

IMPOSSIBLE GLOSSARY

G O A I  
L S R O

*Collaboration*

I P S B E  
M O I L

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DEMOCRACIA

## *Collaboration is inevitable* María Mur Dean

We excavate<sup>1</sup> this term “collaboration” in one direction, in relation to artistic practices. We delve into it, unearthing meanings, interpretations, contradictions, and examples. The excavation of the term is subjective and is influenced by the practice of consonni as producers of art and as publishers, which is the perspective from which this text is written.

### The First Layer

Collaboration in relation to art has been studied from many different perspectives. Since the 1990s, collaborative art practices have become increasingly visible, and not only its practice but also the theories about it have proliferated. In the discourse collaboration goes hand in hand with the concepts of individual and collective authorship, conflict and consensus, ethics and aesthetics, the political and the social, activism, orchestration and autonomy, among others.

For one of the top specialists in the matter, Grant Kester, cultural production is polyvalent and generative, capable of transforming more than simply transmitting meaning and value. Kester maintains that de-individuated creative agency does not diminish its critical or transformative power but, in fact, can actually enhance it if the experience of creative agency itself is approached in a more reflective manner.<sup>2</sup> Marc Léger, on the other hand, considers that Kester’s dialogical aesthetic renounces political statements and social critique for dialogical interaction in which artists are expected to abandon their claims to authority and authorship.<sup>3</sup>

1. I apply a free interpretation of the very inspiring technique of exploring language used by Sociedad Doctor Alonso, a company directed by Tomás Aragay and Sofía Asencio, in their project *Excarvación Permanente* (Permanent Excavation). According to Aragay and Asencio, excavation is a pedagogical mechanism revolving around the words and language, dialogue and ethical values we are comprised of, which allows all kinds of people to work together to share knowledge and improve their ability to reason, listen, and collectively construct discourse. This project was a product of the research project *El Desenterrador* (The Undergravedigger), realized by the company over the past few years. As its name indicates, the company has literally and figuratively “dug up” words, probing the narrow, shifting relation that is created between words and their use, and the actions that result from this. See <http://eldesenterrador.com>.

2. See Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 138.

3. Marc James Léger, “For the De-Incapacitation of Community Art Practice,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, no. 6 (2008), <http://www.joaap.org/6/another/leger.html>.

Collaboration can also be found at the center of another widely referenced theory: Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, according to which artistic practice is a space for public participation in the work. According to Bourriaud, in the current day forms of mutual encounter and the creation of human relationships represent aesthetic objects that may be analyzed as such, creating spontaneous *micro-communities* in situations he calls *everyday micro-utopias*.<sup>4</sup> Claire Bishop cautions that Bourriaud's theory places excessive emphasis on the production of relationships, with projects aimed at a relatively homogeneous community, the art public, who have a lot in common, thus excluding conflict and dissent.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, in Rosalyn Deutsche's "Agoraphobia," which had a profound influence on consonni, the focus is placed on Antonio Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical democracy that posits antagonism as the foundation of democracy.<sup>6</sup> For Deutsche, conflict, division, and instability do not damage the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence.<sup>7</sup> Deutsche argues that artistic practices lead to discussion on common issues. They relate to the public sphere through their participation in political activity inside and outside of institutional frameworks. Art institutions, she reminds us, are not "secure interiors, isolated from social space," just as extra-institutional spaces are neither completely independent—they are rather interdependent—nor free of the sexual politics inscribed in visual and representational codes. Whether inside or outside of the institutional frame, "vision" in political projects or works of a more subjective or personal nature is invariably a "public matter."<sup>8</sup>

4. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), pp. 17, 31.

5. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 51–79.

