

Notes on a research proposal

Article

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de Bruin-Molé, M. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4243-1995> and Brookes, A. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1762-2768> (2025) Notes on a research proposal. *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, 16 (1). pp. 165-176. ISSN 1918-8439 doi: 10.17742/image29736 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/127905/>

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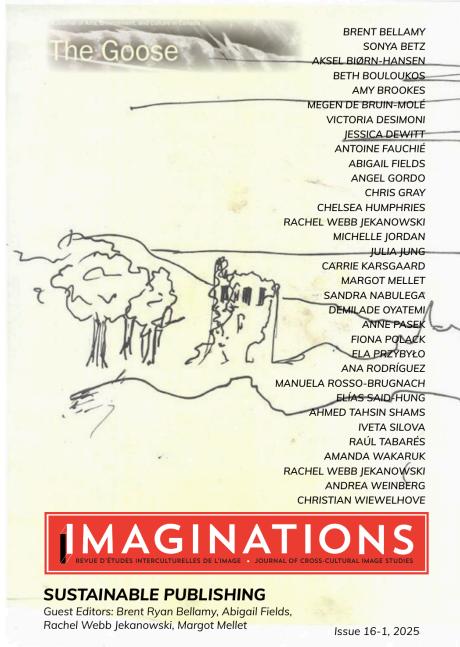
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NOTES ON A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

MEGEN DE BRUIN-MOLÉ

AMY BROOKES

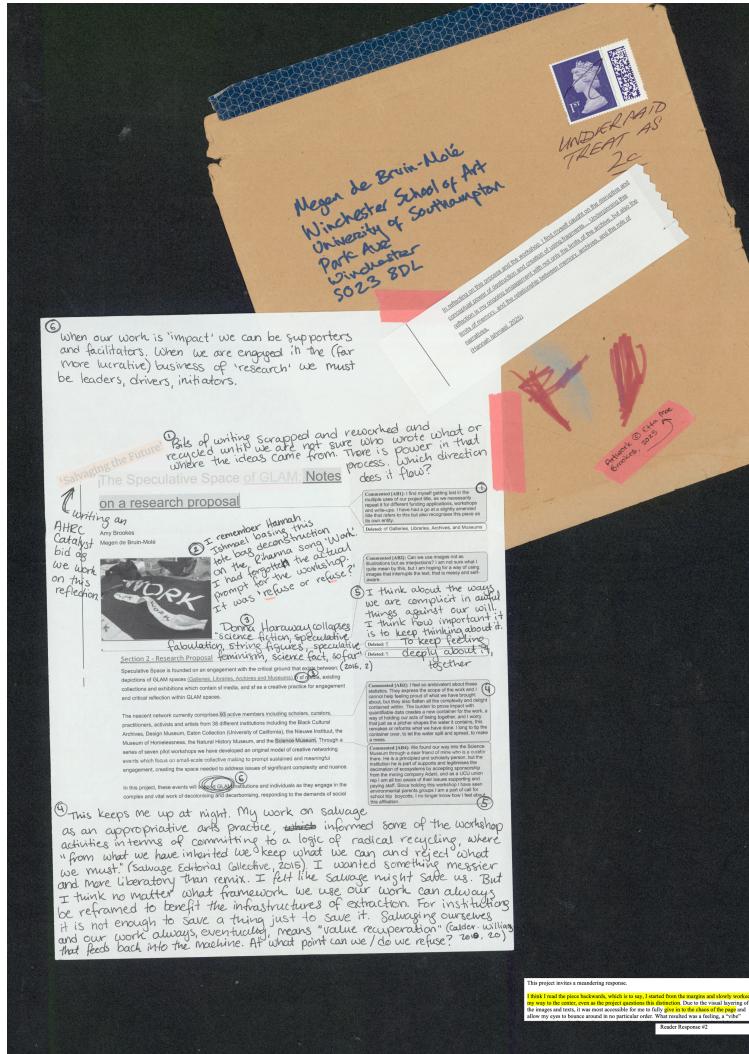
“We discussed which texts had lingered and shaped us while we sat in a café in the park, each feeling like we had stolen ourselves from work, freed from our desks and devices, despite the fact that we sat discussing a research project. I remember mentioning the work of Jane Rendell, Jack Halberstam, Donna Haraway, and Katherine McKittrick whose work I encountered thanks to you... These works do not include an introduction that details their originality and impact. To engage with them has been to follow a trail of breadcrumbs through the woods. They have taken me somewhere entirely elsewhere, but I have had to work to follow them. I picture their disdain for the slides I am shown in a REF Impact workshop, these strategies to make work appealing to assessors. I imagine them laughing and slipping away between the trees, or at least that is what I want for them, to remain untethered and elusive, free to revel in wild strangeness.”

