

Open Call

collective / connective

thealit Frauen.Kultur.Labor.

Deadline: October 20, 2026

In these times, when commercialized connectivity and social divisions dominate, and right-wing tendencies, heteronormativity, sexism, racism, anti-intellectualism, and the exclusion of everything different and foreign are on the rise, solidarity is becoming increasingly important. What does that mean?

collective / connective

The meanings of the collective and the connective—that which gathers and that which connects—are distinct from one another: A collective cannot exist without the connective, but it is only through the configuration of these connections that what a collective can be is brought into being, and thus also the nature of this connective. Both only work in relation to each other producing themselves mutually—towards a respective “we.”

“Collective” and “connective” sound similar. In terms of pronunciation, there is only a slight difference between “l” and “n”: Kollektiv and konnektiv, collectif et connectif, colectivo y conectivo, and so on. The phonetic distinction between the lateral and the nasal connects the two words across languages, creating a vibrant difference.

The theme conveyed in this way by the two title words of the open call invites to focus more on difference—especially its unifying power and productivity—than on origin, similarity, or identity.

connective

The media play a decisive role as both a unifying and a dividing force. They do not merely serve as simple conveyors of information, but are also powerful actors who actively shape political processes and establish new forms of group formation and thematic discourse. Through their gatekeeping function and, at the same time, their potential to act as parasites, they determine which voices and narratives are heard and which are ignored. This selective perception of “reality”—which is also tailored to individual users’ preferences—leads to the marginalization of groups and perspectives and significantly limits dialogue.

Gatekeeping and the (hidden) workings of social media algorithms have the ability to promote certain ideologies and suppress others. This power has far-reaching consequences. Specific within this system, emotionally charged and conformist narratives are disproportionately prevalent—currently, for example, so-called nonconformist views, particularly of a racist and sexist nature, that aim to discredit state institutions and democratic participation. These mechanisms reinforce existing power structures and jeopardize critical discourse within the networks.

collective

People talk less about collectives (in the strong historical sense of the word) these days. This is hardly surprising, since the word has taken on a brutal connotation, especially when viewed through the lens of the Soviet Union of the 1930s: “collective” as in the forced collectivization of agriculture, culminating in the forced death by starvation of millions in Ukraine... Or: collective as in educational philosophy of, for example, Anton S. Makarenko, who, beginning in the 1920s, ran a project of collective (contradictory) self-education for destitute street children and delinquent youths, aimed at fostering self-discipline and responsible behavior—in short, aimed at a collective self-creation of “new (socialist) men.” “Only by educating the collective can we hope to find a form of collective organization in which the individual possesses both the highest discipline and the greatest freedom.” (Auf holprigen Wegen der Erziehung, 1934)—in theory, a ‘really-existing’ Kantian collective ethic, in the reality of Stalinist tyranny. An educational and labor commune led by Makarenko for several years was an institution of the Soviet secret police.

connective

Agency within media interactions is particularly relevant because it is distributed across many actors—connections between people and other entities, devices and objects, things, and the question of the forms of being within such open relationality. This complexity means that responsibility for the dissemination of information often remains unclear.

At the same time, disruptions within these networks can be viewed as opportunities for political resistance. Movements fighting against dominant narratives use the connective power of social media to bring alternative perspectives to light, thereby mobilizing a broader, newly formed kind of public sphere.

collective

The various meanings the term “collective” has taken on internationally have been shaped in particular by the social and cultural experiments of the '68 generation and their lasting impact; in non-socialist states, this generation sought to develop the collective as a form of resistance against the fundamental contradictions of capitalist and oppressive contexts.

In Western democracies, the collective—as a means of overcoming bourgeois social formation—remained extremely prevalent well into the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by a focus on freedom and a commitment to nonviolence toward one another and toward oneself. Who's afraid of group discussions? Consider: self-managed cultural projects, left-wing dropouts in work and housing collectives, feminist and artistic collectives, as well as LGBTI+ experiments with alternative forms of life, art, and political action, as well as patient and prisoner collectives that, under the most restrictive conditions, experimented with different forms of association for self-empowerment and systemic resistance, breaking through the barriers of forced confinement in multiple ways.

This also applies to revolutionary educational philosophies and their experiments, as seen in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/70): To change their situation, the oppressed must act collectively; knowledge emerges through collective production between teachers and learners. We should also consider bell hooks, who, for example, in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), similarly emphasizes that both upbringing and education are collective practices that foster and demand community and solidarity. She highlights that learning in communities where all voices are heard creates transformative experiences.

connective

A critical examination of this complex, almost entirely capitalized relationship between mediatized “connecting and dividing” (connect and divide, *The Practice Turn in Media Studies*, ed. Erhard Schüttpehl, Ulrike Bergermann et al., 2021)—much like artistic processes—brings to the forefront practices that articulate resistance. Underlying power relations can be questioned.

collective

In what is generally—and often euphemistically—referred to today as “community,” and is typically conceived in the context of online communities, the collective in the historically strong sense of the word is nowhere to be found; rather, to put it in polarizing terms, it stands in direct contrast to it. In the name of community, rather than practices of solidarity and resistance, consumers are offered above all mediatized visibility and reach—in this sense, pleasure and capital gain. This presupposes that “we enjoy our oppression” and “know very precisely in advance that we will not get what we desired” (Slavoj Žižek, *Surplus-Enjoyment, A Guide For The Non-Perplexed*, 2022) Community, in its ideological form, seems to form as if by nature—through connections among those who are alike or made to be alike, among competitors—profiles, identities, preferences—in fact, to the benefit of the often-forgotten media provider and the economy of data mining.