6. Rosalyn Deutsche, "Agoraphobia," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 269–327. See also: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

7. The question of antagonism, dissent, and conflict opens up another line of investigation and experimentation in artistic practices. A referential example of an approach to these questions of dissent as a driving force of artistic work is Desacuerdos. Sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español, a multi-year project of different collaborating institutions. The aim of Desacuerdos is to "track cultural practices, models, and counter-models that do not correspond to the dominant structures, policies and practices that have prevailed in Spain since the transition to democracy." Our contribution to the debate is the project "LaPública," a research laboratory directed by consonni that analyzes the capacity of art to create the public sphere. During 2015 and 2016, workshops, talks, and work and study groups were developed, along with artworks that attempted to record diverse responses to the question: How can art create the public sphere? This culminated in October 2016 with an international symposium, which was formalized as a live radio show. It was an exploration of the radiophonic medium as a critique of representation, in which voices amplified by a medium produce experiences of both intimacy and distance; extracorporeal voices that embody imagined and real bodies, constructing the everyday, living together. See <http://www.lapublica.org>.

8. Deutsche, "Agoraphobia," pp. 269–327.

As we begin to excavate the term *collaboration* and outline some of the discussions and theories it has given rise to, we see that the collaborative can be confused with other, related terms such as "collective" and "participatory." According to Subtramas, a research and co-learning initiative focused on collaborative audiovisual production, the "collaborative" introduces micropolitical nuance and entails a more active approach than simple participation in something already organized or established. "Collaboration is much more than simply doing something with others; it's not about adding up the work or the power of different actors, but rather about a joint production method where (ideally) controversies, issues, and disagreements are continuously shared and incorporated into the process itself, pooling all the different sensibilities involved into a new plane of agency."<sup>9</sup>

And indeed, etymologically, *collaborate* is a Latin conjunction of *col-* ("together") and *laborare* ("to work"). Collaboration, the act of co-laboring, means working with another person or other people to carry out a task, helping with others to achieve an aim. But who are you working with? Who are these agents? How is this collaboration structured? How do you establish your aims? All of these issues will help us to continue excavating the term, identifying the different forms and meanings that collaboration takes on when in dialogue with art.

## The Second Layer: Who

As we scrape away another layer, we discover that the term *collaboration* takes on the form of a puzzle, the pieces of which compose an image, a whole. But, unlike George Perec's puzzle in the preamble to *Life a User's Manual*, in which the separate pieces mean nothing and the element does not precede the existence of the whole, each element here determines the whole. The sense and meaning of collaboration is determined according to who the collaboration arises between.

Paloma Blanco situates collaborative practices at a midway point between political art and a new kind of public art. She places primary emphasis on the methods of production and distribution of the work as well as the fusion by which artists and social movements work hand in hand to articulate intervention models in accordance with the needs of the different agents and sectors

9. "Collaborative," in *Abecedario Anagramático* (Anagrammatic ABC), <http://subtramas.museoreinasofia.es/en/anagrama/collaborative..>

involved. It is a hybrid formula, residing between the art world, political activism, and community organization.<sup>10</sup> José Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo add that collaborative practices are a set of proposals with an agenda centered on sabotaging the institution, the desire to short-circuit the logic of the spectacle, the dissolution of the traditional concept of authorship, the awakening of social creativity, or the collaboration with distinct local communities.<sup>11</sup>

The transdisciplinary initiative Transductores points out that collaboration is only feasible in frameworks that promote the exchange of skills and knowledge. Such exchanges favor the mixing of diverse professionals with local experts and other groups involved to create learning communities in which all actors contribute their specific knowledge and approaches. At the same time, these exchanges interconnect different disciplines, institutions, and organizational modes, facilitating a wide range of collaborations (with NGOs, schools, daycare centers, local communities, universities, youth or community centers, unions, etc.).<sup>12</sup>

