

IMPOSSIBLE GLOSSARY

G O A I
L S R O

Context

I P S B E
M O I L

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Walking in Ice, Artistic Practices in Context

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The Collective Condition of Context

Working within and with context would seem to be one way to rethink the question of the social function of art and its place in the public sphere.¹ Art practices responsive to setting are called upon to address the problems and issues of life in the city, which, according to Manuel Delgado, is the space where “individuals and groups define and structure their relationships with power; submitting to it, but also disobeying or ignoring it through all kinds of self-organized formations.”² As such, art practices can contribute to the creation of these formations or micropolitical spaces capable of generating locally based action areas committed to reality and to its transformation. Furthermore, generating a context is creating a place for articulation where connections and networks can be established through which new imaginaries are created. It is also an experience of new forms of organization that can be transformed into experiences of citizen empowerment. Art practices can thus participate in the reactivation of the collective imagination, mobilizing and producing political subjectivities that challenge established narratives and contribute, for example, to the participation of local residents in decisions about the place they live.

When we speak of *context* within the field of art, we are referring not only to a physical environment but something much broader, which ultimately has to do with the social fabric and its cultural construction. Working with context can thus issue a call to an entire neighborhood as well as to a social movement.

* I would like to thank Olga Fernández López and Santiago Barber for helping me shape this text with her comments and corrections.

1. The title of this essay was inspired by Werner Herzog's text *Of Walking in Ice*. With respect to the title “The Collective Condition of Context,” I am referring to its collective nature, which is the result of the social and cultural constructs of people, communities, and the networks that inhabit this context, or, in other words, context as the “collective production of social order.” See Isaac Marrero, “La producción del espacio público. Fundamentos teóricos y metodológicos para una etnografía de lo urbano,” (*con*)textos. Revista d'antropologia i investigació social, no. 1 (May 2008), p. 74.

2. We understand the city in a broad sense, as a population center with its own administrative authority, regardless of whether, given its size, it may be referred to by another name. Manuel Delgado, “De la ciudad concebida a la ciudad practicada,” *Archipiélago: Cuadernos de crítica de la cultura*, no. 62 (2004), p. 9.

To describe this in terms of the discipline of art, we could allude to the “outside” of the art institution, an outside that broadens, extends, destabilizes, or even dissolves the traditional idea of the art space, and re-signifies it through new relationships with its social context.³

As Jesús Carrillo points out, “Collaborative work in situ would seem to allow for an effective articulation of art practice in the social space, providing a way out of the dead end to which late modernism and postmodern cartographies had arrived in their aesthetic reflections on space.”⁴

However, far from being a utopian territory where art leaves behind its self-absorption and rejoins life—in sites with no real place⁵—working in dialogue with context means addressing the challenges, contradictions, and tensions that permeate a specific place. But just merely treading the slippery ground of collaboration does not in itself legitimize it; for this, one must experience and critique the collaborative practice itself.

The past thirty years have witnessed in Spain a gradual legitimization of collaborative art practices, the development of which can be situated within critical and public art, social and educational shifts, and the new institutionalism. Although the precedent for these practices can be found in the first act action groups of the late sixties and early seventies, typically expressed in terms of political or activist art⁶, it was only in the nineties that the notion of collaboration came into more frequent use with the emergence of a series of artistic and cultural experiences, both individual and collective, that would renew a desire to impact actively on a given territory and social context from a critical approach.

While outside of Spain a wide range of terms has been used to refer to this kind of art, such as Suzanne Lacy's “new genre of public art,” within Spain the term most commonly used by academics, artists, and institutions is “collaborative practices,” together with the terminology that identifies these practices with a

context.⁷ Thus, in searching for an appropriate term, was coined “arte en contexto” (contextual art), suggested by Jordi Claramonte in his book of the same name, to refer to socially and politically articulated practices “that could be characterized by the care put into the productive and political contextualization of their work.” Contextual art would be shaped by the modes of relations it generates.⁸

Also with a specific focus on contextual practice and addressing a range of collaborative practices are the publications by the Transductores collective, particularly their third book. This volume provides a broad range of experiences in Spain, and seeks to share methodologies and tools for location-based work from fields traditionally seen as rather distant from one another, such as academia and centers of art, and through different layers, such as production, mediation, curatorship, and research.⁹

From New Social Movements to Citizen Initiatives

The significance of art practices that adopt collective processes in order to address certain social issues can be found in the political dimension of intervening in public space. In this sense, and as a reflection of underlying power relations, public space remains a crucial arena for contemporary aesthetic debate, a space for action and reinterpretation, and a laboratory for new forms of criticism and revindication through diverse means. In Spain, most of these forms of protest are found within the historical culture and in the creation of a dissident space, to which, in way or another, artistic practice now belongs.

