

Chapter 1

Common settings

or how do we start working together?



collaboration for future

The research

Common settings

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Collaborations for Future is a design research programme in which 10 designers and 10 climate scientists get the opportunity to collaborate 1-on-1 for a period of 9 months, without predefined roles or outcomes. This is the long form of Chapter one and weaves all four areas of reflection together. We start off by laying out what fostering a curious attitude means to us, at Foundation We Are. Following this, we'll dive into the concrete themes and issues we discussed and the insights and experiences we gathered. Namely, we reflect on the effect of disciplinary communities, the value of talking practically about how we work, and the role of societal and personal values in professional contexts.

The first step of cross-disciplinary collaboration is curiosity. As we eagerly step into the worlds and work of others, we become keen observers, intrigued by their methods of collecting and interpreting information, fascinated by how they weave it into narratives and knowledge. To make sense of what we encounter we ask questions, interpreting or comparing with our own experiences and practices. To truly embrace this openness, we must suspend our assumptions about the meaning, value, or attitudes of our collaborators' work. Donna Haraway's essay, 'A Curious Practice', resonates with this ethos. She speaks of the art of polite inquiry and the act of visiting with a curious mind, devoid of haste in drawing conclusions or clinging to assumptions.

In her words:

"Visiting is not an easy practice; it demands the ability to find others actively interesting, even or especially others most people already claim to know all too completely, to ask questions that one's interlocutors truly find interesting, to cultivate the wild virtue of curiosity, to retune one's ability to sense and respond—and to do all this politely! What is this sort of politeness? It sounds more than a little risky. Curiosity always leads its practitioners a bit too far off the path, and that way lie stories."

- Donna Haraway, Chapter 7 A Curious Practice, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016

The Collaborations for Future program was set up to test how we can enable this kind of curious practice, and the research was designed to collect and document the emerging stories. Three weeks after the 10 pairs of designers & climate scientists formally began their collaborations, we held the first community meeting. There we focused on creating a common setting, making room for the participants to meet fellow scientists or designers, and generating a shared and nuanced image of what 'design' and 'science' are about. We were curious to see how the collaboration pairs were setting off, and how their ideas of 'science' and 'design' are informed by encountering each other's work and world. This article makes sense of the shared interests, themes and concerns discussed during the first meet up and concludes with a reflection on what the group setting does in this context of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Curious practice

Practices and disciplines establish themselves over time and are shaped and developed by their professional communities. They develop a culture of working, rely on norms of doing things, languages of communicating about things, and criteria for 'doing well'. The creative and scientific communities each have their own culture of working, rely on different norms, use different languages and most importantly operate by different criteria of 'doing well'. To engage curious practice, as Haraway defines it, means also to understand and let go of assumptions both about one's own work and that of the other person. In this meeting, we wanted to create a common ground as a group by gaining a deeper understanding of both fields of work.

To achieve this, we invited the participants to note down their answers to 6 questions: How would you define design? How would you define science? What makes design design? What makes science science? What is the role of design in society? and What is the role of science in society? They took their time to note their answers down on cards before laying them out for everyone to see and opening up the conversation. Looking at the collection of cards,

a participant remarked that many answers on the qualities and definitions associated with design could also apply for science, and vice versa. Discussing how and why designers and scientists do what they do, this first community meeting helped articulate some stereotypes and uncover some shared concerns. With several representatives from each group, these stereotypes could be transformed into a more nuanced understanding, highlighting several perceived differences and commonalities between the disciplines of 'science' and 'design'. This interdisciplinary encounter was especially effective in a diverse group setting where the work, background and practices of both the designers and scientists varied. The group setting played an important role in identifying and acknowledging different perspectives and experiences among fellow designers and scientists. The openness and genuine curiosity that they showed each other invited the exchange of personal experiences and anecdotes, giving everyone present a deeper glimpse into the two professional worlds.

Figure 1. Mapping of unexpected commonalities by the participants of the incubator.



It seems that the value of these community meetings is in creating room for the participants to meet each other outside of the familiar boundaries of 'design' and 'science'. The meetings can be a space, where traditional roles, agencies and expectations can be temporarily suspended, a free space to re-examine what new roles, agencies and expectations they would like to have in response to the climate crisis. This space is essential in a project like Collaborations for Future, and might prove to be what is needed in order to open up perspectives on what a collaboration between a scientist and a designer truly might have to offer beyond conventional definitions, expectations and role divisions.

