



a tender talk:

tender

**jenna porter,
iris lee,
& shan wallace**

structures for

collaborative

work

**moderated by
kimi hanauer**



Introduction:

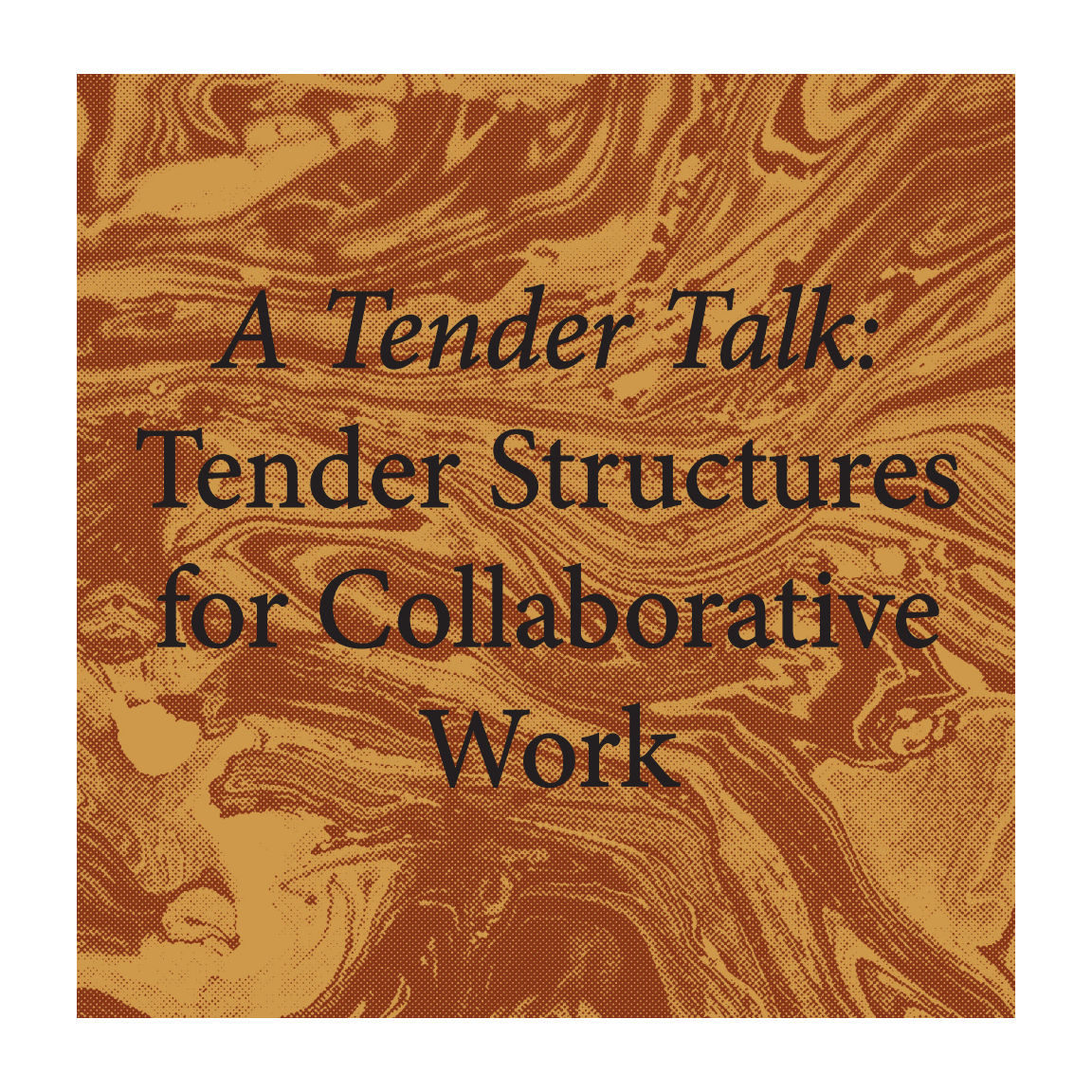
Building Tenderly

The other week, during our weekend Open Hours at Press Press, we gathered to talk about the latest issue of *Scroll*, an all intern produced publication that is published annually by The Contemporary in Baltimore, MD. As one of the founding members of this publication in 2014, along with Max Anderson, and Lee Heinemann, who now directs the program, seeing this project continue and take such a more rigorous form really warms my heart. This year's issue is called *A Tender Thing* and is co-authored by the amazing Iris Lee, Jenna Porter, and Shan Wallace. *A Tender Thing* is comprised of five vignettes, taking various literary and visual forms, that explore the ways arts practices, here framed as practices of self-care, exist as