The 1990s saw the emergence of new social movements as well as the resurgence of community-based organizations that were threatened and weakened during the Franco era and that remained in a fragmented state during

3. In order to visualize political, social, and financial systems that often remain invisible, hidden, or unknown, useful tools do exist, such as Bureau d'Etudes' *An Atlas of Agendas: Mapping the Power, Mapping the Commons* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2014), or other visualization projects such as “Visualizar” by Medialab Prado, <<http://medialab-prado.es/visualizar>>.

4. Jesús Carrillo, “Espacialidad y arte público,” in *Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*, ed. Paloma Blanco et al. (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), p. 135.

5. “Utopias are sites with no real place,” from Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), p. 24. Originally a conference given in French entitled “Des espaces autres,” Cercle des d'études architecturales, 14 March 14, 1967, and published in *Architecture Mouvement Continuité (AMC)*, no. 5 (October 1984).

6. See Nina Felshin, *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), pp. 8–29.

7. Some of the most commonplace terms are “community arts,” “participatory art” (C. Bishop); “collaborative art,” “socially engaged art” and “dialogical aesthetics” (G. Kester); “relational aesthetics” (N. Bourriaud); “littoral art” (B. Barber); “collective artistic praxis” (M. Kwon); “social practice” (E. Gold); “placemaking” (J. Jacobs, W. H. Whyte, W. Berry); “useful art” (T. Bruguera); “contextual art” (P. Ardenne); “Kontext Kunst” (P. Weibel); “post-autonomous art practices” (N. García Canelini); “situated practice” and “connective aesthetics” (S. Gablik).

8. Jordi Claramonte, *Arte de contexto* (San Sebastián: Nerea, 2011), p. 93. Though published in 2011, the issue of what was to be understood as collaborative art practices had been under discussion since the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of the most interesting examples is the Reunión 03 seminar (Universidad Internacional de Andalucía [UNIA], 2003), at which over thirty collectives and people working on “art practices of social interference” come together, and at which was held one of the first conferences dedicated to collaborative art, organized by La Fiambrera Barroca (Curro Aix y Santiago Barber), entitled “Ora et colabora. Mesa poliédrica en torno al arte colaborativo,” <http://ayp.unia.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=193>

9. Antonio Collados and Javier Rodrigo, *Transductores 3. Prácticas artísticas en contexto. Itinerarios, útiles y estrategias*, Antonio Collados and Javier Rodrigo eds. (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 2015).

the 1980s. Citizen movements were thus reborn, and in particular the neighborhood movement, which would play an important role in sharing its experiences in civil action, a role often ignored by official narratives.¹⁰ At the same time, a new wave of squatting and self-organized social centers coincided with increasing numbers of nonprofit associations and organizations as well as independent art and cultural centers. These last would gradually introduce a more collective, socially oriented focus to art and would come to play an important role, functioning more or less free from governmental influence.¹¹

Out of this breeding ground, where there was an urgent need for the revision of the dominant discourses of the institutions and where diverse means of resistance and of creating conditions of possibility—of “doing not waiting”—were flourishing, emerged a rich landscape of artistic initiatives that sought a greater connection to context. Paloma Blanco has described how in the 1990s a large number of collaborative practices “articulated new forms of intervention in the public arena with varying degrees of effectiveness and importance.”¹² It was here that artistic practices found a development path with an enormous critical potential, which meant identifying the context via social movements and initiatives and finding expression within them, in other words, forming part of their structure of protest and revindication as well as their constituent processes. On one side, strategies were adopted from social movements that helped to more effectively articulate their practices, while on the other, these movements were influenced through their way of working and the introduction of new discourses and symbolic frameworks.¹³ As a result, as pointed out by Marcelo Expósito, collaborative practices have been identified as one of the two critical currents in the repoliticization of aesthetic practices in Spain since the mid-1990s, specifically the reestablishment of ties between the art world and the reorganized social movements.¹⁴ In this regard, it is interesting to see, for example, the connections to some of the arguments used by the autonomist movement, such as the demand for direct participation and horizontality in order to achieve a social activation

of political power, a mistrust of institutions, or many of its strategies and tactics developed in dialogue with the specific realities of their context. The truth is, however, that collaborative practices searching for an effective implementation in social space are stimulated by methodologies and tools from outside the art world, not only from the activist community but also from other disciplines and modes of cultural production, or those that are produced through exchanges with other fields of knowledge.

