. Every week, I would write my reflections on the tasks that I have done and what I have learned, and I would go back to this list to check if my time has been well spent. I was also willing to let go of certain initial goals if I found that they were unrealistic or unfitting to the situation I find myself in. For instance, I wrote that I wanted to improve my camping skills, and we were prepared to stay in a tent for the month, but we found that staying indoors was more practical and granted more time to focus on the work and spending time with our host. I found that writing down goals and journaling were helpful tools to assess the experience throughout and be proactive in shaping it.



Sketchbook page with initial goals.

Week 1

During that month, our host was in the process of building a house and shed from earth and wood, clearing up a barn for adaptive reuse as an event venue, and maintaining her gardens. There was another volunteer with us for part of the month. During the first week, we helped clear the barn of straw and move it to different piles for composting and using in planting beds. In that process, I learned a composting method which entails laying out alternate layers of dry straw and green matter mixed with dung. We also helped with moving gravel on the construction site of the house and shed. I learned about the construction methods and materials used to build the shed, which was in its final stages of construction and was mostly made of materials found in the area. The foundations were made of rocks and cob, the walls of tree trunk columns with a twig mesh and cob infill, and the green roof of spiraling wooden rafters with a waterproof membrane that allowed for growing moss on top. Other tasks involved replacing a bike tire, cleaning the sauna, and sawing wood to firewood size. The tasks were not particularly creative, but I found that physical labor of this sort can be enjoyable if done calmly and attentively. Plus, having people around allows the work to become a way to bond with others. For the most part, the tasks rotated between the volunteers and host, except that she wanted to do the plastering of the shed walls herself, which was understandable given that she will be the one seeing those walls for a long time.

Preparing food and sitting together for meals three times a day allowed us to get to know our host and the other volunteer better and to learn more about the ecovillage community. Our host took us on a tour of the village in the first week. The village consists of fifty people living on sixty hectares of land and is organized as a shareholding company. One pays 13000 euros to become a member and is then entitled to rent half a hectare of land for 500 euros per year and to rent houses in the village at a discounted price. The community does not

share any particular ideology, but it was established by people who are interested in settling in the countryside and building their own homes. Construction materials used in the village include logs, standard wood elements, straw bale, clay, and recycled materials. A common sauna and library help bring people together. When I was not doing tasks, I was exercising, meditating, reading, taking walks, sitting in the forest, and connecting with family and friends. Besides working and having meals together, we spent time with our host doing other activities like using the sauna or playing board games.

Week 2

We continued clearing out the barn and working on the shed in the second week. We measured and cut planks of wood to size to line the perimeter of the shed roof. We also helped with removing weeds in the gardens and paving the paths with wood cuttings. The tasks were tedious, but I could find satisfaction in them knowing that they are part of a project that is worthwhile and that I uphold. By offering a small contribution of time and effort, I was helping someone achieve a more self-sufficient life. The labor was shared among us and there was a variety of tasks to do throughout the week with different skills required for each. This sort of life simply requires hard work, and it was important to acknowledge that. I was gathering knowledge and practicing skills that I know will come in handy since I am interested in a similar sort of future for myself.

Week 3

In the third week, we painted the wooden boards we had cut with tar and attached them to the shed roof. We chopped some more firewood and did some more cleaning at the barn and disassembled wooden structures in there. We also went blueberry picking at a beautiful location for a day. Our host asked us to work in the weekend shredding wooden sticks to be used for covering

garden paths. I mentioned that the schedule in the initial agreement describes weekends as free days, and so I would rather not work during the weekend. I got flustered bringing that up. Though the discussion was amiable, it felt like a confrontation on my end because there was a sense of shame around asking to take a break from work, perhaps rooted in a fear of being perceived as uninterested or lazy. I dealt with that emotion by reminding myself that it was important to have rest days and appropriate not to have to work for more days than agreed on initially. Our host explained that she wrote the agreement terms long ago and forgot the details. Later, we remembered that we had all taken a day trip on Monday and did not do any work then, so we told her that we would be happy to work for a day in the weekend to compensate for that. Regardless, it was important to have that conversation.