This first meeting marked the symbolic stepping over a threshold, the making of the group, and the first exploration of the differences, commonalities and opportunities between science and design. This unveiled a (complex) landscape that challenged the participants' and our preconceived notions and

enriched the understanding of both disciplines. It highlighted shared concerns, as well as opportunities for meaningful collaboration. The next three sections highlight the disciplinary, professional, social themes on which our first encounter focused.



Figure 2. uncovering prejudices around 'science' and 'design'.

Part 1:

Disciplinary dimension

In this project we see disciplines and subdisciplines primarily through their professional communities. In both science and design, authority and legitimacy comes in part from being a member of your professional community. In everyday practice, this translates into complying with disciplinary norms, methods, and values, as well as speaking the language and jargon of our discipline.

Disciplinary communities

What is our area of expertise / what types of topics can we be professionally concerned about?

Disciplinary boundaries have a strong role in the career of a professional scientist. In the community discussion, their specialisation and deepening of knowledge was compared to working in a silo. This view was particularly true for those scientists working in the natural and physical sciences, where specialisation is further defined by certain geographic areas, geologic periods, methods and tools, making it difficult to pivot to another branch of research later in one's career.

While specialising with such devotion can strengthen one's expertise and professional profile, it can also limit agency outside this theme. The general opinion

in the group was that, contrary to science, designers could be less strict with the boundaries of disciplines and knowledge domains, making it possible to switch themes, collaborators and contexts more readily than for a scientist. The notion that designers often engage with different disciplines was compared to dipping one's finger in different pies, in a sense indicating that it is a casual act that can be done curiously as well as carelessly. Adopting a nested approach can foster collaboration and the integration of ideas across various disciplines. Extracting, borrowing, copying or combining elements from different disciplines can lead to intriguing bricolage, innovations and inventions, but it does not necessarily guarantee creative versatility or artistic quality of the outcomes.

The versatility and flexibility attributed to designers not only facilitate the ability to switch from themes and contexts, but also offer an additional benefit. For some, the disciplinary looseness of the design community makes it possible for practitioners to switch careers and professional occupations more readily than for some scientists. This was the opinion and experience of some of the designers, but not all. Specialisation

within the design and cultural sector also strengthens the designer's portfolio and chances to receive talent development grants, among other benefits that come with profiling and specialisation. On the other hand, this can lead to repetition and reproduction of one's own past work. Similarly, the affordance of crossovers were familiar to the climate researchers in the Collaborations for Future program, who operate within the social sciences. It seems that neither of the models - high specialisation or broad versatility - is stereotypical of either of the fields - design or science. They just might be a matter of professional requirement or the personal inclination and preference of the designer or researcher. When done with care and commitment, crossovers and disciplinary looseness can reveal how different disciplines can work together, how the thinking of one can influence the other. This in turn can lead to more avenues and better understanding of the effects, outcomes and disciplinary crossovers, as well as the typologies of collaboration forms that can be used. Acknowledging this left us with a shared sense of urgency to create room for different ways of knowing and working.

Language and vocabulary

In a project such as CFF, how can we talk to each other so that we understand each other?

Within disciplinary communities language is a familiar point of attention. Both fields have developed specific languages (i.e. jargon) within their respective professional bubbles. One of the challenges of a project like Collaborations for Future, is to develop a shared language, or at least a similar or shared understanding of the words that are being used. Even though designers and scientists may use identical words, their definitions do not always correspond and can lead to miscommunication, as demonstrated in the group discussions. Therefore, participants raised the importance of creating clarity at the beginning of the collaboration process. Although eliminating all miscommunication is unfeasible (and unnecessary), starting with a basic understanding of what the other person means when talking about words like 'science', 'design', 'creativity', 'research' is crucial. We expect this to be a recurring theme in these collaborations, as we uncover and address those gaps of understanding. Beyond conventional notions, scientists and designers share a common focus on inquiry. The development of a shared language and vocabulary seems to be an integral

part of this program, in order to enable a meaningful exchange of ideas and practices.

In the group discussion it became clear that, by communicating within one's own professional communities, the use of specific language and vocabulary is common practice and even a sign of experience and expertise. This is a shared experience for designers and scientists alike, and it points to the professional dimension of interdisciplinary collaborations.