For consonni, collaboration forms part of a process of artistic production—with artists and professionals with whom they work, and then, with the community implicated in each situation. Collaboration takes place from a feminist perspective, diversifying voices and insights. Based on the exchanging of views, dialoguing, and learning from our mistakes, consonni presents itself to the world as an art producer—a fairly uncommon definition, a confused identity, even queer. This allows the initiative to rethink its approach, to redefine itself through the effective and transformative force of its productions. There is a close monitoring of the process, accompanying artists in each stage of production. The research on which the projects are based brings us closer to the work of other people and collectives, with whom we share knowledge and esteem. When we took hidden cameras into the Guggenheim Bilbao with Andrea Fraser, when we realized a zombie walk in Barakaldo's shopping district with Iratxe Jaio & Klaas van Gorkum, when we organized concerts in the dark with Sra. Polaroiska in Bilbao La Vieja, when we dove into the sea in search of whales with Fermín Jiménez Landa, or when we walked in the mountains, traversing, with Gerard Ortín:

10. Paloma Blanco, "Prácticas colaborativas en la España de los noventa," in *Desacuerdos 2. Sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español* (Barcelona et al.: MACBA et al., 2005), pp. 192–93.

11. José Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo, *Arte en España (1939–2015), ideas, prácticas, políticas* (Madrid: Manuales Arte Cátedra, 2015), pp. 690–91.

12. Antonio Collados and Javier Rodrigo, "Transductores: Pedagogías colectivas y políticas espaciales," in *Transductores 1: Pedagogías colectivas y políticas espaciales*, eds. Antonio Collados and Javier Rodrigo (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 2010), p. 17.



Andrea Fraser y consonni, *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001.  
Fermín Jiménez Landa, *Ultramarino* (Ultramarine), 2014 (Photo: Marc Vives)

all these works are based on artistic practice and reflection, but with the intention of transcending them through the discussions they provoke, even as we remain aware of the frame in which these actions are inscribed.<sup>13</sup>

The aforementioned productions are concrete examples of works grounded in an artistic research process with great complexity in the conceptualization, dissemination, and reception. They are coordinated either directly by consonni or by artists who decide on the formal, conceptual, and aesthetic development. Artists are paid for this work, as are others who participate in the process. Authorship (individual or collective) is credited and all participants are mentioned. These artistic productions are funded primarily with public funds, but we are always looking to diversify our financial sources (public/private, local/international). The issue of symbolic capital is something that is handled primarily between artists and consonni.

When the productions are presented to a public, the critical capacity of the former is reinforced and, at times, transformed, as, forgetting for a moment collective processes, all artistic practices are to a certain extent collaborative. From the moment a work is realized and exhibited, a *sharing takes place*. Artist and film director Petra Bauer asserts that making a film is not a political act in itself, but rather there is a potential in it that is not fully developed until the work interacts with an audience: “Art is a public effort. A film does not exist until it is seen.”<sup>14</sup> As Rosalyn Deutsche would say, artists “like Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper,” who were committed to what has come to be known as *institutional critique*, “demonstrated that the meaning of a work of art does not reside permanently within the work itself but is formed only in relation to an outside—to the manner of the work’s presentation—and therefore changes with circumstances.... The significance of an artwork is not simply given or discovered, it is produced.”<sup>15</sup>

13. The aforementioned projects, produced by consonni, are *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001) by Andrea Fraser, *Quédense dentro y cierren las ventanas* (Stay Inside, Close Windows and Doors, 2008) by Iratxe Jaio & Klaas van Gorkum, the research project *Pájaro y ornitólogo al mismo tiempo* (Bird cum Ornithologist, 2012) directed by consonni, experiments related to the HPC research residency program: *Ultramarino* (Ultramarine, 2014) by Fermín Jiménez Landa and *La habitación suena de otra manera* (The Room Sounds Different, 2015) by Sra. Polar-oiska. In addition, “Trabeska” (2015) by Gerard Ortín for LaPublika, our laboratory for artistic investigation on the public sphere. There were very different projects, with distinct aims and publics, some being broader and diverse, others more specific and concrete. See [www.consonni.org](http://www.consonni.org).

14. Danele Sarriugarte, “Ampliando la esfera pública. Petra Bauer in conversation with Danele Sarriugarte Mochales,” 2015, <http://www.editorialconcreta.org/Ampliando-la-esfera-publica-Petra>.