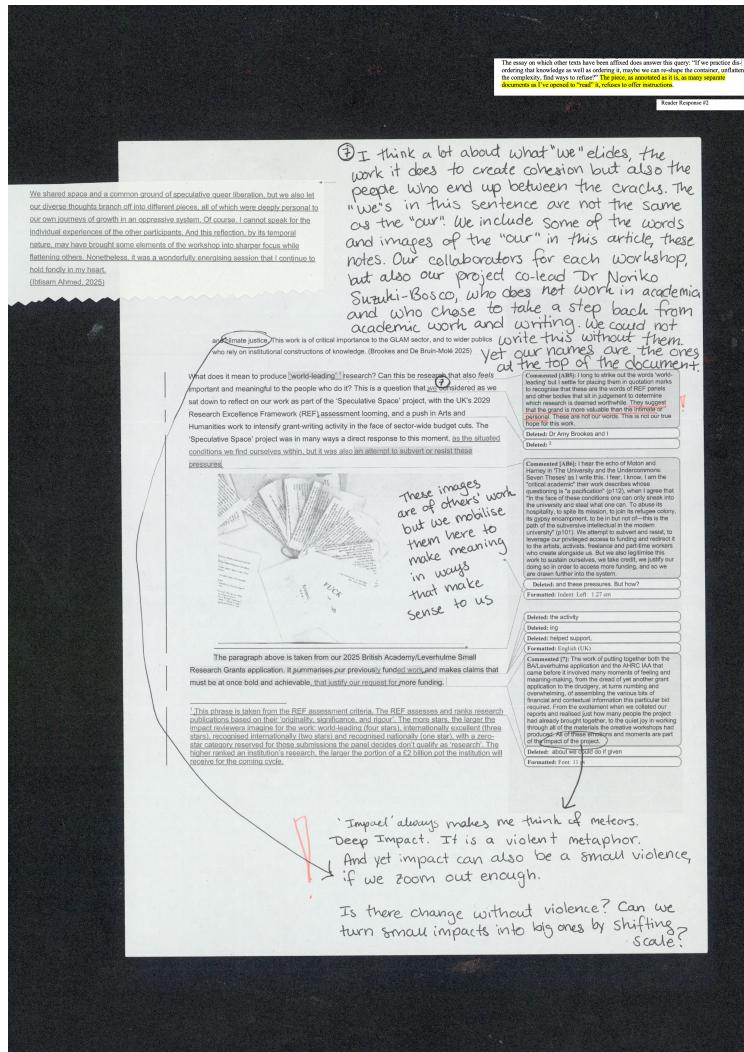
How do we sustain creative work in the face of burnout, institutional crisis, the end of funding, the mess of life? Like the workshops that it addresses, this article is a deliberate attempt to resist closure. It draws on the ongoing work of our “Speculative Space” project, which uses “SF as a creative practice for engagement and critical reflection within GLAM space”—galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. This project has comprised a series of workshops oriented around site-specific small acts of collective making. Over the last three years we have gathered in the back rooms of the Winchester

