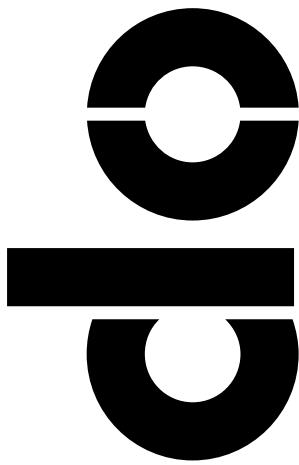




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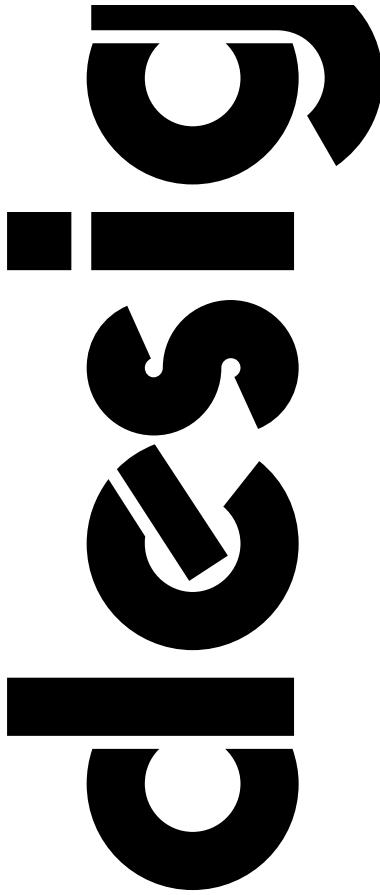
## Group split

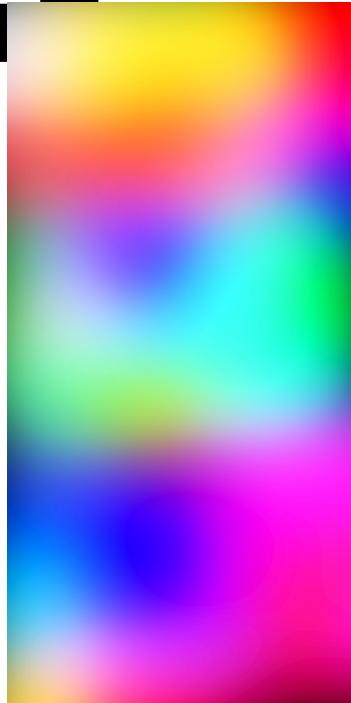
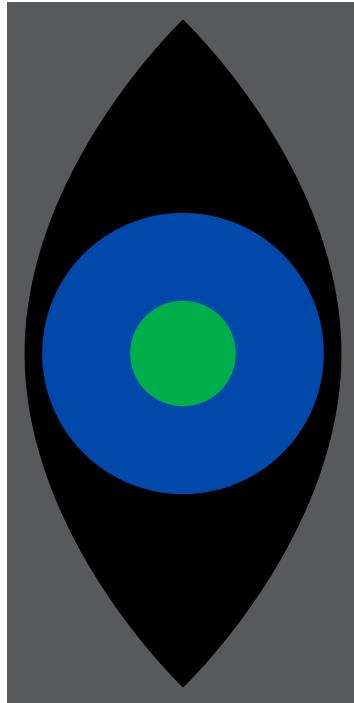
One larger task is broken up into smaller tasks that are then recombined or synthesized. Larger task may be known (have been planned out) or unknown (needs to be discovered). This is how many websites are created: everyone has specific tasks that get pulled together into one usable end form.



## Group share

One larger task is done by multiple people in the same space. This happens when many hands are needed, or the complexity of a task benefits from many brains and hands and specialties. This often requires coordination and teamwork. Worked shared by a group may have a leader who works through how to share the work (in real-time). Group shares are helpful when the physical size of a project is large: building a phone booth or a large table. This method of collaboration is common because it's visible and when used, often quite necessary. A group share can lead to a group split.





*Crowdsourced*

collaboration

## Crowd-sourced

Similar to parallel play, but anonymous. One person asks and “the crowd” satisfies the ask. This method works best when all the work is visible (twitter, etc). Crowd sourcing done via closed contest or to gain multiple perspectives is frowned upon. When done openly and with a community mindset, crowd-sourcing can rally people around a subject matter and build community where there was none. Examples here include a project we did for flag day, 2016: “design a flag that everyone can fly!.” The project was posted on twitter and designers responded on the same platform.