So far, my experience at the village confirmed that my hope to live self-sufficiently within a community is possible. I felt well in that beautiful, natural environment. Physical labor for five to six hours is satisfying, feels healthy, and leaves plenty of time for rest and energy for other activities and interests in the evenings and weekends. In contrast, my previous experiences with forty-five-hour (not counting overtime) workweeks often left me drained and vapid. One could say that our daily schedule had a sensible “work-life balance.” But that’s a clunky term. It assumes that work is an activity separate from life, as if we turn comatose upon entering the workplace and only spring back to life upon leaving it. Work ought to be an activity that invigorates rather than diminishes our lives.

It is important to live around people who share one’s values. That brings about a sense of safety and a sense of validation of one’s own values, goals, and effort. The village community members exchange help, know-how, and tools. This is an important consideration for establishing, say, a design coworking space. Using coworking spaces merely to split expensive costs like rent and equipment

leaves out the potential for sharing skills, time, friendship, and a sense of community and purpose.

Week 4

We finished cutting up the branches that we started working on in the weekend and cleaned up a little more in the barn. We prepared a sand-clay-dung mixture for plastering the shed walls. That involved collecting, breaking up, and soaking horse poop, stomping on clay, and mixing these two ingredients with sand. We did some more garden maintenance and started clearing out a section of the barn that had been left unattended for long and had accumulated a thick, sludgy layer of goat poop and straw. I did some solo blueberry picking too. It is a good way to unwind and be in the company of trees. While preparing the plastering mixture was a team effort, it was not the same this week for the cleaning up in the barn, as it was just us volunteers doing the cleaning. Over the weeks, the conversations at the dining table more personal, and that built more trust between us.

We visited one of the village residents who built her house with her husband. The house is made of naturally sourced materials and uses wind and solar power for electricity, a rainwater collection system, wood heating, a dry toilet, and a cold storage room. They even grew all the food they ate for some years. I learned about the advantages and the practical, financial, and legal challenges of building an off-grid house out of natural materials. Before building their house, the couple built a sauna within a few months and lived in there for a while. That is a common strategy for people who construct their home themselves and want to have a temporary shelter on their land while they do so. The visit was very useful as we got a first-hand account of what it is like to build your own house. I had made sketches for a log house before coming to Livonsaari, and I made notes to improve the design based on what I learned.

Week 5

In the fifth week, we continued clearing up the same part of the barn on Monday. Our host did not participate this time either, so I felt that we were being given the most unpleasant task as volunteers and thus was not motivated to do the work. So, we decided we would work half the day. On other days, we assisted our host in building part of the stone retaining wall around the shed, gathered apples and blackcurrants, and helped with making a lot of applesauce. As our last day at Livonsaari came closer, I realized that, to me, living close to nature is essential for a good life, perhaps as essential as having family and friends.

Overall Impression

In our last dinner together, our host asked what we got out of the experience. My main takeaway was that I saw a concrete example of what living that strives to be self-sufficient is like. I am more certain that I want to live close to nature, based on how well I felt throughout the month, and I got a sense that it is doable. I learned about gardening and food preservation and gained design know-how relating to self-sufficient living, such as sustainable materials, construction methods, and energy use.

The experience brought up considerations to keep in mind when joining or establishing a community in the future. I did not like that the community was not as tightly knit as I had expected when it comes to social relations, a common value system, and general management. The closeness to Turku city seemed like an advantage: it is relatively easy to drive there for supplies, medical services, and work. By living near a city, it is also possible to stay connected to more people: for example, it would be easier to invite people to visit and participate in workshops on self-sufficiency. I also got an idea of the cost of starting such a life.

I got a sense of what sort of life this is. The rhythm of the day, the sort of

tasks to be done, and how much work is needed. Our host was friendly, and we negotiated our tasks day-to-day. She offered us some seeds, blueberry jam, and applesauce to take with us at the end of our stay. Even tedious tasks did not feel much like drudgery when done collectively and within beautiful surroundings. They strengthen the body too and, when done in moderation, leave capacity to do other activities (I finished three books that month, for one thing). That is the sort of daily life I would sign up for. An exchange based on mutual respect and benefit enabled a rich learning experience with several facets: learning hands-on skills by doing, gaining new knowledge through conversation and observation, and understanding a particular lifestyle through daily life experience.

