

HAND MADE

Portraits of emergent new community culture

Edited by Tessy Britton

POWER OF 8

Anab Jain and Chris Hand

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The near-collapse of financial systems, looming fears of climate change, and continuing ‘wars on terror’ have added to the recent sense of doom and gloom we seem to collectively experience. But where do our individual aspirations of a better life collide with what seem to be ‘dark futures’?

We sensed urgency in the air. While we all want to do our bit, where do we start? We decided to do an experiment to find out. Using a DIY approach to imagining alternate futures, we assembled an *ad hoc* team of eight people from different walks of life. The aim was to explore new pathways for creating democratic futures by building a public discourse around the aspirations of ordinary people.

The team of eight comprised a Designer/ Speculator, an Educator, an Interaction Designer, a Permaculturist, a Policy Researcher, an Urbanist, a retired Civil Servant, and a Biomedical Scientist.

Over three months in the summer of 2009, we became a guerrilla-style summer school, meeting in cafés, pubs, and drawing rooms, while continuing with our day jobs and other commitments. We developed methods that would give this multi-disciplinary collaboration space to breathe and grow.

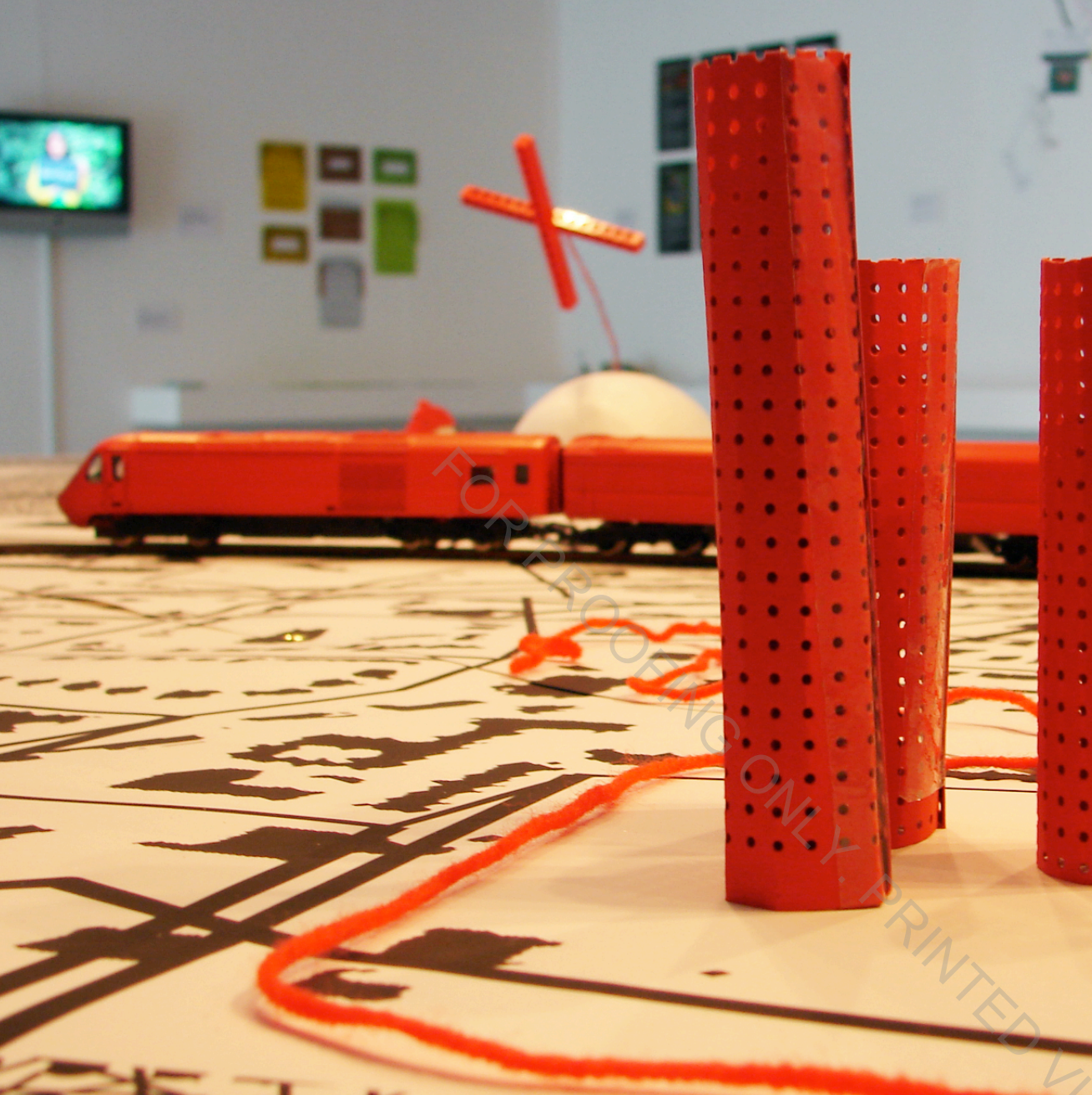
We created our own design workshops: drawing, writing stories, making maps, creating montages, drinking tea, trying to give a voice to our individual ideas. Sometimes there were conflicts as we struggled to understand each other's visions of the future. We dealt with questions like: How do individual identities of the participants not get affected by such a collaboration? How do we move towards a unified group identity in achieving a vision, a world – or is this even possible?