15. Deutsche, “Agoraphobia,” p. 295.

## The Third Layer: How

On this question, Claire Bishop is highly critical of Kester and Bourriaud, whom she believes prioritize ethical over aesthetic criteria and focus excessively on how relations are produced rather than on conceptual density or artistic meaning. Bishop maintains that artists’ good intentions are given too much weight in the assessment of their projects, and that the social turn in contemporary art has led to an ethical turn in art criticism.<sup>16</sup>

It is not a matter of choosing one point over the other, but of seeking a balance between the two. It is true that the way relationships are structured makes a difference. Artist and cineaste María Ruido paraphrases Jean-Luc Godard in stating that it is not enough to make political content, but rather the making of it also has to be political.<sup>17</sup> More than ethical judgment, it is vital to insist on good practices in cultural and artistic policies that should apply to all agents involved in artistic production. Artist Petra Bauer realized her latest film, *Sisters!*, in collaboration with London collective the Southall Black Sisters, an organization that since 1979 has worked to improve the social and political conditions of black and other minority women. Bauer points out that each person involved has their own role to play. Not everyone has the same history, the same responsibility, or the same decision-making capacity. For Bauer, it is important to create a method whereby the different participants feel that they can relate to each other and that they can use their experiences and skills for a common cause. This is likewise where the negotiation begins, which, as Bauer admits, is not an easy task. A relationship is never without conflict, but the idea is not to create a frictionless work environment but rather to find systems of interaction while keeping in mind existing power relations.<sup>18</sup>

16. Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006), p. 180.

17. In this sense, we stress the importance of “ways of working.” “Without a fuss, Michel de Certeau leads us to the concrete terrain where, without great struggle, the tactical expertise of people and the operations realized by the works of artists meet. Ways of working thus involve a form of mediation that brings down to earth high-flying dissolutions and that also articulates this hackneyed notion of ‘everyday life’ so that it could be newly understood as a set of tactics and ways of working. Apart from that, in dealing with the theatrical, artificial, and rather bohemian specificity of ‘constructed situations,’ ways of working do not aim to reinvent the wheel, but to allude and interconnect practices that were already there.” Jordi Claramonte, “Modos de hacer,” in *Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*, ed. Paloma Blanco et al. (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), pp. 383–90. We thus encounter a juxtaposition between the aesthetic and the political. Claire Bishop resolves the issue by commenting that, in consonance with Jacques Rancière, the aesthetic is the “ability to think contradiction”: the productive contradiction of the relation of art with social change, characterized precisely by a tension between faith in the autonomy of art and the belief that art is inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come.

18. Sarriugarte, “Ampliando la esfera pública.”



Collaboration should be situated in a system in which everyone needs to be conscious of the role they play in this chain of production, as Walter Benjamin argues in his mythical 1934 text “The Author as Producer.” Unveiling the conditions of production of any work of art means formalizing the structure of it. As Jo Freeman argues in her essay of the early 1970s on the feminist movement, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” no group of people who get together, whatever the objective, lacks a structure. The simple fact of being individuals with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds makes this inevitable. It is however possible that, if not done so consciously and consensually, the structure can remain informal. “As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules.”<sup>19</sup>

Power relations and structures accompany any association between people. To deny them is to conceal them. Freeman points out that a lack of structure is often defended from the left for ideological reasons, as a reaction to an excess of formalization, and she thus recommends a flexible structure. This would entail a formal, visible structure adaptable to the specific circumstances and situations of any moment, a structure in a *state of becoming*, rather than a rigid, bureaucratic, reified structure. Aída Sánchez de Serdio asserts that the capacity for political action depends on the hybridity and “multi-dynamicity” of the organization, that is, the possibility of altering tactics and strategies in response to different governing rationalities, mobilizing mutable capitals or energies, at times institutionally invisible or under the radar, and at others wholly orthodox.<sup>20</sup> With a formalized structure, it is easier to assume responsibilities and reduce the possibilities of being instrumentalized<sup>21</sup>, a threat to which artistic practices are often subjected. Paloma Blanco emphasizes that this issue had already been considered by Lucy R. Lippard, in whose opinion a “social change artist” should be ambidextrous, to be “able to think both ways, to understand dual coding and act in dual contexts, taking into consideration who the art is for, where it is, and what s/he wants to accomplish by putting it there.”<sup>22</sup>

19. Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.