The term collaboration is vague. When does it happen? How does it happen? What does it look like? Is it one skill? Or many? As a designer who tends to work with others, I’ve had to grapple with this myself. When is a task paid labor versus a collaboration? Are they mutually exclusive? Who owns the work?

Eleven years ago I started a shared workspace<sup>1</sup> for designers in downtown Providence. In those 11 years, I’ve noted the various ways that the designers in the space have worked together. Working with others adds more complexity to a project, but it often leads to unexpected pleasures as well.

#1 <http://thedesignoffice.org/project/the-common-flag>

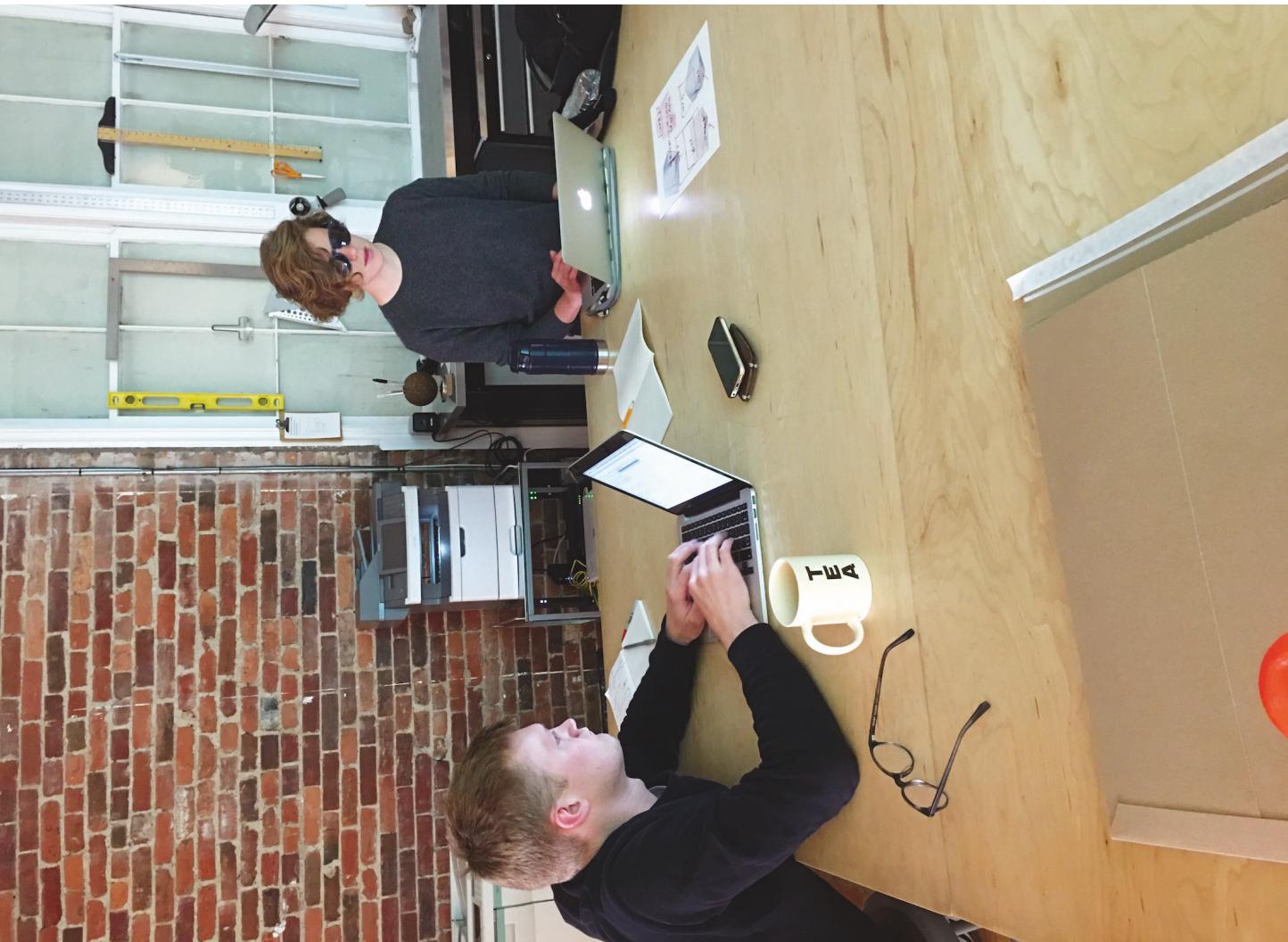
#1 <http://thedesignoffice.org/>

Sometimes collaboration is by necessity: specialization and workload being primary reasons.

