

FORMES VIVES

Who: Adrien Zammit, Nicolas Filloque, Geoffroy Ìthon

Location: Marseille, Brest and Nantes, France

Operative between: 2008

Practice: association, collective, co-op, company, freelance, etc.

<http://www.formes-vives.org/images/>

Formes Vives is a France-based collective of three graphic designers and illustrators. They take politics as their field of intervention and produce work that supports political causes and social issues. In doing so, they try to resist commercialisation and instead strive to develop a visual language that is not based on marketing strategies.

What desires, values and elements of support/discouragement made your practice evolve over time?

We evolved with common desires which brought us to design, think and compose pictures, letters and words that underline meaningful ideas. Our work centres on the search for a political way of practising visual communication. Our questions is: how can we create and deploy quality forms for topics and organisations that foster the common good? We thus work with entities such as non-profit bodies, committed public institutions, activist collectives and fellow artists.

What are in your case the advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of working collectively?

Advantages and strengths: we share three times more things, we meet people in three different places which brings us three times more opportunities. We also move and progress together, creating a common style which would never be the same if we evolved separately. We continue to surprise each other, to learn from each other not only about graphic design and drawing but also intellectually and about human aspects of social life. Whilst each one of us has his particularities, we develop a certain form of complementarity. Disadvantages: we cannot think of anything for now. Perhaps sometimes the development of work takes more time than we expected, but generally we notice the contrary.

How do you deal with money and wages between the components of your group?

How do you deal with tensions and power relations within your group?

Concerning money, we have installed a sort of system of turns. Because we are three freelancers, we charge in turns: each one charges for a work and we exchange who charges for each work. Thus, we try to find a balanced system so that each of us earns the same amount of money and feels good with this. We also have an online bookkeeping system so it is easy to keep track of where we are. In our production, we share time between paid and unpaid work but we treat them with the same importance. We don't refuse some work because there is no money; we accept it by looking for other stakes - political, artistic, intellectual... For the three of us, Formes Vives is our main activity and, for now, we have not seen any tensions concerning money. Nevertheless, we occasionally integrate the collective's finances through other financial gains, for example, through teaching.

How do you access meaningful commissioned work and how do you finance and carve-out time for self-initiated projects? What strategies and tactics are you making use of?

Since we know each other's personal ways of life (if we have a family, for example) and our personal financial necessities for a month, with this information we are able to organise our working time between paid and unpaid work, with the idea to earn enough money to live in a city such as Marseille, Brest or Nantes, which are relatively costly. As I said, we can accept unpaid work if we see in a meaningful context which permits us to consciously develop our art. Most of the time, we don't look for work - people who want to work with us contact us directly by mail or phone.

How do you organise your time between work and non-work? What systems do you use to keep track of where you invest your time?