20. Aída Sánchez de Serdio, “Políticas de lo concreto: Producción cultural colaborativa y modos de organización,” in *Transductores* 1, pp. 49.

21. On the one hand, as José Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo point out, well-intentioned, committed projects end up being co-opted by the civil service for their own benefit. Any collaborators, on the other hand, should be used for the benefit of the art project.

22. Lucy R. Lippard, “Moving Targets/Moving Out,” in *Art in the Public Interest*, ed. Arlene Raven (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), p. 210; quoted in Blanco, “Prácticas colaborativas,” p. 194.

## The Fourth Layer: For What

The possibilities of art are modulated in the interstices of negotiation. As Claire Bishop argues, it is not only important to stimulate dialogue but also to question the relations that are produced, for whom and for what. Art can activate a strategy of empowerment, as it is capable of engendering imagination. It is not a question of representing reality but impacting upon it and fostering its becoming. This is what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called the *strategy of the Pink Panther*, and it forms part of consonni's DNA. Mimicry—camouflage—is the product of a binary logic. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the Pink Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its color ... this is its becoming-world ... asignifying, makes its rupture, its own line of flight.”<sup>23</sup> Not fleeing from the world, but making the world flee. While this is perhaps not the way to transform the apparatus of production, we certainly transform ourselves; we affect ourselves.

As Marina Garcés maintains, “This involves ceasing to make of the world a remote field of interests and turning it into a battlefield in which we ourselves, our identity and our certainties will end up being the first affected.”<sup>24</sup> At the end of Friz Freleng's short cartoon *The Pink Phink* (1964), the Pink Panther, this ambiguous character that escapes binary gender logic, thanks a mustached worker for having contributed to *pinkify* his or her world with a big kiss on the lips. The Pink Panther acts as a performer that turns the worker into an accomplice, changing the rigid and foreign surrounding context, becoming affected. Pink on pink.

## The Fifth Layer

The maximum and logical evolution of collaboration, in spite of all well-meaning consideration, is telepathy. In his 1950 essay “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” visionary Alan Turing, within the context of a reflection on artificial intelligence, ventured that telepathy might be a possible evolution of humankind.<sup>25</sup> We adopt absurdity as a tool of

23. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 12.

24. Marina Garcés, “Honesty with the Real,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 4 (2012), <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/18820>.

25. See Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 59, no. 236 (October 1950), pp. 453–54; see also Víctor del Río, *La Pieza huérfana. Relatos de la paleotecnología* (Bilbao: consonni, 2015).

empowerment. In the sci-fi series Sense8, the Wachowskis present us with eight characters, eight voices, eight bodies atypical for this sort of mainstream program: a lesbian transsexual whose mother wants to lobotomize her, a Kenyan bus driver whose mother has AIDS, a famous closeted gay actor living in Mexico City, a policeman who is also the son of a policeman... They are people emotionally and telepathically interconnected who collaborate to change the world. Autonomous bodies who connect to each other through memories, emotions, feelings. They go beyond empathy, which is indispensable for any collaborative action. Affections are, once again, at the heart of collaboration.

## Interview with Maider López

by hablarenarte

The work of Maider López (b. 1975, San Sebastián) revolves around public space and its transformation through the presence of human beings. Her artworks often require the participation and collaboration of groups of people, who she subtly integrates into her proposals. They can play a more or less active role, but they are invariably the basis of her work, whether in the development of the artist's initial approach or by taking part in the construction of a final piece.