But so is pleasure. And the pleasure of making something is the primary ingredient for a project's success. Work made from pleasure carries that pleasure.

This site attempts to name and demonstrate various methods of collaboration in design. Projects often make use of multiple methods within the same project. Collaboration may be how a project begins... it snowballs from a conversation. It may also be how a project gets executed.

This article is formatted as a print



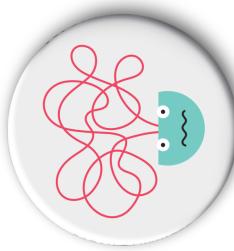
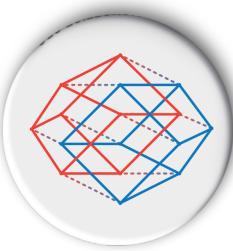
## Perpendicular play

Participants are different projects alongside each other. Ideas and forms start to rub off onto each other. This is the promise of co-working spaces; and it's often easy to deliver on this, provided the work everyone is doing is visible. In The Design Office, it is valuable to have someone project their work as they are making it onto the event wall. Folks going to get water or entering the space can see what someone is working on and how. Printing and posting work (or laying it out on the table) allows designers to affect each other.

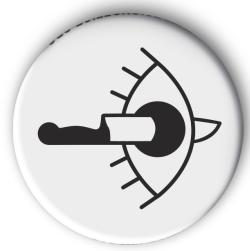
booklet with Bindery<sup>1</sup>, a web to print framework. It arose collaboratively and is open-source software, although Evan Brooks spent countless hours sitting in front of a computer all by himself — an unavoidable aspect of most any development project.

— *John Caserta, Feb. 12, 2019*

#1 <http://evanbrooks.info/bindery>



*Parallel play*



## Parallel play

All designers are doing the same task alongside each other. This technique is not uncommon in the early stages of a project. A team may sketch alongside each other, be gathering precedents (images, other projects, readings), or working on a specific problem that warrants multiple minds and hands. Working at the same table is ideal, because as results are made they can be shared and everyone syncs up. Parallel play is also how many design classrooms are run. At the end of an in-class activity (or homework), participants are able to see what others have done, and in doing so, learn about their own strengths and weaknesses.



## Snowball

Occasional periodic chats by two or more people lead to enough momentum that someone takes the first step. Snowballs build from fragments of thoughts or materials not necessarily owned by any one person. Once there is enough of a direction, a project may shift into another collaborative form or simply become the work of one designer. Snowballs benefit from eating lunch together, walking to get coffee today, or other *lighter* means of interaction. Snowballs also form when one designer is stuck and is open (and vulnerable enough) to ask for help. This allows someone to enter in.