Evaluation in Relation to Initial Goals

- I was able to test out the ecovillage lifestyle.
- I learned about how the ecovillage works in relation to community life, daily life, and costs. I asked our host a lot of questions and met with an older member of the community. I figured that I might not be the best fit for this particular community because I would probably feel more at home in a group that is more tightly knit and that agrees on shared basic values.
- I did learn some practical skills and knowledge:
 - I learned a little about garden maintenance: weeding out plants and maintaining paths.
 - I did not learn anything new about foraging, but I did get to practice picking blueberries and chanterelles.
 - I got a basic idea of preserving fruit: making juice, jam, sauce, and vinegar.
 - I got an idea about the materials, costs, and work needed for wood and earth construction and log house building.
 - I did not learn about renovation because renovating the barn re-

mained at the early stage of clearing it up.

- I got to know people with similar values and interests, which was encouraging. It showed us that our vision is doable, and that support is out there. People within this community share their skills, time, and tools with one another. We made a good connection with our host based on common interests and mutual respect.
- We always shared good meals, simple food made in large part from whatever is available at the gardens. That encouraged us to simplify our food consumption and to limit it as much as we can to food that is nutritious and that can be grown locally. The ritual of expressing gratitude for having food before meals was appealing to us, and we carried that through into our daily lives. We were able to get to know our host and learn more about the village over conversations at the table.
- I was very happy with our daily routine, even though I would have liked the meditation to be more consistent. The amount of work in relation to free time was balanced. The shared meals set a good structure for the day.
- We did not get to do much camping because it was not practical to settle in the tent when we needed to be at the house or sauna often to eat, wash, and take breaks. We tested out some new gear though, and I read one book on bushcraft.
- I finished three books, and I am satisfied with that amount of reading for one month.
- I practiced mutual aid. I got the opportunity to nurture a sense of willingness to give without having to feel good about myself or that I am saving the world but rather to simply contribute to a project that I believe is good. Of course, we were receiving food and shelter in return. Exchanging our resources with our host's created a space for true learning.
- Journaling sometimes felt like an obligation, but it did help me keep track

of my thoughts and emotions around the experience and gave me a solid reference to come back to in order to realistically evaluate the experience and to be proactive throughout. It enabled me to reflect on how the experience is going and what is lacking, then act upon that by requesting specific tasks and asking to meet other village residents to get their knowledge and perspective. It also helped jot down thoughts and takeaways that I want to keep in mind for our future vision for a self-sufficient home and community.



Images from our stay at Livonsaari. Photos: Catie Fleming.



Tool #3: The Critical Internship: A Nonmonetary Exchange Model

As a transitory phase between formal education and work, an internship carries potential for learning outside the limitations of both. A critical internship can be a test run for how you want to live and work in the future and a tool for envisioning the future of design work and living up to that vision in the present. As precarious life circumstances force designers into exploitative conditions, it is important to think of ways not only to demand fairer labor conditions, but also to work outside the confines of wage labor. Can we create scenarios for work independent from exploitative labor relations? Can internships be platforms to test out these scenarios? Answering these questions entails imagining a more just future of work, and a critical internship entails getting involved in creating that future by using creative and critical thinking to conceive alternative possibilities of doing work and making them tangible through action.¹⁸

By organizing a critical internship, you could set your own learning goals and gather knowledge and experience relevant to those goals. To set your own learning goals, you can reflect on what kind of work interests you and what skill-set do you need to build to do that work. Can you think of a project that would exercise that skillset? You can also use the time to figure out how you want to organize your work: What sorts of things do you like to do? How much time in a week do you like to dedicate to your work? Do you like to work more often with others or independently? What sort of space is conducive to your work? Instead of doing an unpaid internship that may not give you the experience you need, you could take the time to shape a personal practice that aligns with your interests and values, that is, that motivates you, through mentorship with a more experienced practitioner. The work that you do without expecting payment can be a starting point for pursuing your own passions and the interests of your

community rather than the unreasonable expectations of a professional field.