—www.maiderlopez.com

**Nearly all of your works seek, or require, an active participation of a group of people in order to function properly. Yet the degree of participation can vary depending on the project**

Yes. First a project arises, and then the process. When it involves participation by actual people, I distinguish three levels of participation. Projects like *Ataskoa* (Traffic Jam), *Piscine Saint George*, and *Polder Cup* are examples of proposals in which the public forms an integral part of the work. A factor in which I lack a degree of control always comes into play at this point, because the participants/ collaborators create a temporary community based on a proposal of mine. At the other extreme are projects like *Parkings or Crossing*, in which I act as an observer, focusing attention on the way in which we move or act in public space, transforming it through our presence. In these projects, participation may even take on an involuntary form. The participants are active agents insofar as they act in the public space, transforming it, but they may not be aware that they are doing so. Between these two extremes lie those projects in which I am also moved by this same interest as an observer, but in which I myself create a situation that expresses something about reality, such as *366 sillas* (366 Chairs) or *Entrada libre* (Free Entry). These proposals require active participation. The people must perform a specific action (such as sitting in a beach chair located in public space, or picking up and turning on an illuminated umbrella), but because they are framed within other, specific or leisurely, contexts and are quite subtle, participants—even acting as active agents—achieve another degree of involvement in the project.

**You use the words “collaboration” and “participation” almost as synonyms. Is there any qualitative difference between the two in your view?**

They are terms that I use with my own personal connotations. It is difficult to enter into the game of dialectics, above all with commonplace words such







as these, which are ultimately used in both theory and in artistic practice without having a clear definition. Therefore, it is preferable to use an example like the aforementioned work *Ataskoa*, which consisted of creating a situation based on getting 450 people to come to the woods in the town of Inza with their cars in order to produce an artificial traffic jam. In this project there were collaborators at different levels: institutions, which made the project possible at a logistical and budgetary level, and collaboration with the people of Inza, where the project was carried out. The entire town worked together to create the traffic jam and the social event surrounding it: the mayor frying peppers, a local neighbor brought cider... Everybody brought what they knew or what they wanted to and, and from there, we all worked together.

Of course, there was also the participation of the people who came by car and created the traffic jam. Through the many different collaborative tasks with the people, small social communities were formed among the participants that, in turn, made up the larger temporary community. It created an emotional bond with the project that transcended the level of mere participation.

**What does collaborative practice consist of in your view? Do you consider your work or any of your projects to include this artistic dimension?**

In England, the social art phenomenon is very widespread and the term is used as if it were almost synonymous with collaborative art. Within this context, it is interesting to read the essay by Fulya Erdemci on my exhibition *Desplazamiento* (Displacement), at the Koldo Mitxelena cultural center in San Sebastián, in which he highlights that I do not make social art because I do not work with specific communities. In effect, what I attempt to create with my projects are unusual meeting points that also contribute to creating temporary communities, which can play an important social role by creating a space in which we construct a shared reality, at the same time respecting everyone's different realities. However, in the same respect, they have a clear formalization in mind, which is very important in my work. The works are based on an (at times intrinsic) idea in order to then achieve formalization. The work that is produced functions by itself.

One example is *Polder Cup*, an event in which an announcement was made for people to come in and hold a soccer game in the polders of Holland, dried-up

marshes used for agricultural purposes, in which the soccer fields are crisscrossed by water channels. Polder Cup came about in response to an invitation by the Witte de With in Rotterdam to carry out an intervention on its façade. And this formal commission became the starting point for a broader project that created a temporary community. In general, my participatory projects arise from these sorts of constellations: a collaborative proposal between an institution and myself in which I transform its usual functions, using the project to force its social involvement to surpass the customary limits of an artistic institution. For example, the Witte de With Center was turned into a site for signing up and creating the teams for the Polder Cup tournament.

To sum up, obviously I am interested in all of the social actions taking place around the events I produce, and this year it has even been designed in such a way that the institutional and individual collaborators can contribute new perspectives as a result of the action. At this performative level, there is undoubtedly a social and collaborative facet to my work. However, there is also a very clear formalization that goes beyond just the specific dynamics of the project itself. This formalization is also meant to generate new perspectives, but through the objectual and formal in addition to the experiential. This two-faceted dimension of my projects is also reflected in their formalization, which could be summarized as *zoom-out* and *zoom-in*: aerial images that document the environment's transformation through activity, but also specific images of the social moment and the individualities that comprise it.