Some examples of art's convergence with social movements can be seen in the work of collectives such as Agustín Parejo School in their action *Sin vivienda* (Homeless) (1991), in which the group demonstrated alongside *Vecinos sin Vivienda*, an association representing residents without a home, in the streets of Málaga; and La Figuera Crítica, Barcelona, which was born from a collaboration with the Plataforma Cívica d'Associacions de Veïns (Civic Platform of Neighborhood Associations) to protest against the Barça 2000 project. Another example worth mentioning is La Fiambrera in the modalities of Obrera (Madrid), Barroca (Sevilla), and Garrofera (Valencia), whose work has meaningfully stimulated these movements. La Fiambrera's participation in different antiglobalization demonstrations attests to their identification with the notion of the context as well as their intervention within it through the concept of creating a global public sphere.¹⁵ And yet, most of their work is expressed in a commitment to their most immediate and everyday context, a space also dominated by capitalism and its urban policies and speculative ventures, and where they develop some of their most important strategies of denunciation and articulation. Experiences such as those of *Alameda de Hércules* in Seville¹⁶ or *El Lobby Feroz* (The Ferocious Lobby, Madrid, 1998) represent interesting examples of a social mobilization to combat a problem affecting an entire neighborhood, and which consisted of distinct actions and artistic interventions in public spaces as a means to publicize conflicts and denounce urban speculation.¹⁷

10. See Vicente Pérez Quintana and Pablo Sánchez León, eds., *Memoria ciudadana y movimiento vecinal. Madrid 1968–2008* (Madrid: Catarata, 2009).

11. An interesting example is Espacio Tangente (Burgos) that, since 2002, organizes the *Foro Arte y Territorio*, which is a discursive space addressing issues such as territory in the creation of identity, or artistic and political interventions in the urban environment, and with a scope of work that embraces questions such as citizen participation in art actions within public space. See <http://www.espaciotangente.net>.

12. Paloma Blanco, “Prácticas artísticas colaborativas en la España de los años noventa,” *Desacuerdos*, no. 2 (2005), p. 192.

13. La Fiambrera have argued this position on different occasions.

14. The other current would be that of biopolitical production through the analysis of gender and sexual difference, although this does not mean that the two currents are mutually exclusive, as can be seen in the examples of the LSD collective or the Radical Gai group. See Marcelo Expósito, “La imaginación política radical. El arte, entre la ejecución virtuosa y las nuevas clases de luchas,” *Desacuerdos*, no. 2, p. 148.

15. The best-known example of this is Las Agencias (2001), which used the entire art production apparatus to demonstrate against the summit of the World Bank in Barcelona.

16. See Santi Barber et al., *El Gran Pollo de la Alameda. Cómo nació, creció y se resiste a ser comido. Una docena de años de lucha social en el barrio de la Alameda* (Seville: Consejo de Redacción del Gran Pollo de la Alameda, 2006), which shows some of the strategies and actions used and knowledge generated by the collectives, social movements, and people in this district of Seville. More information on the Gran Pollo de la Alameda (Freaking Out on the Alameda) can be found at their website: <http://www.nodo50.org/granpollodelaalameda/pollo.html>.

17. La Fiambrera maintain that “Anything that wants to go by the name of a context-based practice today has to be conceived as work that collaborates with the social and political movements that structure the social space where the ‘work’ is to take place.... It's not enough to make poetical allusions to kind people or folk—you have to shape a space where you are complicit with people who know how to make a political stand. Whether the social movements this happens in are highly structured or spontaneous, our work has to be effective and have a virtual political impact, while we maintain the rigor of formally realizing it in such a way that adds to its strength.” Fuera de. Revista de Arte. Nueva época, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2000), p. 44; reprinted in “*Documentos*,” *Desacuerdos*, no. 8 (2014), pp. 309–12.