Nonmonetary exchange is one of the forms that a critical internship can take. Work based on bartering resources like effort, skills, food, and shelter allow for the valuation of work, not based on profit or status gained by it, but based on mutual benefit. There typically are two sides of the exchange: a volunteer and a host. Basically, a volunteer offers their labor, while a host provides essential living needs and knowledge. A volunteer would not put in the effort if they did not believe that what they are doing is worthwhile and that they are learning from the experience, and a host would not share their home and food with a volunteer if they did not need a helping hand. This sort of exchange nurtures the aspect of mutual aid inherent in us and opens up the possibility for genuine learning and social connections.

Rights, Obligations, and Potential Exploitation

But this model of exchange leaves room for exploitation as well. WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is an online platform “linking volunteers with organic farmers and growers to promote cultural and educational experiences based on trust and non-monetary exchange, thereby helping to build a sustainable, global community.”¹⁹ A volunteer pays a membership fee for the service to view host information, read reviews, and contact other members. Some volunteer experiences posted on an online forum thread²⁰ describe hosts providing poor accommodation conditions and too little food, asking volunteers to work more hours than agreed upon, and misrepresenting themselves on their online profile. Some volunteers said that they left before the agreed upon working period was over, while others felt the obligation to stay. It is possible for volunteers to take advantage of such an arrangement as well. During my stay in Livonsaaren Yhteisökylä, a person joined us for a few days as a volunteer. He stayed at our host’s home, ate the food she offered, and agreed to help with the

work during discussions at the dining table. When the time came for work, he did not show up. Hosts and volunteers should thus have a clear sense of what their rights and obligations are.

WWOOF Independents, the group of volunteers and hosts without a national WWOOF organization, lays out principles for safety and terms and conditions for both hosts and volunteers, which can apply to internship situations as well. Regarding safety, they rely on volunteer and host feedback, and complaints can lead to suspension or expulsion from membership. They encourage volunteers to travel with a companion and both hosts and volunteers to check each other's reviews and to get in touch and ask each other a lot of questions. They remind volunteers that they have no obligation to stay if they are unhappy with the situation and that they should have a back-up plan and enough funds in case they want to leave.²¹ They also lay out terms and conditions for hosts to abide by. Hosts are expected to give volunteers firsthand experience of organic farming and sustainable living by providing various tasks that offer opportunities for learning. Hosts should provide decent and clean accommodation and healthy meals and should clarify the amount of work should be within 4 to 6 hours a day for 5 to 5.5 days a week. Volunteers are expected to show up at the date agreed, be respectful towards the host, their family, and their property, and to participate in the daily activities to the best of their ability to learn about organic farming and sustainable living. Hosts and volunteers are encouraged to have a partnership based on mutual trust and respect and are expected to understand that there is no hierarchy, productivity expectations, or financial transactions between volunteer and host.²² The principles of mutual trust and respect, committing to an agreement, and centering learning are important for internships. Perhaps removing the factor of financial transactions between host and volunteer promotes the application of those principles. However, that does not always mean that finance is not involved in the relationship. For example, volunteers

might at times help with certain tasks that have no educational value in themselves but that contribute to making profit. It is then of utmost importance that hosts are transparent about revenue and that both hosts and volunteers uphold the rights and obligations that ensure that they both benefit from the experience fairly. While nonmonetary exchange does not eliminate the possibility for exploitation, the absence of a financial transaction opens up other possibilities for mutual benefit, which can provide richer learning and social experiences.

The Value of Self-Sufficiency

When we are considering a work environment, we might think about how big or small an office is or about the location and quality of a studio space. It is generally taken for granted that we ought to live in cities to do creative work, because cities are where most of it happens. However, rural environments could be seriously considered as living and working environments that can promote well-being, creative freedom, and environmental sustainability. Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, is a concept that was developed in Japan in the 1980s around scientific research that has shown that spending time among trees brings about health benefits, including lower anxiety and better sleep.²³ A self-sufficient way of life brings shinrin-yoku into everyday activities and gives you the possibility to grow your own food and build your own shelter from your own labor and environment. Of course, it costs to own or rent and maintain land, but with a group of people, the cost per person can be minimized, and the reward may be well worth the investment. The ability to secure basic survival from labor, land, and community rather than a paycheck presents the possibility to create outside of the constraints of the market of jobs and commissions. It presents the possibility of doing independent design work. That means that you get to align what you produce as a designer with your own values rather than the values handed to you by a brief, which you may often disagree with.