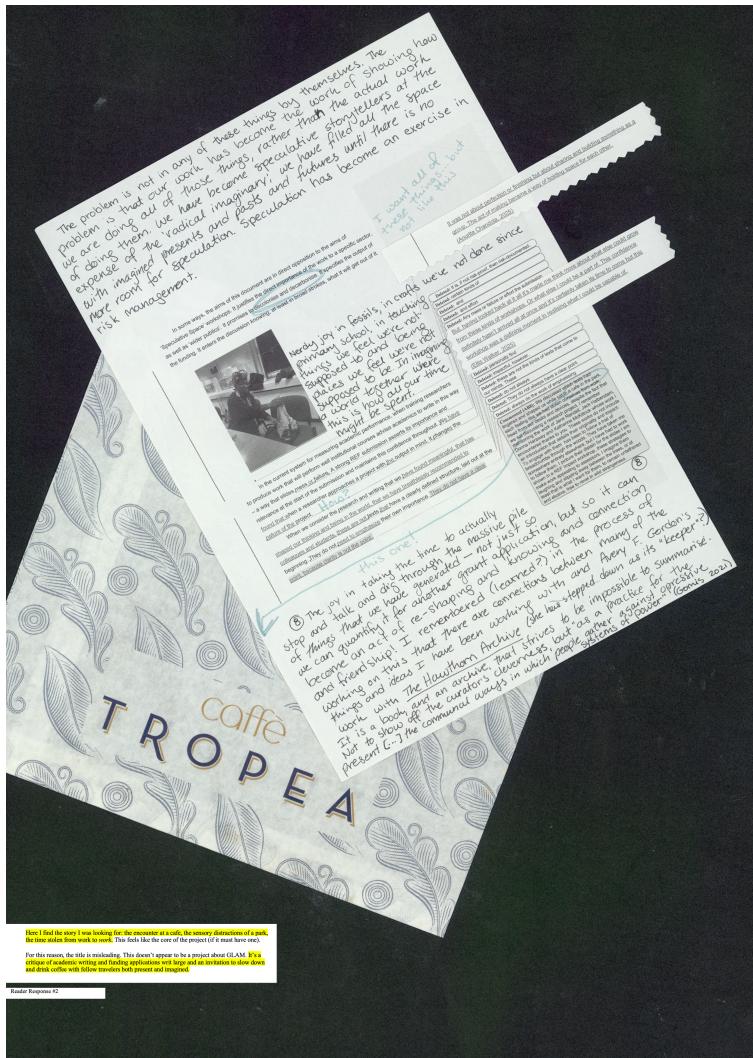
Gallery, the Women's Art Library, the Whitechapel Gallery, Science Museum London, the Museum of English Rural Life, the Natural History Museum, and in the digital institutional spaces of Teams meetings. Each workshop was fragile and fleeting, and the record of the work which lingers in photographs, quotes, and ephemera is only an echo of the true outcome which was in the act of gathering, the trust engendered, and the space created for concerns to be voiced. How then to document this work, and to answer the institutional demands to validate its worth using the metrics of academic research and funding frameworks?