The platform *Salvem el Cabanyal* is another example of a social struggle to save an urban neighborhood, this in Valencia, threatened by the implementation of a development plan that deliberately caused its degradation and disregarded citizen demands. In a similar style, and since 1998 they organize the festival *Cabanyal Portes Obertes*. A broad collective of artists and residents participates in art interventions that invite people into the neighborhood streets and homes to educate them not only about the conflict but also about life in the area. These experiences, along with *reHAB(l)iTAR Lavapiés* (Re-structure and Inhabit Lavapiés)—organized by social movements in Lavapiés, a district in Madrid, and other groups within the Red de Colectivos de Lavapiés such as La Fiambrera, Zona de Acción Temporal, Cruce and Public-Art—represent some of the most important instances of self-managed public art in the Spanish context. In parallel to this and in response to the possibility of working within public space, one can envision the increasingly common presence of festivals that attempt to break out of the logic of the public monument to incorporate more contextual, participatory projects.¹⁸

These ground-breaking experiences organized from a broad social base became catalysts for action, not only bringing communities together but also contributing to their construction and definition. A celebration of public space is a reclamation of a common spatiality in which art functions as a generator of the public sphere. It is a relational space in which rather than an inspiration for a formal proposal or a representation, context is understood as a commitment to the social, political, and cultural dimensions of this space. They are projects that treat art as a critical gesture planned on the ground, developing direct actions based on the participation and collaboration of a population awakened by a problem that directly affects them. Art thus comes to represent an act of citizenship, and through the empowered image of traditionally stigmatized neighborhoods makes it possible to resignify urban space. And yet while artistic practices contribute to a symbolic restructuring and a mobilization of public opinion, one cannot assume that this is an ideal framework of emancipation. In this sense, it is essential to reflect on who capitalizes on, and in what way, the work and productivity of this community, along with what other agents, languages, and methodologies come into play in these processes.

18. One example would be *Idensitat*, the first edition of which took place in 1999 under the name *Art Pública Calaf*, following an international call for projects that understand creation as “a work process connected to a particular space, and a specific context, which advances proposed mechanisms of involvement in the social sphere.” <<http://idensitat.net/en/what-is-id>>.

As we said at the outset, there has been a proliferation in recent decades of initiatives open to dialogue with contextual problem areas, whether through calls for public art (*Idensitat*, *Intracity*, *Mad*, *Madrid abierto*) or through institutional programming (*Medialab Madrid*, *Medialab Prado*, *Intermediæ Matadero*). There also exists a wealth of critically oriented collaborative artistic practices (*Democracia*, *Left Hand Rotation*), cultural platforms that develop dialogic strategies in collaboration with agents and associations networks at the intersection of art, critical pedagogies, and community work (*Transductores*, *LaFundició*, *Sinapsis*), and groups that are especially focused on audiovisual production (*Subtramas*, *ZEMOS98*, *Sitesize*). Also making their presence felt are architecture collectives that labor with a consideration of social context and that work extensively in collaborative processes (*Recetas urbanas*, *Todo por la praxis*, *Basurama*, *Zuloark*, *Hackitectura*, *El Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas*, *Hiria Kolektiboa*). In recent years, in fact, projects related to architecture have proliferated more than others in Spain, as evidenced by the presence of over ninety such initiatives from our country alone, albeit many with a transdisciplinary focus, affiliated with *Arquitecturas Colectivas*, an international network that promotes the collective construction of urban space.¹⁹

These collaborative practices occur within a broad field of action, reclaiming public space through ironic proposals that denounce or give visibility to problem areas, such as the neglect of emblematic neighborhoods and buildings and, in general, the effects of gentrification. Also common are projects for the planning of infrastructures for citizen use attending to specific certain social needs; the creation of situations and the facilitation of processes that promote the formation of political, sharing, and educational communities; and the production of spaces, whether through long-term interventions or through temporary strategies for artistic occupation that often turn into stable projects for the micro-transformation of urban areas. In these practices, context is the site not only of the action, intervention, or presentation but also of experience, process, and reciprocal exchange; the artistic work comes together with a multiplicity of sensibilities, knowledges, needs, and expectations. They create complicities and commitments, meaningful relationships and experiences of which perhaps the most interesting are the possibility of involving a variety of agents and organizations, from grassroots initiatives to institutions, not only from artistic or cultural fields but all those that play a role in a specific context; and the ability to cre-

19. See <http://www.arquitecturascolectivas.net>.

ate alliances out of the many facets of collective experience and in which, finally, the commons takes on a significance.