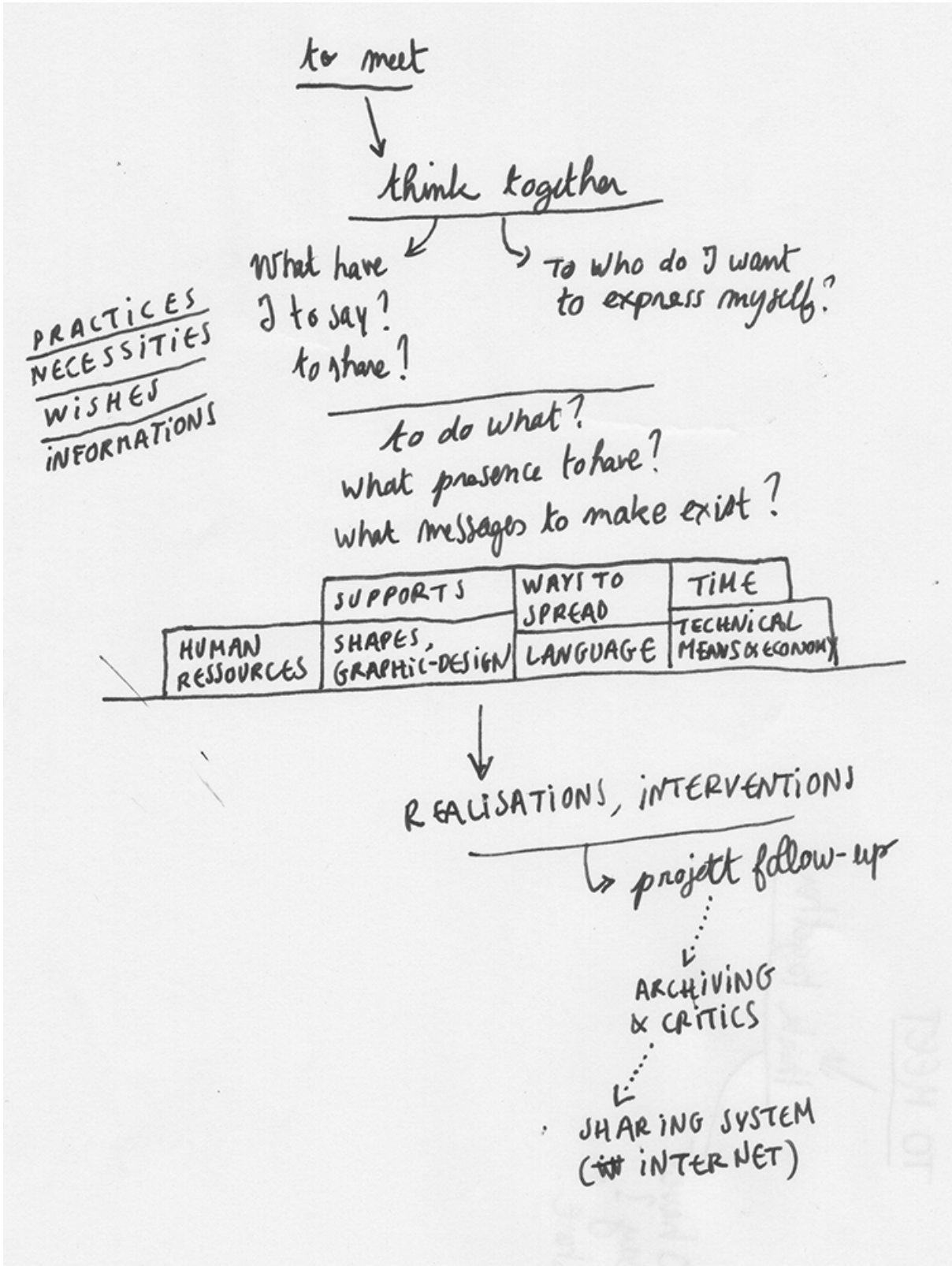
Generally, we work five days a week, and try to use weekends as free time. We permit ourselves to take holidays and long weekends when we have less work or when we feel the desire to take to the road, to leave the place for a moment. In this sense, our three-person collective can also run even if we are just two. We take holidays between two and three months per year. Our habit consists in a daily skype meeting around 9.30am in order to organise our working day, to make any points about how to advance on each project, the pros, the cons. We also have an online planner to check where we'll be the next week, if we are busy at a particular moment, for example.

How does your current working and living environment (geographic location, spatial arrangement) reflect (or not) the ethos, methods and dynamics of your practice?

Actually, we don't work in the same way. Adrien works at home, as does Nicolas which allows him to spend more time with his children. Personally, I share a workshop space with 14 other artists (architects, illustrators...). Shortly after our studies in Paris, we were willing to leave the capital, noticing now that each one of us is back in his native region. We are convinced that a collective dynamic in graphic design - demanding, meticulous and funny - can be possible outside Paris. However, we do still live in big cities, which offer a generous and intense social and cultural life.

We try to meet up regularly, to spend collective time dedicated to in-situ production (workshops in art school, galleries, exhibition, installation in public spaces...). These moments are important because they allow for a break from digital and computer habits and everyday life in order to consider other ways to produce shapes and visuals, sometimes in a hand-crafted way (silkscreen, etching, drawing, stage design...), but also in order to experiment outside of the classical order. This valuable time also permits us to travel, to meet people, to generate other works. We also like to preserve our personal time, designing pictures in a cosy and intimate environment without observation from co-workers, a pleasure which also saves us from internal pressures, allowing us the freedom to experiment personally and to organise our own time.

Please draw a diagram of all the elements and structures that support your design practice (monetary & non-monetary resources, people, spaces and institutions, family, other assets, ...)? Can you note how these elements support you and the flows of exchange related to them? Can you also include elements that "threaten" your practice?



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interviews