connective

It is widely known: Control over media filters lies predominantly in the hands of large technology companies. These corporations use complex algorithms to determine what content is shown to users and what connections are created. Decisions and affiliations are based primarily on user behavior, interactions, and demographic data. In this digital arena, the visibility of information and connections is controlled, which largely answers the question of who truly has the power to shape these connections. Overall, it is evident that control over these filters has not only technical implications but also far-reaching social and political ones. The monetization of personal data creates a distorted landscape in which content that promises high engagement and interaction is prioritized. Connectivity is managed through clickbait.

Within the filter bubbles, what connects us—rather than what divides us—is celebrated. Users primarily consume content that confirms their existing beliefs. In this respect, these connective practices reinforce the dynamics of social divisions and hinder critical, nuanced thinking that allows for differences.

collective

When we speak of “queer”—as in the queer community—the term today refers almost exclusively to LGBTI+ identities and politics, not to “queer” as a question of an im/possible “we.” “We” as in a poetically and politically activist Army of Lovers, in a historical situation of acute danger to life and social exclusion: “Being queer means leading a different sort of life. [...] it’s about gender-f--- and secrets, what’s beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it’s about the night. Each of us is a world of infinite possibility. We are an army because we have to be.” (Queer Nation Manifesto, New York Gay Pride Day 1990, in the context of the AIDS activist group ACT UP)

connective

For the connective is not merely a network of connections, but a dynamic space in which identities, ideas, and cultures are in constant exchange. Glissant’s concept of relation emphasizes that these connections are not static, but develop through interaction and encounter. “We demand the right to opacity [...] Agree not merely to the right to difference but [...] agree also to the right to opacity, which is [...] subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To truly understand these, one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of the components,” (Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relations*, 1990/1997).

collective

What would a sense of community look like that would unite those who have only one thing in common: their resistance to identity? In particular, resistance to self- and group-specific forms of representative advocacy and the logic of identity?

An exemplary queer response: “I propose the figure of the smoker, as elaborated by Mladen Dolar, as one instance where the unconditioned nature of desire, the retreat from identity, and a contingent sociality briefly converge. Dolar writes: ‘Smokers, like proletarians, have no country, but they instantly create liberated territories wherever they appear.’ Smoking provides a counterintuitively queerer-than-queer image: after all, [...] The smoker [...] is in principle genderless, sexless, faceless, and ultimately selfless.” (Luiz Valle Junior, “Lacanian Ethics, the Psychoanalytic Group, and the Question of Queer Sociality,” in: *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, 15/2020) How can a collective “queer” or a “queered” collective be articulated, both theoretically and in terms of activism? How does it work: recognizing one another while refusing to impose identities and labels on “oneself”?

connective

What is sought is a different kind of connectivity—one that allows differences and divisions to exist and draws its driving force from diversity to foster solidarity. What is also sought is a different kind of collectivity—one that creates space for opposition not only to the ubiquitous politics of identity but also to the competitive subjugation to a (controllable) group will. Who dares to encounter “themselves” as “the other” and to analyze the experiences of such an experiment? “The collective ‘we’ is not something predefined that exists before a movement; rather, the ‘we’ is continuously invented and performed through immediate, ongoing practices of resistance and assembly,” as Frantz Fanon too already stated in 1961 in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

connective / collective

Form collectives! Form anti-collectives! (And everything in between and against it.) We invite groups, collectives, duos, and those who want to form one and experiment to invent and test their own forms of connectivity and collectivity—in an ever-evolving articulation and reflection on the intersection of political and artistic practices.

Apply

We invite submissions for artistic, theoretical, and activist projects and look forward to receiving applications from groups (whether long-established or newly forming) with 2 + x members, who would like to use the **Arbeitszimmer thealit at St.-Jürgen-Straße 157/159 in Bremen** for 1–6 weeks between November 20, 2026, and June 30, 2027. Arbeitszimmer thealit is a retail space with a street-facing window, two rooms, a hallway, and a restroom, totaling just under 40 square meters.

There are no restrictions on the format of the application. It should describe the group, its self-concept, and its approach, as well as how the workspace's time and space will be utilized. (For example: the group's collaborative work time, with or without a public presentation, exhibition, performance, report, etc.) Technical equipment for presentations and installations in the space can largely be provided. Small subsidies for materials and travel expenses—or expense reimbursements—of up to €600 per group are available, depending on the duration and scope of the project. We are happy to assist with finding accommodations in Bremen, but unfortunately cannot provide any within the studio space. We, the curators, are available for discussions if desired. Additionally, thealit will publicize the relevant works, projects, and events on its website, social media, in its newsletter, etc.

Please send applications to Lola Castro, including your preferred dates and any dates you are unavailable, at [lola.castro\(at\)thealit.de](mailto:lola.castro@thealit.de)

Claudia Reiche, Andrea Sick

NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY: The access to the Workroom Arbeitszimmer thealit is not barrier-free. However, a ramp can be installed if necessary. Door width 85cm. Unfortunately, there is no wheelchair accessible toilet in the room.