Soon we realized that such an experimental DIY process would have to embrace conflict, and we hoped that this project would eventually raise the right questions and have

the intended impact on each of the collaborators and their respective audience. To test some of our ideas and be inspired by other people, we ran a wider public engagement workshop in Brentford, inviting participants to build their own aspirational futures using lego and foam.

Along with our own workshops, the public engagement efforts brought to the fore concerns around climate change alongside a deep-seated nostalgia for a 'green' world. Buried amidst this, we wondered if 'fantastic technological innovations might still triumph and save us from doom', and what the implications of that might be. To explore this, we created an alternate ecosystem of the future called 'Acres Green', where people balance a pragmatic requirement to live closer to nature with their natural human impulses to subvert and control it.

The prototypes, films and installations we produced illustrate this ambiguity between the natural and the technological: Prosthetic trees bear multiple fruits, synthetic pollinating creatures called the 'Beamer Bees' live in harmony with radio waves, and robotic flocking clouds create microclimates, bringing rains to specific areas.







"While it was initially our aim to tell an optimistic story about the future, we wanted this story to bring forth the inherent dilemmas and complexities of any such endeavour.

Ultimately the project has produced one vision of many possible futures, hoping to exemplify an inclusive approach to the development of our shared futures, lives and environment."



The Power of 8 was an experiment that brought together the creative potential of curious people having various expertise, with that of the wider community, those who share in the lived experience of the city and its infrastructure, to produce a collective expression of the future. The project was always conceived of as open, a starting point, and these ideas have continued to be taken forward, with team members finding new collaborators and spinning out new projects and processes.

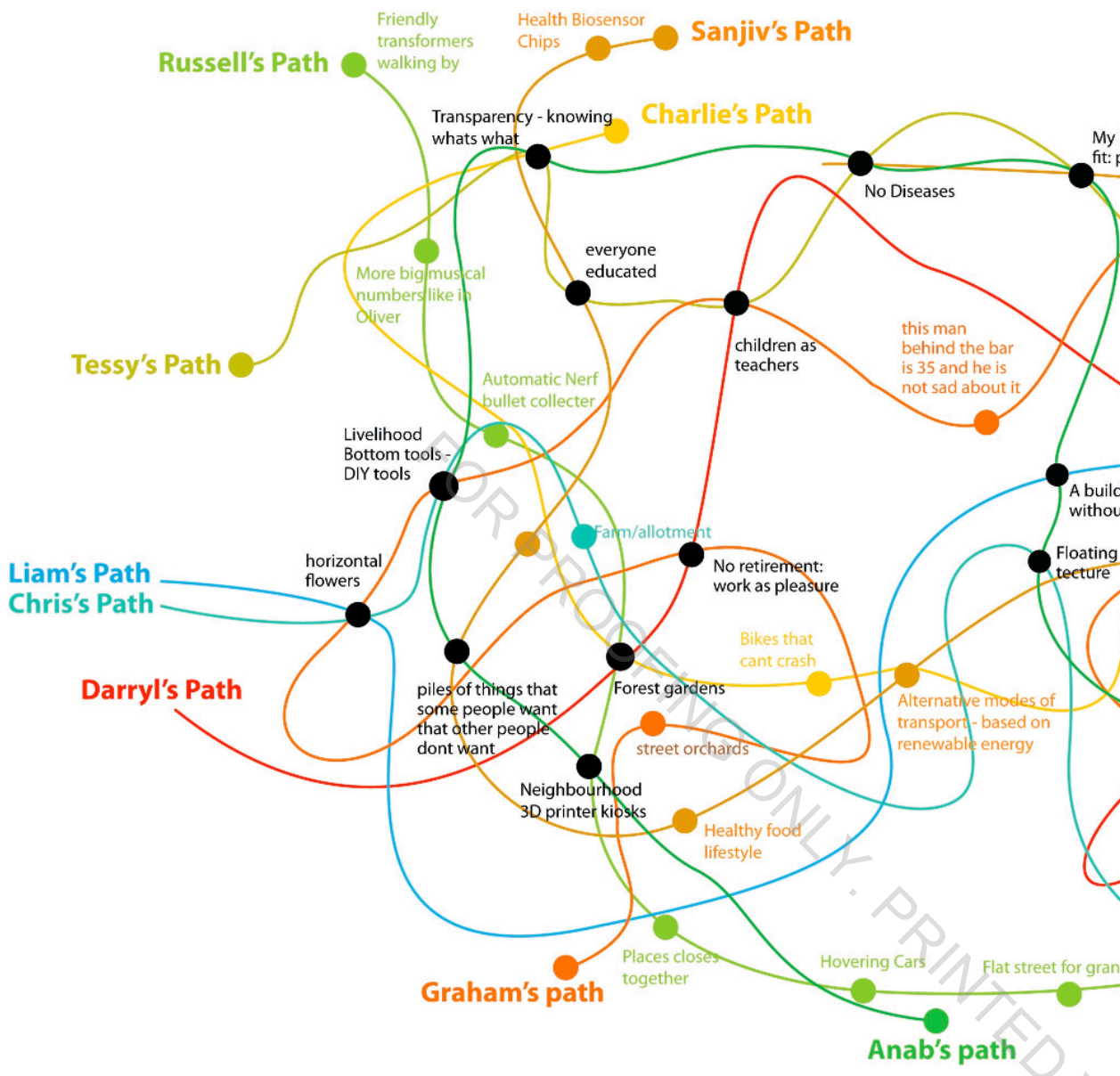
While it was always going to be risky to bring strangers together to build a collective vision, it has also been a valuable learning experience to work with different people and understand and explore different world-views.