A self-sufficient life also offers possibilities for environmental sustainability. Many designers today care about environmental issues, which are typically tackled with two approaches. One is to change the production methods and materials of products to more environmentally friendly ones, such as using methods that take up less energy and use materials that can be dumped into a biowaste bin. The other approach is to change consumer behavior. The premise is that if consumers become woke about the environment, then they will shop more consciously: they will buy stuff made of recycled plastics, they will consider longevity and repair, and they will perhaps even buy less. Following a self-sufficient life offers something different. When we say we care about the environment, we usually think about quantitative or distant notions, like the temperature of the earth rising or polar ice caps melting. The environment manifests concretely in the countryside. It is the trees you walk by, the soil you dig your hands in, the rain that waters your crops, and the food you harvest. A healthy environment is integral to daily life and survival in that context. A self-sufficient life can give us agency not only as consumers but also as producers. We could work towards growing our own food, collecting our own water, producing our own energy, pursuing our own interests, and taking care of ourselves together. There is potential for an intimate connection with the environment, others, and one's needs and work.

Nonmonetary Exchange: Basic Principles

Work based on shared personal values allows for learning and building friendship and fosters motivation. A volunteer would be motivated to work knowing that they are helping someone with a project they believe is worthwhile, and a host would be happy to answer questions and share their experience around a subject they are passionate about.

Collective distribution of work regardless of the task motivates effort. Knowing that you are not just getting asked to do the most difficult or unpleasant tasks as a volunteer is important.

Daily activities like cooking together and sharing meals set a structure for the day and help people bond and build trust.

Four to six hours of work a day is a sensible amount to both get tasks done and to maintain energy and motivation throughout the day. It allows for ample time to rest and to engage in interests outside of work.

Before and during an internship experience, it is helpful to think of and note down learning goals, to keep a journal of the experience, and to regularly evaluate the experience in relation to the goals established. That helps you to be a proactive participant in your work and learning. You could reevaluate the validity of the goals according to the experience as well if they no longer seem fitting to the situation at hand.

Discussing basic rights, such as appropriate compensation and reasonable working hours, should not be a matter of hesitation and shame, but a matter of fairness and well-being. The fact that one might feel hesitant or ashamed about asking for basic rights reflects a work ethos that promotes exploitation, that is, a work ethos that should be changed.

The terms of the agreement should be set out in written form that can be referred to in case of a conflict. That should include, at least, a commitment from the host to provide decent housing, wholesome food, and quality mentorship, and a commitment from the volunteer to offer their help enthusiastically. Details regarding these terms should be specified, including sleeping arrangements, food served, types of tasks, and working hours.

Epilogue

Towards Alternative Economies

The first line of action against precarious internships could well be to demand proper compensation and desirable working conditions. As important as this demand is, it still operates within the framework of wage labor. Wage labor is done within a hierarchical setup that prioritizes the interest of the entity providing the wage, namely profit, and sidelines the interests of the laborer, such as their well-being, livelihood, and sense of purpose. Dependent on the labor for survival or a sense of professional success, the worker does not affirm their identity through the work. Feeling disconnected from what they are spending most of their time doing, they become increasingly disconnected from their nature and consequently from others and the environment. Wage labor is often alienated labor. A more ambitious goal would be to create environments where meaningful work is viable. Meaningful work has intrinsic value for the person doing it. The work is rewarding, and the worker feels fulfilled and exercises their creativity and the full range of their skills. The worker simply wants to do the work for its own sake.

Visions of the future of labor conjure up worlds where time spent in wage labor is reduced to a few hours a day or is eliminated altogether, maximizing the time for people to realize their intrinsic desires. Nineteenth century textile designer William Morris makes the distinction between “useful work” and “useless toil.” Labor is not good merely as some sacred means for earning livelihood. In doing worthy work, we find pleasure in a creative and imaginative skill, hope to make use of the product of our labor, and look forward to enjoying the time when we are not working. Work should be undertaken voluntarily and joyfully, with the hope of benefiting ourselves or our community. Useful work would be varied as we could choose to practice different crafts, and the working day would be short. Morris believed that work that does not have these qualities is worthless. People should produce what they consume according to their ability, and their livelihood would be guaranteed by society. To achieve that, the