**You have occasionally been defined as a “stage director” who carries out her work as if it were a “staged scene.”**

I can in fact be the stage director, as in, for example, *Piscine Saint George*, in which I set very specific guidelines. However, each participant's individual experience in the project is essential, regardless of whether I am directing the scene. The formal is what endures across time, but the foundation underlying it is this social “happening.” And that foundation also has another life that is lived independently. The action does not end at any specific moment. Ten years after *Ataskoa*, people still remember and talk to me about why they took part.

p.20, 21: Maidier López, 366 *Sillas* (366 Chairs), Madrid, 2007







## Interview with DEMOCRACIA

by Ana García Alarcón

DEMOCRACIA is a work team founded in 2006 in Madrid by its two members, Pablo España and Iván López. Their artistic practice is centered on discussing ideas and forms of action and in approaches engaged with social reality. In this way, they visualize certain aspects of our everyday lives and generate viewpoints and dialogues that invite viewers to become active participants and reflect upon issues of our surroundings. DEMOCRACIA regularly collaborates with different collectives to speak about the problems we face, proposing a production based on a concern for the increasing staging of spaces of coexistence.

—[www.democracia.com.es](http://www.democracia.com.es)

### **What role does collaborative artistic practice have for DEMOCRACIA, which also works collectively as an artistic agent?**

Before answering that, we should make clear our position that, though it may seem somewhat maximalist, also defines our view of collaborative creation: every work of art is the result of a collaborative process that means more than just understanding production processes in which many different agents may have been involved, but also includes the reception of the work. In other words, if a certain artistic practice becomes relevant, it is because a specific audience or community places a value on that practice and appropriates it for itself, causing it to have meaning. This factor, which has to do with expectation (with public interest), is often ignored because of the import of the idea, which we don't share, of the spectator as a passive agent. It also has to do with this tired, romantic idea of the author as genius. However, as we say, if there is a community that makes a specific practice its own and instills it with relevance, then the creative process is always collective.

Now, let us imagine that this question regarding collaborative artistic practice is more closely related to specific work with communities in which a project is being carried out and, in turn, the project involves a real interest among cultural mediators and managers in these types of practices. If this were the case, we would have to ascertain to what extent these practices act as surrogates for true political exercises, which become neutralized under the category of "contemporary art," with the intention of bestowing a feeling of participation that is later denied outside the realm of art itself. Take, for instance, actions sponsored by cultural entities that are given legal status despite being illegal when they are performed in everyday life, creating the paradox that an institution can provide legal walls to certain urban artists while at the same time graffiti is harshly punished.

DEMOCRACIA functions based on a solid core of two people who design the collective's agenda, but around them lie concentric rings of collaborators. The first ring of stable collaborators, related with the production of texts, design,

video editing, music, and photography, maintain their own autonomy within the end goals of each project, while at the same time they form the collective itself and share its objectives. With the second ring of one-off collaborators we carry out a series of temporary activities that end with the completion of a specific project. This would be the case of the different communities or other groups with which we cooperate, who also play a role in aesthetic production.

Our work in the public sphere has led us to seek out collaborative projects with different groups, collectives, and communities that have a shared objective, but sometimes, after our field work, we end up taking action without them, because we determine that a consensus-based solution, the tendency toward which all collaborative practices lean, would have diminished the radical nature of the communicative action in question.

**What role is played by this second ring of external collaborators in DEMOCRACIA's work? I mean, in projects such as *Ne vous laissez pas consoler with the Ultramarines of the Girondins football team of Bordeaux*, or *Ser y Durar (Being and Lasting)* with parkour practitioners?**

The role they acquire is that of direct collaborators, but the nature and degree of involvement varies, because there is not just one standard way to work that is then applied in the same way in all situations. It depends on the context. As for the examples you mentioned, with the Ultramarines, in effect, this turned into a full-fledged cooperation in which we sought out a language to reflect a shared ideology of an emancipatory nature. The Ultramarines collaborated with us to create the work at both the conceptual level—because they were being self-represented in terms to which they were not accustomed aesthetically—and the tactical level, because they applied their own communication tools when it came time to distribute the resources produced as merchandising items for soup kitchens.