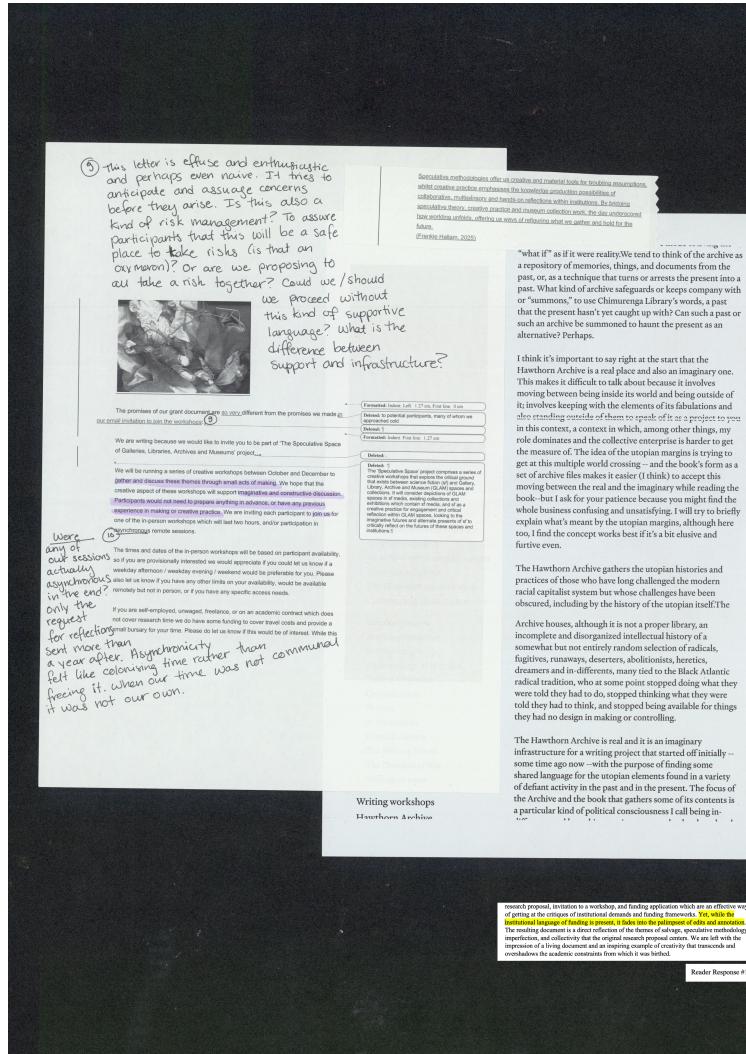
In answer, this article consists of a series of images of scanned and annotated pages which revel in relational complexity. They are layered and non-linear, and while this reflects our ambitions for this work we do not want this form of representation to be an act of exclusion. Embedded within this work is metadata including the original bid and tracked changes as alt text, and image descriptions for each page and the photographs within, in a further digital layering of code and content.

Scroll down to view the images, or click [this link](#) to access the accessible version as a Word document.









⑩ After this conversation with Ellis, which took place before one of the last workshops (it was the last in-person one) I have often wondered what other unthinking language may have put off the people we cold-contacted who did not respond. Critical reflection especially of others' work, is a gift, but also a risk. What if we had not appreciated Ellis' generosity? What if we were not still thinking about it?

It is our hope that these workshops will be a joyful opportunity to meet other scholars and practitioners to foster sustained connections and collaborations. We are keen to ensure that the workshops prioritise and support the involvement of emerging scholars and practitioners, and those from historically marginalised groups. We would very warmly welcome any suggestions you might have for individuals or groups who would be interested in this project.

All the best,
Amy, Meagan and Noelle

(Brooks, De Bruin-Moët and Sundararajan 2020)