hierarchy that compels people into wage labor should be gotten rid of.¹

In her book *The Problem with Work*, contemporary academic Kathi Weeks reminds us that the fact that we should work to make a living is a social convention rather than a natural law.² What compels us to work is a social system that ensures that work is the only means for securing basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare.³ Waged work is strongly tied to social status, personal achievement, and a sense of contributing to society, yet it leaves people precarious and overworked.⁴ On one hand, work is a practice that creates hierarchies, and on the other, it is a field where we can produce alternative models of organization and politics that center freedom.⁵ A guaranteed universal basic income would enable workers to better negotiate their working conditions and to leave waged work without jeopardizing their livelihoods. Full-time work consisting of thirty hours a week would help balance out the gap between unemployment and overwork. More importantly, a basic income could allow people to challenge the wage system and to envision their lives independent from it.⁶

We can see steps towards such visions in existing forms of organization that workers have come up with to challenge alienation and precariousness through different tools, from direct political action, to horizontal self-management, to growing food. The common thread that connects these different forms is that they create security in connections based on mutual support. While the rivalry of the job market has designers take on unfair internships and other precarious work to gain a competitive edge in hope of better employability, the support of the collective can offer tangible security. As a creative field, design can advance cultural change around work. The following instances of collectivity present examples of professional practice to learn from. Although small in the face of the mainstream economy, they can begin to multiply and form networks that can slowly make them less and less alien.⁷



Protest signs by the Carrot Workers Collective, in *Surviving Internships: A Counter Guide to Free Labour in the Arts*, (London: Hato Press, 2009), 54, https://carrotworkers.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/cw_web.pdf.

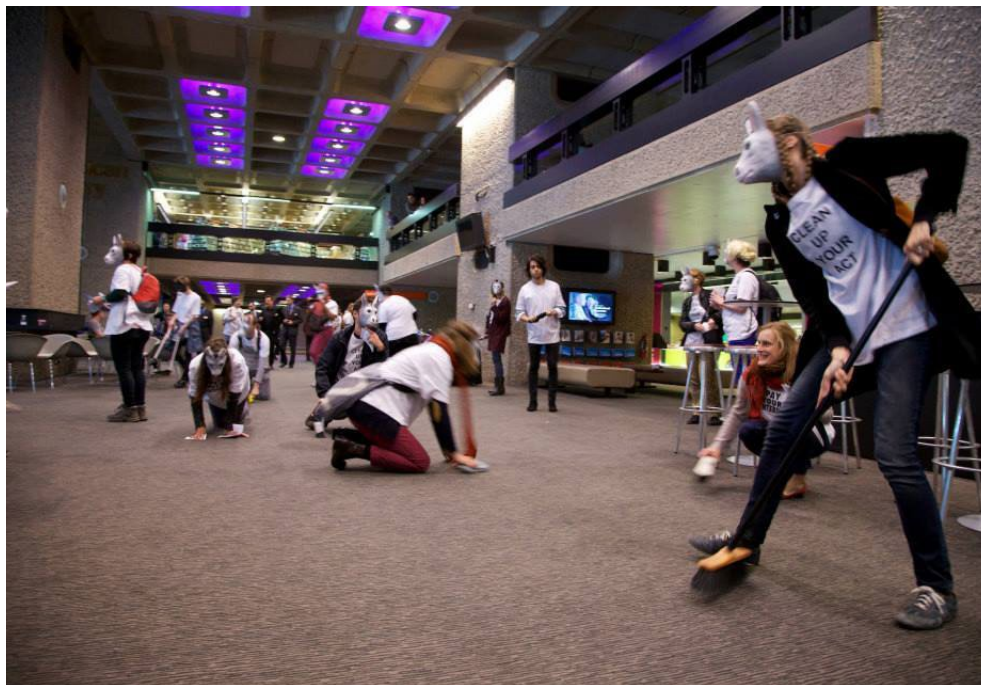
A Collectivized Artists' Residency: Sharing Access to Resources

My castle is your castle is a small experiment in sharing resources initiated by designers Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz in 2011. The duo were part of a five-month artist residency at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw to do research on precariousness and to investigate how socially and politically engaged practices can be economically viable. Aiming to create an alternative economic culture in everyday conditions and to support practitioners working along the same lines of research, the duo shared the resources they had access to via the residency with six others working in various creative disciplines, whom they reached through an open call. The co-residency was proposed to a graphic designer who contacted the duo for an internship, so this model is a potential collaborative alternative to a typical internship.