We are not sure whether the case of *Ser y Durar* could be included within this category of collaborative art that seeks to delimit the community actually involved. In our collaborative work with the parkour group, we sought different goals, but we converged in an alliance of interests: on our side, there was, among other issues, an interest in introducing a political message into

an urban subculture that regularly presents itself as being apolitical, whereas the parkour group had the need to produce an audiovisual product showcasing its activities.

**To what extent do the collaborating agents of your projects actually form part of the work in which they are involved? Does it go so far that you could call it “co-authorship”?**

Of course, there is always co-authorship, as in the case of the Ultramarines we just discussed, or the parkour project, because we adopted their own aesthetics and did not use something created by ourselves, in terms of both the uniform design and in the editing of a video that respected the cultural grammar of audiovisuals related with this urban sport. The whole reason for doing this is that we wanted the work to get disseminated within the community of that specific subculture.

There are also certain processes in which a portion of our production is used by other collectives for social purposes. When they appropriate it for themselves, they add new layers of meaning: for example, in Mexico, our *Estado Asesino* (Killer State) and *Libertad para los muertos* (Freedom for the Dead) signs were used in the “Marches for Peace and Justice with Dignity” in Ciudad Juárez; our logo for the *Sin Estado* (Stateless) project was used by the CNT in Jaén to make T-shirts for their self-managed entity, and in Manresa, the Bages per a Tothom association produced an episode of its television program by evaluating the impact of the *Subtextos* (Subtexts) project in the city along with the local Moroccan community. This was quite interesting because, though *Subtextos* was created without the Arab-speaking community's collaboration, the way in which they perceived the intervention helped add new levels of significance to the project.







**Maria Mur Dean** directs *consonni*, an art producer which works from Bilbao. Since 1996, *consonni* have been inviting artists to carry out projects that do not adapt to the exhibition format. They investigate formulas for expanding concepts such as curatorship, production, programming and publishing through practices in contemporary art. From 2015 to 2016, *consonni* have been producing and directing *LaPublika*, an art research laboratory which analyses how art can create a public sphere.

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*Impossible Glossary* is an editorial project by **hablarenarte** that will grow steadily until the close of the CAPP project, planned for the end of 2018. This digital edition of June 2016 is comprised of seven independent chapters:

### *Agents*

"Constellations, Glossaries, and Functions"  
Es Baluard, Museo d'Art Modern i Contemporani de Palma

"Vanishing Points"  
Javier Montero

Interviews with Núria Güell and María Ruido

### *Autonomy*

"Autonomy and Modes of Relation"  
Jordi Claramonte

Interviews with Rogelio López Cuenca and Alexander Ríos

### *Authorship*

"Going Beyond Artistic Authorship"  
Diego del Pozo Barriuso

Interviews with Christian Fernández Mirón and Left Hand Rotation

### *Collaboration*

"Collaboration is Inevitable"  
María Mur Dean

Interviews with Maider López and DEMOCRACIA

### *Context*

"Walking in Ice, Artistic Practices in Context"  
Francisca Blanco Olmedo

Interviews with El Banquete and DosJotas

### *Work*

"Down to work! Ways of Doing and Activating within the Social Network"  
Selina Blasco y Lila Insúa

Interviews with Juanli Carrión and David Crespo

### *Return*

"The Return Is the Common"  
Haizea Barcenilla

Interviews with Alberto Flores (Makea Tu Vida) and Mawatres

The Impossible Glossary will be expanded over the coming years, the contents of which will be published digitally at [www.cappnetwork.eu](http://www.cappnetwork.eu) and [www.hablarenarte.com/capp](http://www.hablarenarte.com/capp). A selection of all the texts will be published in a paper edition in November 2018.

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