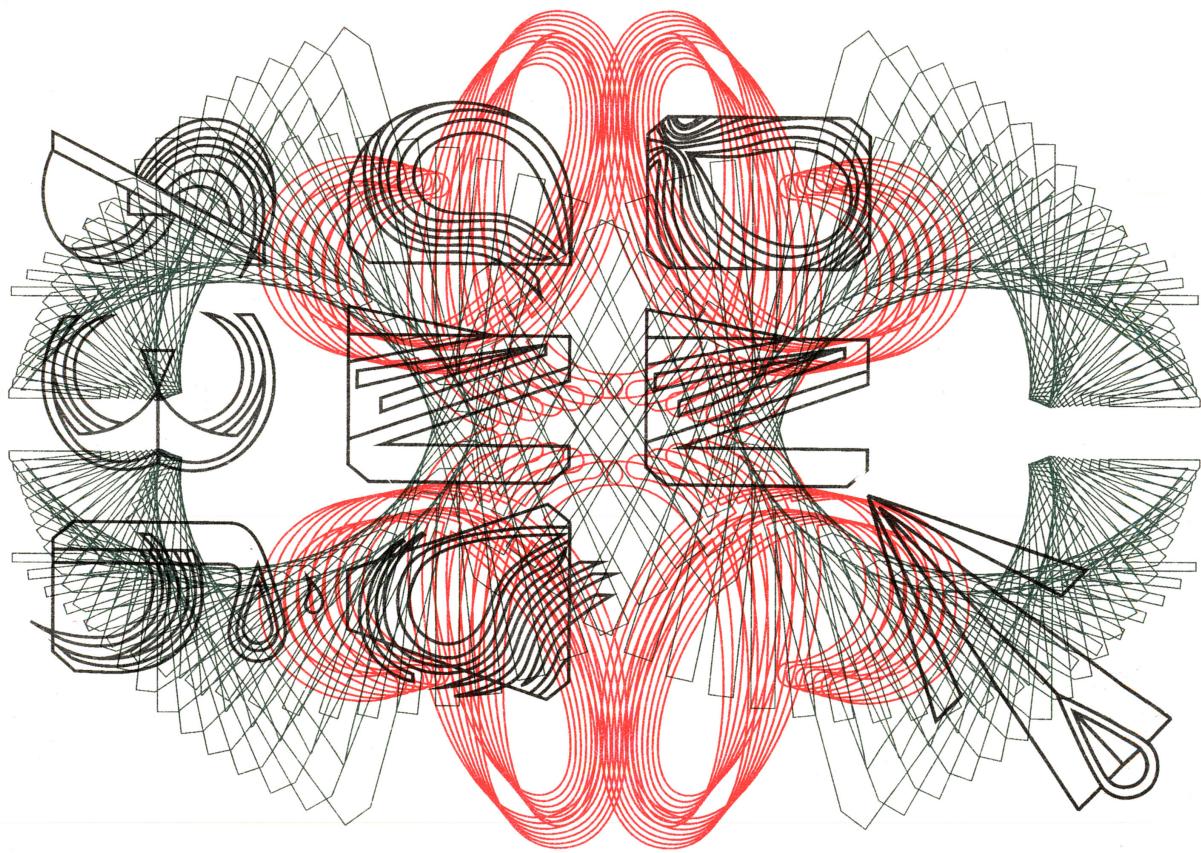
## Serial

Serial collaborations are not collaborations at all. But they are worth noting in this mix because designers can really get to know another designer's work by participating in serial projects. A serial project is when different people work on the same recurring assignment (with different content); for example, the yearly collateral for a lecture series. This is happening now with [Rhode Island Poetry in Motion<sup>1</sup>](#) series on public busses. Every month another designer makes a poem to display on the screens on the bus. Each month, the designer is able to reference, to build upon, be inspired by work of previous person. A typeface may take hold; a visual structure from one might influence the next. Serial collaborations give designers a chance to engage with previous designer's work, and sometimes their files/assets/etc.

#1 <http://thedesignoffice.org/project/poetry-in-motion-ri>

## Back and forth

There are two participants. One person makes a move then passes the work to the other person to evolve the work. The amount of time or task for each round may be predetermined. One reason to use this method is to vary or disrupt a single style or voice. Designers approach matters big and small differently, so with a bit of structure, a single project will carry the stylistic voices of two people, whether apparent or not. Back and forths also result from necessity, amount of workload and specialization. This can also be paid work, a commission. But to be collaboration, both people need to be affected by the other's work. Otherwise, one person is simply filling the other person's empty holes in a design.



*Passive hand-off*

## Active hand-off

One person designs, then hands to the next person. More than two people should be involved. This process is a more intricate version of back and forth, but worth separating out. Active hand-offs involve stages, where each person pushes the project forward. When a stage is complete, the work moves on. Besides the number of people, another point of differentiation with back and forth is that the next person or next stage isn't always known. As a project develops, it may be clear that a person's involvement is needed. Hand-offs usually require meetings, explaining, etc.

One person designs, leaves the design, and another person chooses to pick it up. This can lead to some really nice moves, since it allows the designer to opt-into the work. Is there something there to react to? Is there an aspect of the work as it was made that demands attention? This works best when the work is printed placed out to see... or a digital equivalent. “Here’s where the project is at... anyone see how to push it forward?” The simplest way this plays out is by leaving designs on a table (or visible on a server). We ran a paper football tournament in January 2013<sup>1</sup>, specifically to explore this. Members started, then printed, flyers to promote the event. Other members could pick up a design and add to it by overprinting it on the laser printer.



*Paper Football Workshop, 2013*

#1 <http://thedesignoffice.org/event/footballwkshop>