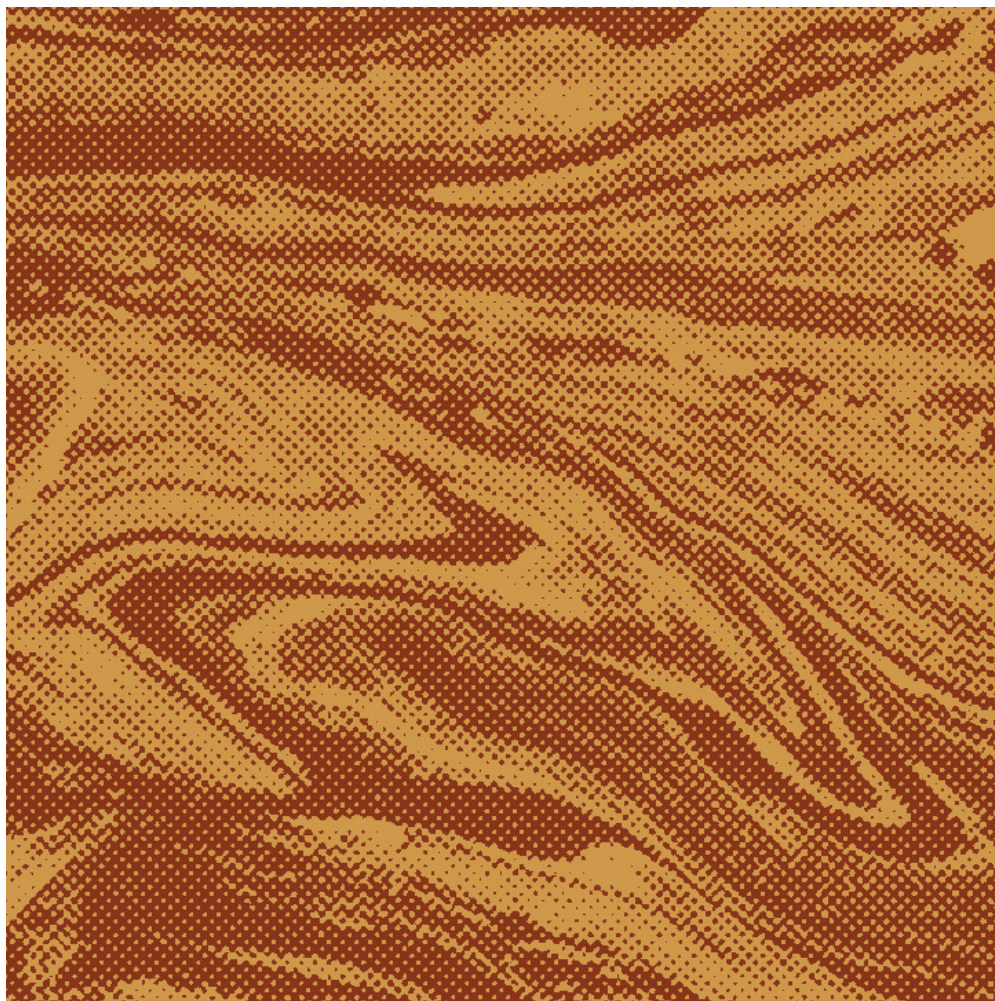
forms of resistance and survival. Similarly to the practices highlighted in this publication, the project itself feels born out of a necessity for sisterhood, acceptance, and tenderness between the authors during the past year in which this publication was produced. During our talk, we explored the ways the authors used tenderness as a strategy to build in space for empathy and support throughout their collaborative process. Throughout our conversation, we wrote down values as they came up, in order to propose our *Manifesto for Tender Collaborative Work*, which flows through the following text. We hope this manifesto and conversation can build on, or inspire, some tender strategies for life and work.

Thanks for reading!