They shared their travel budget with their coresidents, and a part of their production budget was used to support socially and politically engaged practitioners in Warsaw through fees for public seminars. In addition, they transformed the twenty-five square meter studio they were offered by building a wooden structure within it that can be inhabited independently. The coresidents lived with them for periods ranging from four to thirty days and had the possibility to do their own work (without the expectation of producing anything), to explore the city for inspiration, and to connect with other artists, curators, and institutions. The experiment was short-term, limited in scale, and reliant on institutional resources. But even if it does not challenge the conditions that create precariousness in the first place, it is an example of how designers can use the resources made available to them to support others that share their precarious conditions.⁸



The wooden structure built by the duo with Pawel Jasiewicz to share their living space. Photos: Brave New Alps. <https://www.brave-new-alps.com/my-castle-is-your-castle/>.



An Artists' Collective: Research and Activism

The Precarious Workers Brigade is a UK-based collective of precarious workers in culture and education who develop research and engage in actions that aim for concrete change against precarious work.⁹ They have created a number of tools that address labor conditions in the cultural and educational sector, including a template for an open letter to art institutions that advertise unpaid internships; the Bust your Boss Card, an info leaflet on negotiating money issues with potential clients and employers; and publications such as *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education*, which offers tools for analyzing the relationship between education, work, and the cultural economy.¹⁰ The group also organizes workshops with art and design students and recent graduates and does protest actions in collaboration with other groups and campaigns, including ones relating to causes and professional fields outside the sphere of culture.¹¹

They orient and organize their work based on a code of ethics, which outlines their goals, organizational methods, and favored working conditions.¹² Part of their policy is to share information regarding the labor and payment or lack thereof that goes into their work by publishing an info box at the end of their publications or reading an info box out loud at the start of an event. The info box includes details such as the duration of the work, number of workers or interns involved, and workers' fees. Its purpose is to oppose the culture of silence regarding working conditions in the arts, which is one of the factors that allow exploitation to keep happening. They maintain that transparency is a concrete step that can be taken towards doing away with free labor even if achieving that goal is a long process.¹³

“Clean Up Your Act: Living Wage For All Workers” action at the Barbican, London, June 22, 2013. Photos: Precarious Workers' Brigade. <https://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/tagged/actions>.

A Time Bank: Exchanging Effort and Expertise without Money

Leeds Creative Timebank is a platform for skill and knowledge exchange that connects artists from a wide range of backgrounds who work in Leeds, England. Instead of cash, the platform relies on time-credits as currency between members for exchanging services, which include mentoring in areas such as curating, professional skills such as printmaking, and general skills such as catering. Using an online database, a member can request a skill transaction via a “timebroker” who puts them in contact with another member that can offer that skill. Alternatively, members can contact each other directly. According to the time spent on the work, the member who provided a service is credited, and the one who received it is debited. The receiving member provides any necessary materials for the task. The hours of all members are equal in value regardless of what skill they offer and whether they are recent graduates or experienced practitioners. New members are recruited through open calls and are invited to workshops to get acquainted with the values of the organization and to join. A management group that any member can join oversees the policy and operation of the organization.¹⁴

The time bank was established in 2010 with a small grant as a practical response to the 2008 economic crisis and the diminishing public funding available to artists. It allows artists to mutually support each other outside the framework of cash transactions, thereby strengthening the art production of the local community. While the time bank does not free its members from all monetary costs, it does help them realize projects, receive training, make connections, and experiment with collaborating with others—possibilities that might have not been accessible to them otherwise.¹⁵



Social event organized by Leeds Creative Timebank on July 9, 2014. At the event, members shared project ideas, gifted hours to support certain projects, and discussed time bank developments. Photos: Magdalena Szymanska. <https://leedscreativetimebank.org.uk/lct-big-social-heres-what-we-got-up-to/>.