These experiences are taking place concurrently with and influenced by a notable shift in the social and political context in Spain. In recent years, the reality of a more greatly mobilized society propelled not only by such meaningful phenomena as 15M but also by contemporary experiences of citizen empowerment represent new stages and possibilities of action for collaborative artistic practices. We live in a time when debate over the public sphere is proliferating, and we are witnessing increasingly more initiatives and spaces for citizens to meet, revealing a spirit of social collaboration unknown just a few years ago.²⁰ These social spaces provide a network of possibilities yet to be identified, and a location where new links between artistic and social practices can be projected. These are new modes of thought and of political action in order to burst the banks of the social, artistic, and urban.²¹

The social practice of art, with a long tradition outside Spain, was until just few years ago a marginal issue, frequently ignored by critics and practically nonexistent in institutional programming. While in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium these practices existed on the margins of the accredited art world as exercises critical of its hegemonic structures, and often closely related to activism and at times becoming precisely that, today, the opening up of art to social issues and collaborative practices seems unavoidable. Furthermore, a body of theory is now taking shape, although this still suffers from the absence of a genealogy that would allow a dialogue between present developments and the most relevant experiences from previous decades. This shift to the social and collective clearly represents not only an opportunity but also a commitment by and a challenge to both artistic practices and institutions to amplify their significance in the public sphere.

20. The website of Vivero de Incitativas Ciudadana (viveroiniciativasciudadanas.net) has a long list of some of these experiences that have taken place in Spain. In Madrid, the platform Los Mardriles (losmadriles.org) has a digital map (civics.es) showing over a hundred neighborhood initiatives. One of the most recent, relevant social initiatives in Madrid is Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela (evarganzuela.org), a group which brings together different social movements and residents of the Arganzuela district to reclaim the self-management of the Legazpi fruit and vegetable market. Since 2014, when the group began, it has made a significant contribution to articulating and reflecting on similar experiences in other contexts, actively collaborating with other initiatives both locally and internationally. Similarly, the first Encuentro de Iniciativas Ciudadanas (Meeting of Citizens' Initiatives) of the Red de Espacios Ciudadanos (<http://www.espaciosciudadanos.org>) in January 2016 brought together La Casa Invisible (Malaga), LaFábrikatodotalavida (Santos de Maimona), the Ateneu Popular 9 Barris (Barcelona), and CSC Luis Buñuel (Zaragoza).

21. See Andrés Walliser, "New Urban Activisms in Spain: Reclaiming Public Space in the Face of Crises," *Policy and Politics* 41, no. 3 (2013), pp. 329–50.

Interview with El Banquete

by hablarenarte

El Banquete, founded in Madrid in 2012, is a research and creation collective that develops projects related to everyday experience as an artistic value. Comprised of Alejandría Cinque, Raquel G. Ibáñez, Marta van Tartwijk, and Antonio Torres, their work confronts the private with the public and challenges systems of both collective and individual power. Their work methodology consists of a political rereading of our daily acts and our everyday environment. El Banquete's projects are articulated as playful appropriations that give rise to subjective experiences—provoking reflection, stimulating critical thought, and empowering people as individuals.

—www.colectivoelbanquete.tumblr.com

Your projects often require long-term research processes. Are they based on theoretical interests, or is the point of departure a real-world context?

We understand research as an expanded field. It is the process that lays the foundation for our projects that, in turn, are born out of common concerns, interests, and desires, between us or in the context in which we live. Thus it's difficult to separate our practice into theoretical research and fieldwork, because our projects are designed based on an intertwining of them both, growing out of ideas or dilemmas that can exist both on a theoretical plane and in our immediate context.

How do you choose the contexts with which you want to work?