With Care,
Kimi Hanauer, Press Press



A Tender Talk:
Tender Structures
for Collaborative
Work




Kimi: Can you give us a brief overview of what you all did for this issue of Scroll 4: A Tender Thing?

Iris: We did five different interviews and structured each one in a different way; some of them were conversations, some we were making art as we were speaking, some we were basically just viewing a conversation between two people... We kind of tried to mold each one around the people we were interacting with.

Shan: Throughout the process, we tried to be reflective on what we were living individually, and in relation to the people that we also talked to. One thing I realized is that there are so many similarities between us as individuals, and the people that we were interacting with. It felt really good to be honest and create work that can continue to be a testament to our own lives, as well as those around us who are using art as a way of preserve their own space.

Kimi: So there are five vignettes that cover a wide range of topics throughout this publication. Could you talk about how tenderness is something that flows throughout each piece, as both a strategy and a theme?

Shan: One thing I realized throughout the interview process was that everyone was making art for a reason. It wasn't just for leisure, but it was for survival. And one thing I noticed about everyone we talked to, like the Very Black Project—they are existing because it's necessary! Then we have Robin Lynn Marquis and Najee Haynes-Follins who create art; Robin said, she started making art because it was saving her life, and Najee creates art because, as a Black woman, she's amidst all this chaos and she has to disperse these feelings. She can't just keep them inside herself. To see how they are both making art as a way to truly express who they are, as a way of mourning, and as a way of saving their own lives. Then Morgan Monceaux and Joyce J. Scott, who took us on a whole history trip, everyone kind of



1. *Embrace and support one another fully.* You are at your best when you feel accepted.

[manifesto for tenderness]

2. *Don't compartmentalize.* Be your full self and bring that into your work.





talked about struggles and trouble, and how art is tender to them. It's what they do to save themselves. It's what they do to take care of themselves, but it's so serious because this is something that they do for a living.


One of my favorite things about the Very Black Project is this thing on their website that says "Asian is Very Black," and I'm like, how can Asian be Very Black? In our conversation, they said they hope that people who are onlookers can also learn from how they celebrate themselves. Asian is very Black, not meaning Black in skin, but meaning it's very loving; our community and our spaces are here for each other, and that they are simply a tribe.

Jenna: Another thing that goes through this work is how to make tender spaces. For example in Rebecca Nagle's interview she talks about how she went to Standing Rock during the No DAPL movement and she made a tent for women at the camp who were survivors of sexual as-

sault. She talked about how to make a safe space for them within an environment that was completely unsafe. And when we put this piece next to the Bell Foundry piece, we realized there's a lot of connection between these things; between either trying to claim a space, or reclaim a space, and build a sanctuary. Whether that be protecting your land from the government, or protecting your house in Baltimore from the City shutting it down.

Kimi: Something that stuck out to me is that the content you produced is about a certain idea, while the process you took also embodied a lot of what your content was about. Could you expand on how the content you were developing was fueling the sisterhood between you all, and how your sisterhood also then influenced the content? It feels like you valued your process equally to the product you ultimately produced.


Shan: The process was such a divine time for me. We




3. *Mold* the structure of your work around the *people* that are a part of it.

[manifesto for tenderness]

4. Be tender to your collaborator's *identities, experiences, and daily challenges.*





5. *Know what is going on in your collaborator's lives. Don't assume your project is their first priority at all times.*

[manifesto for tenderness]

6. *Universal Love. Pick up the extra slack when needed.*



were able to create something like this because we were so supportive and open with one another. There would be days where we would talk about our lives and what we were going through for hours, and then talk about Scroll for like five minutes. In those moments, the trust that we are going to get it done was developing. It's funny to just look back at the process and the many talks we had, the conversations, the traveling... The days at The Contemporary just chilling, or the days at Red Emma's, being amidst all that traffic and still being able to just embrace each other. And that's one thing that really supported the process—is that we were able to embrace each other.

That felt really good because I can be at my best when I am accepted, and also being pushed and challenged, but supported. That's one thing that I got from both of them was support. It just suddenly happened: we all gravitated towards each other through the work.

"I can be at my best when I am accepted..."


Iris: I remember one of the first things you said to me was “I just love women,”

Shan: I was so happy that it was all women.

Iris: I was like, yes. Me too.