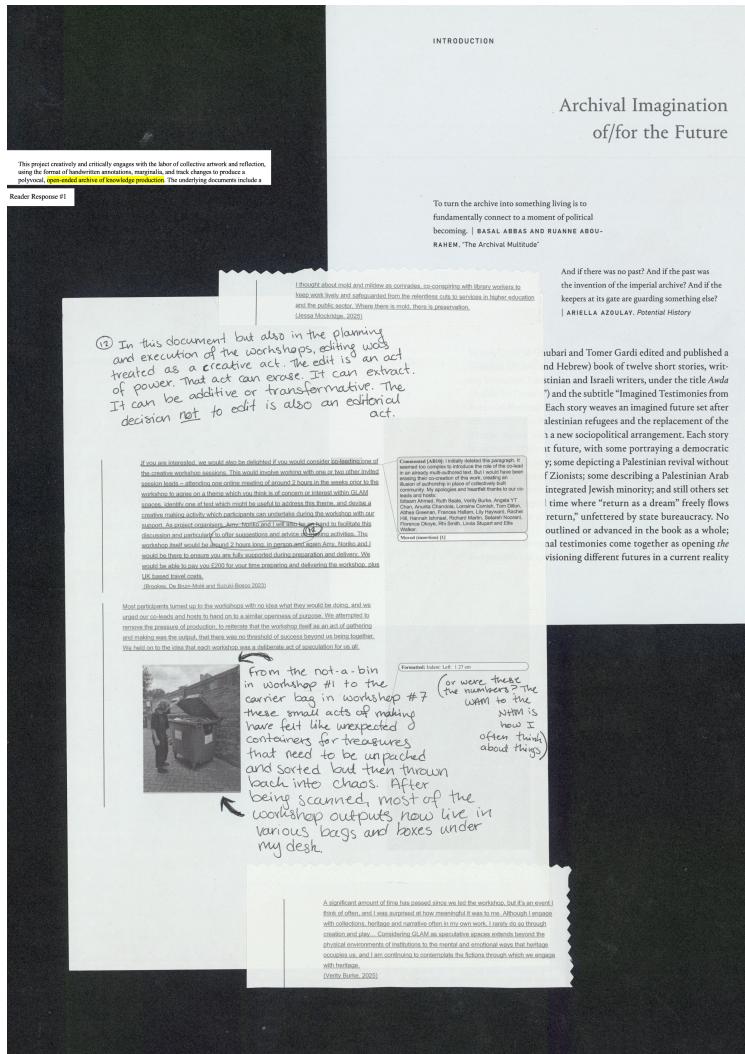
Nowhere do we specify an outcome or indicate impact. Instead, this email promises reflection, space, support, *relation*, joy and connection. It claims to ask for nothing but time, but implicit within this is a request for engagement and trust.

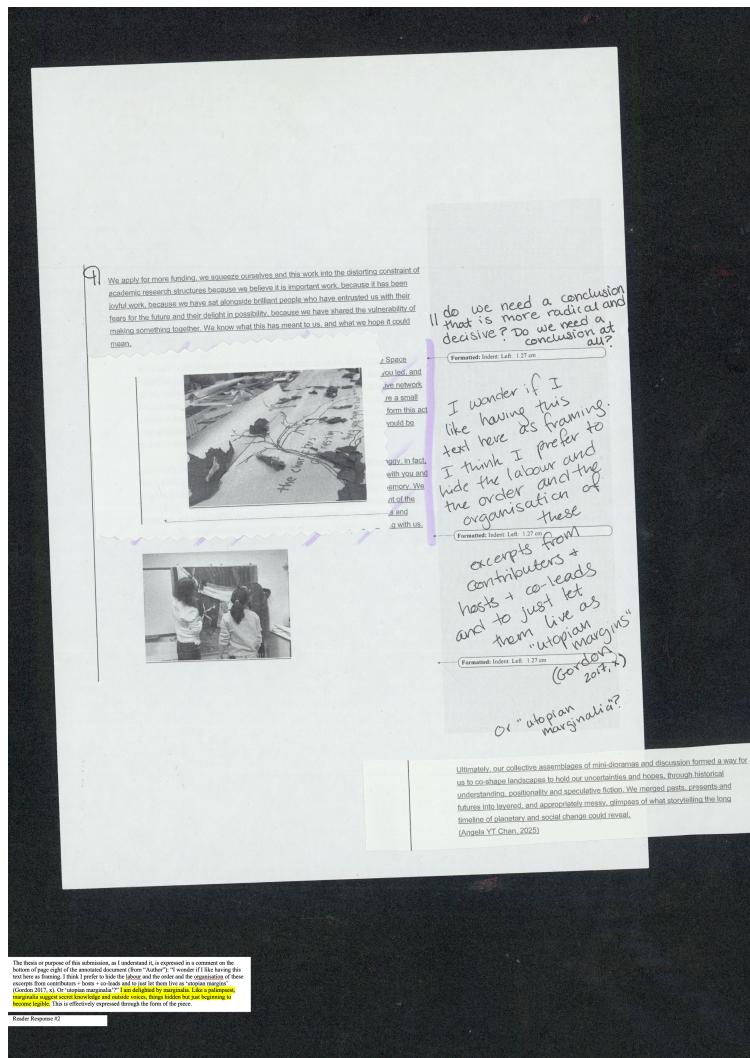
But we asked more of some people. They became co-leads, working with us to devise a workshop that responded to the specific concerns of this particular gathering of people and place.