Part 2:

Professional dimension

The professional dimension encompasses the practices, terminologies, methodologies, goals, and target audiences, shaping the why and how of design and scientific work. In a project like Collaborations for Future it is valuable to take the time to share these with each other. It seems that how we think someone does their work, affects the way we might imagine a collaboration with them or the type of project we might work on with them. This first community meeting brought to light the participants' concern with the practical professional aspects of their collaborators' work.

Process structure / Method

How do we work?

For an activity or outcome to be defined as science and scientific, it seems to need to be produced according to strict processes, consistent methods and systematic approaches, that can be reproduced. A process that is evidence-based and characterised as 'rigid'. In contrast, the conventional view on the activities and outcomes of design is that they result from more open-ended processes, where various forms and mediums can be explored, inconsistently and casually. While this freedom exists, in practice the designer often receives a specific commission, outlining certain results or effects. Perhaps even more often than in science the form of the outcome is defined in advance - an app, an experience, a video or a chair. Thus, along with this perceived freedom of the designer comes their perceived autonomy. Some scientists partaking in Collaborations for Future, associated creative work with methodological freedom and a welcomed degree of creative autonomy and independence.

Another duality highlighted in the discussion was objectivity versus subjectivity. Science was said to strive for objective truth, and to operate by detachment

from the subject in presenting findings and outcomes. In turn, design was said to accommodate a more subjective, emotional and personal approach, akin to artistic practice. What proved intriguing in the conversation was not that these views emerged, but the ensuing exchange of anecdotes, personal views and experiences of both scientists and designers. Despite their distinct processes and contexts, scientists and designers share a commitment to inquiry, curiosity and exploration into the unknown - questioning, searching, and discovering. This was something perhaps everyone seemed to agree on. Looking for new perspectives and generating new knowledge is therefore a shared pursuit. If science and design both aim to break away from the limitations of present knowledge and approaches, encouraging innovation and collaboration, then this seems like one of the shared values that can give ground to their collaboration, despite differences.

Form & Audience

With whom and how do we share our work?

Representation and form constituted another concern for both groups. Scientific research was seen as primarily concerned with factual, referenced representation and typically adhering to predetermined formats, such as research papers. Presented in a way that would be useful or impressive to other scientists. (Self-initiated) design was said to be more flexible in that the forms of its outcomes revolve around finding the most suitable form for a specific project, whether it be through an object, space, website, or video, to name a few. Yet, often the way in which designers present and describe their work at exhibitions is directed at other designers or curators. The dimension of representation and form relates to the purpose, audience and focus of communication. This seemed to differ significantly between the two disciplines. The aim of science was perceived to be to explain and present information in a precise and detached manner, while relying on compelling evidence and explanation to make its case. Whereas the aim of design communication was seen to be to evoke an emotional response while relying on compelling visuals, narratives and experiences to make their case. Communication methods emerged as a familiar and

indeed rich ground for collaboration between the two fields. It was noted that, while science often still struggles in this regard, design can create experiential understandings, such as conveying the tangible impact of a 1.5-degree temperature increase. Some participants suggested that science could use a more interactive communication style, beyond the traditional approach of simply disseminating information in the form of papers. Having named a few 'solutions' the interest of the group shifted to questioning how better representing scientific results can foster a dynamic exchange of ideas, turning communication into a dialogue rather than a one-way transmission. Communication and audience engagement is a shared concern for both groups, and an urgent one given the necessary total engagement that the climate crisis requires. In the context of projects like Collaborations for Future, it also promises to be one of the areas of mutual learning and inquiry that such open collaborations can address productively.

Access & Accessibility

Whose work do we get to see and who gets to see our work?

For both fields of work, knowledge is inextricably linked to access. Those with access to resources, or to renowned publications and exhibitions can more readily gain knowledge. To be a good scientist or designer, capable of producing relevant work it seems that you need to have (or get) access. Similarly, in both fields of work, getting one's work presented in professional conferences or published on recognisable platforms, such as scientific journals or design magazines is often interpreted as professional success. Whether in the form of papers, platforms, exhibitions, or performances, the lack of access to conventional and standardised resources and references limits knowledge dissemination and development. This represents a shared struggle and concern in both fields, which highlights the inequality that is embedded in the availability and access to information. Beyond the boundaries of one's discipline, the communication of climate science activities and outcomes can come across as inaccessible, or at least too reliant on the audience possessing specific prior knowledge, disciplinary literacy, vocabulary

and awareness of context and broader movements. This pitfall is also true of design, for example when exhibition or project texts are written primarily for an audience fluent in designer speak. In collaborations, such as the one's in Collaborations for Future, having a partner with that knowledge can bridge these gaps and can make these assumptions visible.