A Workers' Cooperative: Nonhierarchical Distribution of Income

Cooperativa de Diseño is a multidisciplinary design studio established in the corner of a recuperated factory in Argentina in 2011. They offer services in several areas including graphic design, product development, and audiovisual production. They have done socially engaged design projects with workers' cooperatives from other recuperated factories, artisan communities, and activist groups. The studio operates as a cooperative based on horizontal self-organization. A basic income is provided from the cooperative's revenue according to each member's financial needs, such as dependents and housing costs. In addition to the basic salary, the members earn a second income which is divided equally between them and is meant to cover daily living expenses such as food. Necessary work hours are also divided equally among the members regardless of whether these hours directly generate income or not. In this way, the cooperative members adopt their political values not only in the content of the projects that they work on, but also through their own ways of working, and thus align their practice with their political outlook. They offer both projects that aim for social impact and an alternative way of organizing creative practice.¹⁶



Cooperativa de Diseño's workplace. Photos: Routines magazine. http://routines.xyz/index.php/portfolio/routines_cooperativa-de-diseno/.

An Artist-Run Space in the City: Public Space and Accessible Facilities

Mansion is a public space for cultural production housed in a twentieth-century villa that was formerly abandoned since the eighties in Beirut, Lebanon. Starting in 2012, new inhabitants, including artists, designers, and activists, have slowly transformed it into a shared space that offers a freely accessible and quiet working space, garden, kitchen, and library. Mansion also offers a sound studio, dance studio, and work desks and offices for an affordable financial contribution that helps cover the running costs and maintenance of the space. The villa's users are also encouraged to take care of the space by making repairs and improvements and replenishing the kitchen supplies. This gives art and design workers and associations access to spaces and facilities at an exceptionally low cost while contributing to a communal venue that offers the neighborhood and city much needed public space. The villa was repurposed in agreement with its owner who offers the place free of charge, albeit on a temporary basis. This experiment in collective reuse stands in bright contrast to the typical fate of Beirut's disintegrating old buildings that are either demolished to make way for high-end real estate projects or remodeled into exclusive enterprises. Over the years, Mansion has hosted a variety of activities and initiatives, from exhibitions and performances, to a bicycle repair shop, to activist campaign meetings.¹⁷



Work in progress at Mansion's silk screening workshop. Photos: Soraya Ghezelbash. <http://aauanastas.com/silkscreening-villa-mansion/>.



An Artist-Run Space in the Countryside: Culture Meets Ecology

Kultivator is a project that explores the intersection between visual art practice and farming. It is situated in formerly abandoned farm facilities in the village of Dyestad on the southeast coast of Sweden. It includes spaces for artist residencies, exhibitions, and performances beside an organic farm that produces crops, oil, and dairy and provides food for the residents. The artists in residence and other visitors in return offer helping hands for the farm work in an otherwise scarcely inhabited area.¹⁸

Kultivator was founded in 2005 and is currently run by artists Mathieu Vrijman and Malin Lindmark Vrijman and farm manager Henric Stigeborn. The artists maintain their practice by doing commissioned projects, hosting gatherings on the farm, and teaching at the local art school, and they work with the nearby agricultural community to learn about growing food and taking care of animals. They see parallels between artistic practice and organic farming: the lack of accessibility of both to a broad public and the precariousness that comes with a cultural and ecological orientation in one's work. Their projects involve both international artists and the local rural community and take on both artistic research and practical needs.¹⁹ With small farmers and others, they set up a simple platform for the exchange of labor with around ten participants living on the island where Kultivator is located. The participants share the need to restore and maintain derelict buildings, and the exchange allows for organizing labor-intensive projects involving construction, maintenance, or large-scale events at minimal cost. Following an open call, contributors show up and do what they can to help finish the work, while the host provides food, drinks, accommodation, and a good atmosphere.²⁰ Kultivator offers a model for practitioners who have both a cultural and ecological direction in their work and who wish to secure their survival, at least in part, through agriculture and community.

Kultivating m<Other Tongues preconference for the Multispecies storytelling conference at the Linnæus University and Växjö konsthall, Växjö, Sweden. Photos: Kultivator. <https://www.kultivator.org/kultivating-m-other-tongues/>.

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