Jenna: Regarding the holistic process, I think part of that was us being our full selves and not compartmentalizing, or being our ‘professional’ selves. We couldn’t do that. If we are making a product that is about tenderness and issues like race, gender, sexuality, and violence, it was really impossible to not bring our own stories into that. I think if you are trying to make a product that is actually inclusive, and your not bringing your own self and community into that, the product will reflect that. The product was never more important than our relationships with each other. It was never worth it to ruin our relationships for, and if it had I think it would not have been as good of a product.






7. The product is never more important than *the process* or *the relationship*.

[manifesto for tenderness]

8. *Embrace difference!* We are different, let's address our differences directly.



“The product was never more important than our relationships with each other. It was never worth it to ruin our relationships for, and if it had I think it would not have been as good of a product.”

Shan: And we didn't really have a conflict at all. We all just agreed on everything. It felt so easy and natural. The energy and effort was all reciprocated. We all are clearly coming from different places, and we were just tender to each other and our daily challenges. I think what really helped us was that we just opened up. We all here, we getting paid, we have to spend time together, let's actually spend time together.

Kimi: Knowing that you are three women who come

from different backgrounds, while dealing with issues like violence and racism in this publication, did you have insecurities about how you were going to navigate this subject matter collaboratively and how your identities fit into the conversation?

Shan: I just wanted to bring what I could bring to the table. I reflect my community and where I come from. And that was immediately accepted. When we didn't work on Scroll and we were just reading a lot and just chillin, I felt really accepted. I was nervous going into it because I haven't collaborated with people in this way before. So my insecurity was around that—I have to check myself, make sure I bring myself to the table, be a good listener, and compromise on things I usually don't compromise on.

We got it done. Real quick and real easy. Wasn't hard at all. I really want to come up with a story where it's like, we worked hard, blood, sweat, and tears, but it's like, no we





9. Paid time. Creative freedom. Femme-centric space.

[manifesto for tenderness]

10. Trust the process and trust the people. Make space for each other's quirks.



didn't, it wasn't that. We just were there for each other.

Jenna: Which is work too, it's just a different type of labor!

Kimi: This publication is definitely a rigorous project. Even if it was 'easy,' you can tell that this is a loved project. If you can reflect internally on the process, what characterized the approach you took as individuals that allowed you to hold space for tenderness throughout?

Jenna: Being the only white women in this group, I had to think about that. I think you have to be careful to not recreate the power structures seen outside, even in such a small space like this. Not being afraid to talk about difference is important too—because we are different. Saying, “OK, we're all women so lets just focus on that,” is counter-productive, because we are different! Let's actually handle these differences in a direct and productive way. We can't just pretend that we are all coming from the

same place—you have to acknowledge your privilege in a situation, and step back, listen, learn, and not ask for too much emotionally. Try to be in a supportive role instead.

Kimi: I know Audre Lorde was an influence in this; you quote her in the introduction, and I know she talks a bit about embracing difference. Could you talk a little about the ways she influenced this work and what lessons you took with you?

Shan: One thing that Audre Lorde talks about is universal love, a universal fight, of course for women, but for all

“Not being afraid to talk about difference is important too—because we are different... Let’s actually handle these differences in a direct and productive way.”

women, for all plants, for everyone... So paying homage to her is really respecting that, and practicing what you preach. That was really part of the process: just caring about each other, making that effort, asking about each other's days, or if your sick if your not. One thing I know is that I don't get offended, I don't take people's mood's personally. Like, "Shit, ok, you don't want to work on Scroll today? Ok, that just means I got to pick up the slack." You know, just being open... It's just that universal love, that understanding of being like, "I get it, that's cool."

Jenna: That's definitely something that I had to learn throughout this. I'm definitely that person that takes things personally. I know they had to deal with me all the time being like, "Are you guys mad at me?" (Laughs).

Iris: I'm sensitive.... They were just really accepting of that. You just learn little quirks about one another and you have to make sure you make space for that.

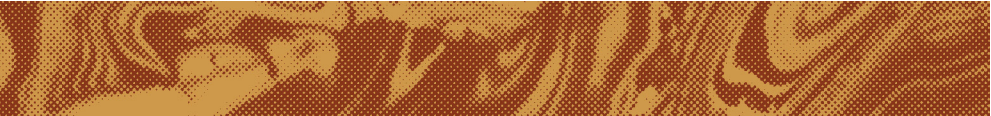
Jenna: And being aware of the other projects everyone is working on too. I think that's something else that could go on the manifesto—know what is going on in each other's lives! You can't expect this to be your first priority all the time.