The group conversation around issues of access and accessibility shifted to identifying potential alliances and synergies between design and science. The opportunity is recognised for design to make climate communication more tangible, experienceable, and relatable – and therefore more relevant and urgent to the broader public or any other specific target audience. The way the outcomes of research and design projects are communicated influences how others can engage with the topics and issues at hand. The questions of access and accessibility are equally valid for the outcomes of interdisciplinary collaborations, including those in Collaborations for Future.

These shared concerns have already surfaced in the collaborations 3 weeks into the process. We are curious to see how this line of inquiry develops further

and how accessibility for the intended audiences is addressed in the work produced. Concerns with access and accessibility made us aware that the aspiration for relevance is an undercurrent in both fields of work. And both grapple with their societal relevance in different terms.

Part 3:

Societal and personal dimension

How society views, values and relates to design and science has a great impact on the professional career choices that individuals make. This much we learned from this first community meeting. From funding structures to the public image, we navigate social hierarchies and perceptions, and we prioritise certain professions and their opinions over others. Every so often, when we get the chance to step out of our disciplinary bubble, we can look back critically and pose the question: Is this what my job should be about?' In this section we bring our attention to the social concerns that come about when we collaborate with other disciplines on climate change.

Values and valuations

Some of the designers highlighted the widespread appreciation and high societal value of science in the western context. Scientific facts are assumed to have more influence on societal decision-making, than the outcomes of a designer's work. Similarly, some scientists thought that most designers' work is more appreciated by society for its aesthetics, direct usefulness and its capacity to engage the public in participation. What's interesting is not what those stereotypes are, but that in group conversations they can come up and can be fairly effectively dismantled. In interdisciplinary collaborations this is important as such stereotypes can place narrow expectations on both collaborators.

Beyond these 1-on-1 collaborations, these conventional ways of looking at the disciplines reaffirm perceived disciplinary boundaries and societal ideas regarding the societal value of 'science' and 'design'. This can get in the way of understanding how others do their work, reinforcing both actual and perceived inequalities. These perceived values end up being reproduced in the work that is being made, or in the roles and assignments that designers and scientists take, and

can also end up being embedded in funding policies and criteria. Science, having to be a discipline of undebatable facts, objectivity, certainty and emotional detachment; and design as always being material, beautiful, inclusive and creative. In times of climate crisis, we need to move away from this siloed way of thinking if we are to organise our efforts in a new way.

Beyond the practical aspects of how designers and scientists work is perceived by the public, we exchanged concerns and experiences around the associated funding, commissioning and employment models, with all their certainties and uncertainties. Some participants associated the job of a scientist with financial comfort and employment certainty, a perception that was not necessarily shared by all scientists present in the room. These meetings and the project give the participants the opportunity to discuss their working conditions with each other, to share about their methods and motivations for doing the work they do with the 'other', as well as to reflect on how society relates to their work. Having this lays the groundwork for empathy, open communication and collaboration. It also points to the inequalities (both actual and

perceived) at play between the two communities, which possibly strengthen the difficulty in setting up projects and collaborations which can effectively combine creative and scientific work. Some of these inequalities are systemic, even in a project like Collaborations for Future, which has been set up with the best intentions, equality is elusive. A possible follow-up project would be to test how equal collaboration might play out when the playing field is further evened out, both in funding and in perceived value of the contribution of each collaborator. There seems to be a conventional understanding of how the fields of design and science are seen, organised and funded, which doesn't always match the lived experience of their practitioners. This is also why in this project we ask what funding and commissioning models can enable more effective and sustainable collaborations between designers and scientists.

Emotions & Positionality

Why do we choose to work on this, and not that? How do emotions guide us?

When discussing the societal value of science and its perceived objectivity, it turns out that there is room for subjectivity in a scientists' work. It can be found in their motivation to do their work or in their selection of methods, cases and the framing of research questions. The same is true for creativity, which can be found in the shaping of a hypothesis or in the application of familiar methods to novel contexts, or vice versa. Emotions play an important role in the work of scientists, particularly in the context of this climate crisis (i.e. climate change). Being a climate scientist can feel like being at the front of multiple crises affecting humanity, from extinction, disasters, to insufficient action and policies. Considering the existential threat posed by climate change, the researchers in the Collaborations for Future program have developed strong personal positions towards the topic. Emotions inform positionality, and that can have a large impact on the motivations, directions, methods, and subjects of research, for as long as the researcher has the autonomy to make decisions about those matters.