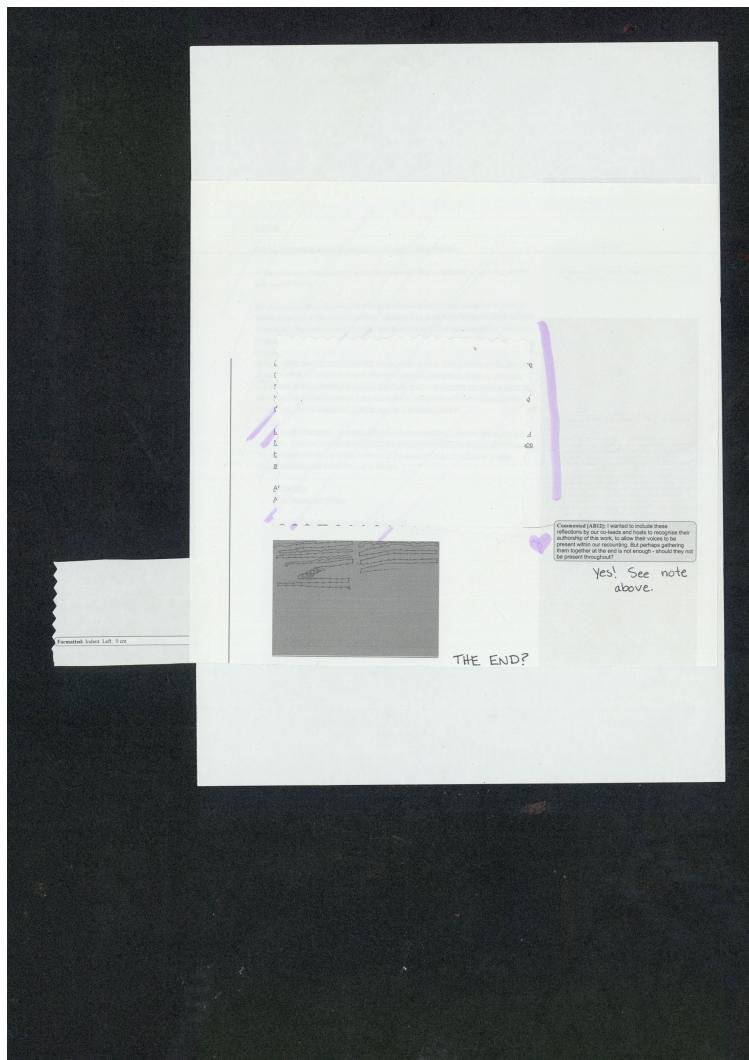
⑪ I remember thinking about this term and how we struggled to find a language to enable the kind of work we wanted to do. The workshop "co-leads" were our innovators and researchers, and we, the "project coordinators" were researching how to create a space where leadership ≠ ownership or sole responsibility of care.

Speculative fiction with its stakes set on the future has traditionally represented the new and has had less to say about the maintenance of what already exists. At the same time though, the philosopher of science Ernst Bloch says the good news is that a more complete picture of events in itself and communities that are attempting to build a more equitable future together... The contradiction between the new and of maintenance was cut, allowing us in what we call Speculative Maintenance: the care for the new that will build ahead a better future.

(Tim Dilton, 2020)







ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original Speculative Space project website can be accessed here: speculativespace.wordpress.com. It includes images and materials from, as well as further reflections on, the workshops.

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