

FrameWork 3/22

Parker Kay on *Less* by Meech Boakye and Gareth Long

In 1972, Bill Withers wrote the billboard-topping song “Lean on Me” that was inspired by his recent move to Los Angeles and the lack of community he felt in the city in comparison to the memories of togetherness he experienced in his hometown of Slab Fork, West Virginia.¹

*Lean on me
When you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on...²*

Withers’s song beautifully summarizes a feeling we all search for. Existing in—and being nurtured by—a community. To be a part of a community is to feel as though we are safe and seen. Even more powerful yet is to see one’s actions reflected back in the community they nurture. Another way of describing community is a reciprocal relationship built on the trust of individuals that coalesces into a collective entity through fellowship and togetherness. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts and wholeness heals the maker.

The titular act of Withers’s song shows how community can be embedded into the body. To lean is to distill the complexities of being in relation with one another to the level of muscle memory. Furthermore, to lean on, or with, someone is to lower your guard and rely on them implicitly. A trust fall.

Lean

intransitive verb

to cast one’s weight to support another

Lean

/lĕn/

verb

be in or move into a sloping position.

Indeed, collaboration is when two people lean towards each other, mutually. The application of counter pressure establishes equilibrium between both participants. If either person decides to move away or shift the other must adapt or fall. However, through com-

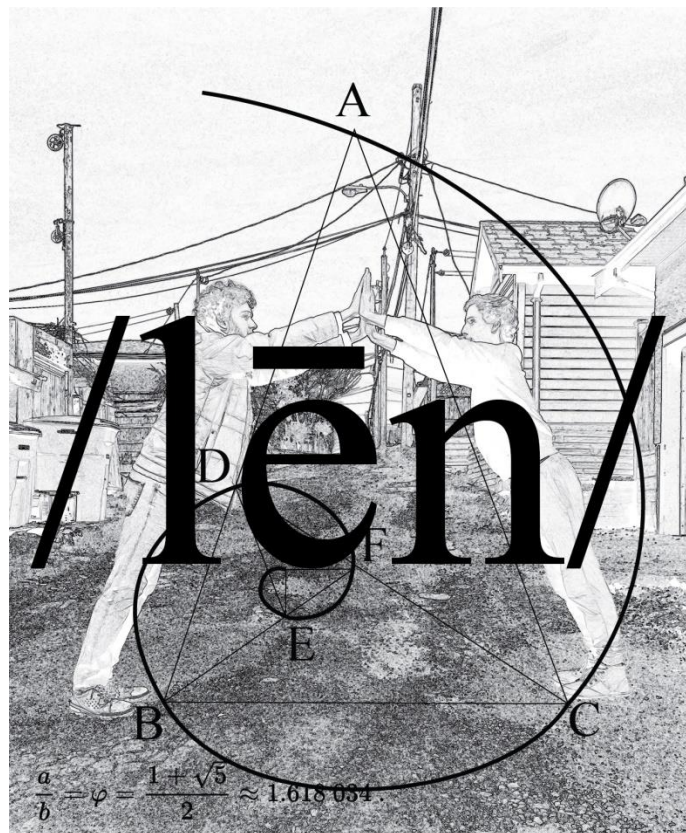
munication, leaning is a way to break through stasis towards a praxis that is constantly unfolding and forever coming into being. Leaning defies categorization by existing as a state between planes. The curve of life. Neither and both x and y , to lean is to reject a dualist worldview built on a Cartesian grid hell bent on relegating the paradox to the realm of absurdity. Instead, as we lean together, we recognize its absurdity and beautiful utility, simultaneously.

Lean

/lĕn/

noun

a deviation from the perpendicular; an inclination towards radicality.



Embodying vulnerability is a radical act. Vulnerability is the magic ingredient within the swirling, bubbling, and boiling brew of collaboration. To be vulnerable is to lean into the unknown while accepting the risk of imminent and total annihilation. When faced with annihilation, collaboration thrives through a reciprocal understanding that each person is responsible for the others well being.

Collaborative art making then becomes an excuse for—as much as a product of—a spirit of togetherness, a desire for exchange and dialogue, and self actualization through caring for one another. Evincing the process of collaboration is perhaps even more relevant than the results themselves. In fact, does a resolution need to arrive at all?

The denouement of a story is meant to untie the knot of the narrative in the final act in order to arrive at a logical end. During this process, the world building potentiality of cinema is obliterated through the desire for linearity. What a shame. Part of what makes life so exciting is the limitless connections that are created/discovered through shared experiences together.

Picture this then: a room born from collaboration that does not purport to prescribe a resolution but instead embraces the durationality of objects and celebrates their potential for future meaning-making via those who come and go. Lean in and lean on.

End Notes

¹“Bill Withers ‘Lean on Me.’” Rolling Stone, December 9, 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20071001175536/http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/billwithers/articles/story/6596050/lean_on_me

² Withers, Bill. Lean on Me. Columbia Records, a division of Sony Music Entertainment, 1972, Accessed on Youtube March 02, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOZ-MySzAac>.