The emotional aspect resonated particularly with the designers in the Collaborations for Future program. Some expressed the desire to help the scientist they work with, others expressed their sensitivity to the emotions triggered by climate science work. This uncovered a potential exploration point for some of the pairs, on how to effectively convey the emotional aspects of scientific findings. Since science was said to have to be objective, we wonder: is there really no room for emotions in science? And what can designers and scientists learn from each other in this aspect? Even though all designers felt more freedom to engage with emotions in their work, both communities were unsure of how to deal with questions of positionality, e.g., how do you position yourself in regards to the emotions you encounter in your work? And how much of these emotions do you include in your work? During the incubator this will be an interesting topic to engage with and reflect on. If communication around climate change is to change, during this first meeting we all seemed to agree that recognising the emotional dimension of climate change is one of the first steps to take.

Societal stereotypes affect how professionals from different disciplines see and value their own work and that of others. This can produce inequalities in funding and employment conditions. Interdisciplinary collaborations, such as Collaborations for Future, need to address this, not because inequalities are easily removed, but because this lays the ground for honest and fair communication between the parties. This is essential as we seek new collaboration models together, as a community of inquiry.

These are the main shared interests and concerns, discussed during the first community meeting. We've structured them in three groups in a way that helps us, in the research track, to make sense of the issues that concern us when we encounter professionals from other disciplines, openly. By discussing assumptions and societal ideas about what good 'science' and 'design' is, and what separates them, a more nuanced perspective arose. As a community of inquiry, we hope to slowly start moving beyond the 'traditional' roles attributed to designers and scientists, creating room for trying out other roles and agencies. For us a first productive meeting and moment of research, for the pairs, perhaps a moment of realisation that there are 18 other people in the same field of exploration.

Extra:

The importance of group settings

During the first public event, we realised the value of these collective meetings. On December 11th, in Pakhuis de Zwijger, we sat down with Rembrandt Zegers, Fabian Dablander, Harriët Bergman, Neela Paulussen to talk about how they professionally make sense of the emotional, social and psychological effects of climate change. From their perspectives as psychologist, scientist-activist, researcher or activist therapist, they spoke about how and why they do their work, and how they've found their role and agency in the climate crisis.

For us, at Collaborations for Future, their conversation highlighted the way collective action empowers citizens to join and stand up for the systemic and societal changes we need. In other words, it is easier to join a group, than to go alone. (You can watch the recording or read our article about the event on www.collaborationsforfuture.com).

The conversation highlighted the power of collective action in helping individuals in taking a position or crossing a boundary, such as those disciplinary ones we're encountering in Collaborations for Future. Taking an activist and/or professional position requires

stepping forward and standing out, doing things differently and embracing the consequences. This can be confronting, can generate criticism or exclusion. But doing it as a group creates the social support and collective reflection that empowers individuals to make similar choices. This is what we've learned from the reflection of the psychologists and activists that joined the panel of Unexpected Encounters #1. At Foundation We Are, we find inspiration in Haraway's perspective on curious practice as we host, learn from and develop the Collaborations for Future program. For us the series of Unexpected Encounters is a way to maintain this curiosity. It is a way to continue visiting other professional fields, and encounter and learn with them, about how to support and practice collaborations between designers and scientists. We set off with the idea that we will be enabling 10 pairs each consisting of a designer and a scientist. These collective discussions were intended as a space for research and collective insights. In this first meeting the group setting proved to make it easier to become aware and let go of preconceived ideas. Coming together and sharing this setting of unexpected collaborations perhaps normalised the uncertainty and openness of

the collaborations. It seems that everyone left those meetings with a renewed sense of excitement and curiosity. To us this is when the idea of a community of inquiry crystalised.

How do we build meaningful, effective and sustainable collaborations between creative and scientific professionals? That is the question we hope to answer by the end of this collaborative experiment. In the second meeting, we looked at what the collaborators have learned from and about each other's practice, and how they see their agency, and what assignment or theme they think is worth working on together.

Tune in again next time, when we publish Chapter #2, in which we focus on the peculiar question of 'How do we know we know enough about an issue to take action?'. We'll delve into the issues when different ways of knowing meet each other, and on the difficulty of finding agency within large and complex situations such as climate change.

Colophon

Collaborations for Future: the research

Chapter #1:

Common settings, or how do we start working together?

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