Georgia: I want to hear a little bit more about the conditions that made it easy to support each other and be there. I heard two that I thought were important, the first was, no men. And the second is, paid time. Are there other conditions that help facilitate this situation?

Shan: We had a lot of creative freedom.

Iris: The Contemporary was a source of constant support.


Shan: They also picked our brain a lot, they helped us think big, but weren't helicopter parents. Like I said, we all come from different places, we all want to talk about different



11. *Know and embrace your own subjectivity.* There is no such thing as being objective.

[manifesto for tenderness]

12. *No hierarchy.* No one should have more control than someone else.



things, and to have that freedom to be like, “This is what we are going to do, this is what we want to talk about,” was really important.

Iris: It felt good to have that supportive structure that was invested in our work, but wasn't actively part of the creating process. We felt really independent, but also had that support when we needed. We'd get an email from them sometimes saying something like, “Hey, the world sucks, and we are here for you if you need anything.” They offered us tenderness, which really inspired our work.

Kimi: So, supporting you as people just as much as they were supporting the product you were producing?

Shan: Yes, and the financial support too. And they weren't on our backs about time. We were just able to operate how we wanted to. And they are smart as shit too.

Kimi: This project could be seen as an affirmation of tenderness as a form of power, in your product and the process you took. In doing that, it redefines what power looks like. I find myself in situations all the time, where it feels like I need to ascribe to patriarchal notions of power, and it only goes so far for so many reasons. Could you expand on how power shows up throughout this work? And if you see this redefinition of power as a strategy for dismantling patriarchal modes of power?

Jenna: In the beginning we say that soft is strong, soft is necessary. If your trying to define power in this “white-man-suite-kind-of-way,” you just can’t do this kind of work. I think for us, as three women, it was really important to redefine power in a way that made sense to us that’s not this notion of power that’s really capitalistic and only informed by domination. What do you guys think?

Shan: I think we were able to expose new windows of pow-

TENDER STRUCTURES FOR PRODUCTIVE WORKS = MANIFESTO

- tender to each other's identities
- Embrassing difference
- Know whats going on in each others lives
- NO MEN
- paid time;
- constant *support = creative freedom
- * treating us as human beings
- redefining power
- letting go of control
- Knowing your subjectivity
- you have a body;
- be vulnerable


er, and how power can work. One thing that Robin Lynn Marquis does is sex work, and that's redefining power- she has power and agency to do what she wants with her body proudly. Then how Najee Haynes-Follins takes power over her own emotions and then disperses it out into the world, that's power. Power to me is just agency over yourself, your emotions, your body; to put that out in the world through your expression, that's power. So I think we just gave different examples of what power is and what power can be.

Iris: I think in other ways, when we were talking about carving out spaces- that is also a really powerful action. I think all of the discussions we had, being able to carve out your own space and support other survivors in a way that shows itself to the public rather than hiding.

Jenna: Scroll is also a platform. It's not the biggest, but it is one. We chose these people for a reason. They don't need help with getting power, but just to share this platform.

Kimi: Going back to the content you sourced for this; the biggest chunk is this conversation between Morgan Monceaux and Joyce J. Joyce. Could you expand on why you chose those two individuals and what that experience was like? Why is this the biggest chunk of the publication?

Shan: Deana Haggag, the former Director of The Contemporary, really put the bug in our ear about them. That was an experience we will never forget. Even just going to his (Morgan's) house in West Baltimore. The neighborhood is not the prettiest, and of course it's just moments away from where Freddie Grey is from. His entire house is an art museum. And Joyce, of course, she is the mother of everything. They were very welcoming, but they def carved out their own space, and had their own thing going on. We really didn't get to ask questions or have much of a say so because they were vibing out. We were there for four hours... They were making references we didn't know, talking about



13. *Let go of control.* Try stepping into a supportive role.

[manifesto for tenderness]

14. Let yourself be *vulnerable.*



people we have no idea who they are, just getting schooled the entire time. The one thing is that they were both just so open and they trusted us.

Kimi: What was your biggest take away from the entire process?