There is a common thread in our work that results from our interest and concern as citizens of Madrid, more so than a search for contexts. The phrasing of the question implies that we are severed from the context and that it is marginal to our work. Yet most of the contexts with which we've worked are spaces we have had more or less peripheral contact with in our daily lives and into which we were motivated—primarily by a desire, will, and interest—to explore more deeply, and out of that research a project emerged. Thus, while still a factor, our alterity is somewhat relative. A good example of this might be *Obra Pública* (Public Work), a project that developed around an equestrian statue in Plaza de Legazpi, right in front of Matadero Madrid, that had been covered for years. Ultimately the project came about because we visited Matadero regularly and implicating ourselves in the life developing within this space. From this contact and our frequently passing of the covered sculpture, piqued our curiosity and led us to inquire, investigate, keep digging, until we finally realized that we had a potentially interesting project.

Obra Pública isn't a typical collaboration, in that we act as artist-researchers, looking for specific agents who give us certain information, which we then ultimately translate and shape as we wish. The collaboration takes place

when an encounter occurs and impressions are shared and, through this process, we can start collecting different voices. However, the question is: Are we simply loudspeakers? What we know for sure is that we are gatherers, and gathering information always requires some kind of collaboration, regardless of how that information generated is later formalized.

There is also a question connected to the genetic code of the collective, in which this need and desire to join and collaborate with the other forms part of our daily activity, such that approaching other groups is fairly normalized and natural. Nevertheless, each context involves a different approach: we analyze the particularities, always keeping in mind that being dependent upon other agents in our projects demands on our part honesty, direct communication, and a clear commitment to a collaboration that is much more than simple participation.

Does working in collaboration with heterogeneous groups facilitate the creation of new contexts?

Once a collaboration begins and a certain permeability is generated, it is inevitable that the context will be modified by a presence and a change in activity, or use, and that ultimately other possible contexts will be reconfigured by the artistic proposal. Although in many instances an added difficulty, the heterogeneity of the groups typically enriches the work and, indeed, facilitates the emergence of new contexts that can expand a project, or even bring a new one into being.

What for you is a collaborative artistic practice? Would you consider that your work falls within this category?

Even though we perceive the viewer as a participating or activating agent, and we work with others in relation to context, most of our projects are not conceived with an explicit collaborative intention, but making the idea of collaboration more flexible is of interest to us. Because of the type of processes we propose in developing our projects, it is inevitable that they are naturally open to this practice. This means that our research and processes

of formalization are contaminated by other collectives with a distinct focus, while we also participate as contaminating agents in their contexts or practices.

Obra Pública, for instance, was more of a confrontation: first with the sculpture, and then with the entire history of the context. The subsequent research, however, included many voices: from taxi drivers to politicians, neighbors, and other artists.

Yet in other projects there is indeed a more set collaboration. *Traspaso de Poderes* (Power Transfer), a workshop we realized together with the retirement home Centro de Mayores Benito Martín Lozano, is perhaps the clearest obvious example, because there was a precondition of collaboration: we asked the residents to teach us, a group of young people, how to knit balaclavas. We went to the home and proposed this to them, which obviously resulted in a need to negotiate. There was a lot of reticence: “Why a balaclava, if what I want to make are some booties or a scarf.” And that’s where mediation came in. Also, in this particular instance, there was no need or desire to reach a final outcome; and even though we managed to make the balaclavas, what mattered to us was the encounter.

In this case we really had to seduce the participants with the idea, and although the initiative was ours, ultimately the participants threw themselves enthusiastically into the project, which placed them in the role of a figure of *power-knowledge*. It is inevitable that within every collaboration there is an asymmetry between the agents involved, as it is precisely in this difference where the appeal probably lies. But in order to speak of a collaborative practice, it is essential that both sides come out of it in some way transformed, or that it creates some kind of mutual—though not necessarily shared—benefit. That is, collaboration must be, by its very nature, bilateral, in order not to result in a dynamic of unidirectional instrumentalization.



El Banquete, *Obra Pública* (Public Work), Madrid, 2015



El Banquete, *Traspaso de poderes* (Transfer of Powers), 2013

An interview with DosJotas

by Ana García Alarcón

DosJotas (b. 1982, Madrid) intervenes in urban (but not necessarily public) spaces. He articulates a cultural and urbanistic criticism by appropriating and reinterpreting existing elements in the urban landscape, using the city as a field of artistic action and intervention. He plays the role of a social critic, addressing the gentrification of large cities, the means of social control, and citizen passivity. Context is a fundamental aspect of DosJotas' work, becoming the setting for direct intervention through which he introduces his critical discourse.