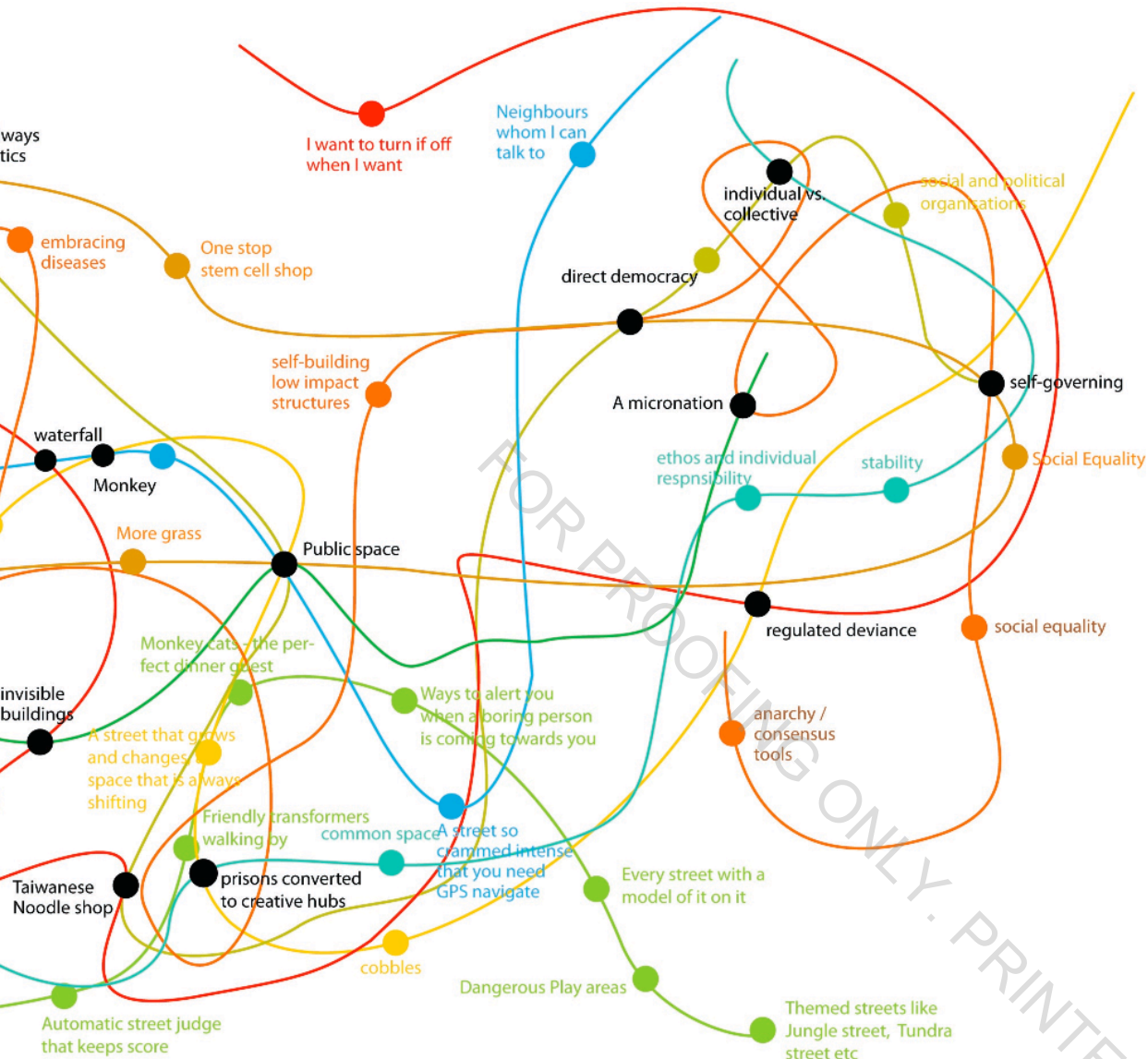
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www.powerof8.org.uk

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