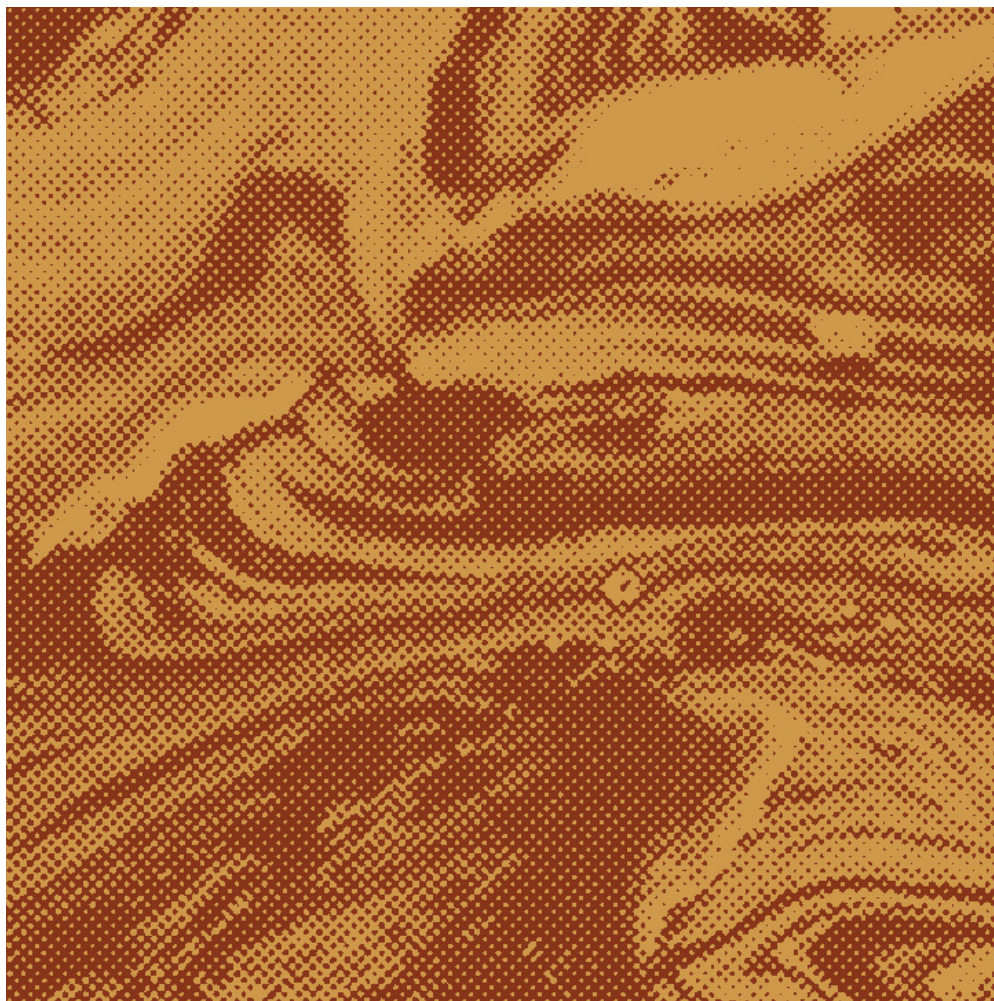
Shan: Definitely, trust the process and trust the people. And, that I can be vulnerable too. Especially traveling, that I was able to travel but that I was able to trust that they can make decisions without me and that it will be ok. And the friendship that I have with them has been the best, the conversations that we have really just opened up my eyes to who they are and how they feel... Just the fact that they are so, so supportive. I took a lot away from the process of building this publication, but most importantly, it was the friendship that developed with these two.

Jenna: For me, definitely trust is a huge thing. We didn't

decide to work with each other and just had to make the best of it, so being able to trust and letting go of control. In a feminist structure, no one should have more control. There shouldn't really be in any hierarchies. Coming back to my own privilege in this group, I had to let go of having to control things. And I'm glad I met that challenge. And friendship, of course.

Iris: I think my take away is that trying to be objective is not a real thing. You have to acknowledge and embrace your subjectivity, and infuse it into the process if your trying to make a project that hits home in all these ways.

Jenna: Knowing your subjectivity and how it's influencing what's being made is really important.



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