—www.dosjotas.org

Urban space is the fundamental setting for your work. Though intervention, you dialogue with different contexts. What leads you to intervene in one or another? To what degree is each setting important? Are they chosen according to each project or is it a random choice?

Context is one of the most important aspects of my work. Most of my projects depend on it because they are absolutely specific actions that are meaningful in a particular place and that would be decontextualized elsewhere. In that sense, the preliminary research is very important. I want my projects to have a direct relation with their context and I gather quite a bit of information in order to develop my ideas.

For *Ecos de barr(i)o* (Echoes of Clay/Neighborhood), a project I realized in collaboration with residents of Cuenca's San Antón neighborhood, the preliminary research was crucial in order not to simply arrive and do "my thing," regardless of what was happening. For me it was fundamental that the local inhabitants made the project their own. *Ecos de barr(i)o* began with a residency I was awarded without having specified the idea I wanted to develop. Once I arrived in Cuenca I began investigating the neighborhood and chatting with the locals, and, from there, having noticed the chaotic signage in that part of the city, I had the idea of changing the signs that indicate street names. That is when I decided to involve the local community, and to limit my own participation to suggesting that the new signs imitate the aesthetic of the original ones in this historical neighborhood, but with new names suggested by the residents.

In addition, we first held a ceramic painting workshop, and after that the local inhabitants took over. So, in a way, they were in charge and I could disappear. Later, I started to install the new signs in public space without the municipal government's permission and following the instructions of the residents. So that strikes me as total cooperation. The idea of *Ecos de barr(i)o* was to get people to identify more closely with their neighborhood and to give the residents of San Antón, symbolically, a power they did not have.

In your interventions you generate subtle changes in urban fixtures, in advertising spaces, and in the streets themselves. What role does the casual observer play in these pieces? What is the determining factor in each setting?

Public sphere has the great advantage of reaching many more people and, above all, the general public, and not only viewers in an art context. My interventions could be defined as the language of power against power. In a certain sense they function like advertising, with the difference that ads shout about the products they are selling to us and these interventions whisper reflections.

When a passerby encounters one of my interventions, my main hope is not that he or she interprets it as an artistic action but rather as an anonymous effort to communicate an idea: a reflection that points out something obvious yet obviated.

Could we say that you realize a collaborative artistic practice? To what point can these individual interventions come to metamorphose into collaborative processes?

I think all artistic processes have a collaborative aspect, a sort of collective production. There are some projects in which this is more evident, such as *Ecos de barr(i)o*, but others that I conceived as individual works also seem collective to me, although in a more symbolic than tangible way, as they are part of a social fabric without which they would not be possible.

There are also individual projects that are subsequently amplified. For example, I carried out an intervention for the Day Against Gender-Based Violence that consisted of putting sexist statements made by politicians on trash cans. Three weeks later a feminist collective in Madrid did the same thing with better-designed and more beautiful posters than mine, and that struck me as perfect. My work consists of providing tools, of simply proposing something to be shared so that people can take it and use it for their specific vindications. In that sense, even when my projects are individual they have a collective aspect: providing tools to people who want to do certain things.

There has been considerable theorizing about “context art” or “contextual art,” about the importance of including locations in artistic practice in order to transform them into places for participation and intervention. What role does urban art play in this context art?

Quite an important one, as it is completely of its time. Much of urban art takes reality as its reference, not by aesthetically representing it but by merging with it, relating to the world to which it belongs, using space and context as a means of approaching the everyday and reclaiming the real.

p.22, 23: DosJotas, *No error* (Don't Make Mistakes), from the series *Prohibiciones* (Prohibitions) Madrid, 2008



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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 and www.hablarenarte.com/capp. A selection of all the texts will be published in a paper edition in November 2018.

We hope for the widest possible dissemination of this publication. When quoting fragments or full texts, the following formula should be used: Full name of the author, "Title," in: *name of the chapter, Impossible Glossary*, ed. hablarenarte, (Madrid: hablarenarte, 2016), p. xx., see: www.hablarenarte.com/capp

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