NARRATING COLLABORATIONS

Narrating Collaborations Warsame Ali Garare, Gorka Bereziartua Mitxelena, Michael Birchall, Toni Coromina, Javier García Clavel, Samira Goddi Mendizabal, Anna Recasens

Introduction
by hablarenarte

In 2014, the Irish Create agency invited hablarenarte and eight other European members to become a part of CAPP (Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme), a network focused on the research around collaborative art, as well as the proliferation of this type of artistic practices.

hablarenarte is the only Spanish member of this European project. Aware of the recent encrease of collaborative practices in Spain, our motivation for participating in this project was primarily to foster reflexion about these practices in the field of contemporary art, as well as to offer a structure that would facilitate artists' work with communities. The project focused on three lines of action:

> —The production and promotion of four residencies
> —A line of theoretical research based on specific terms
>   and with the participation of artists and agents from the
>   sector. The result of this work was the book *Impossible Glossary*
> —Training workshops for artists and related professionals interested
>   in working with collaborative proposals

The residency program began in 2017, the third year of the CAPP network's activities. Four projects were carried out in four different Spanish cities: Huarte, Madrid, San Sebastian and Vic. Each of those projects was designed in close collaboration with local art centers: ACVic, Centro Huarte, Medialab Prado and Tabakalera, who collaborated and co-produced them with hablarenarte as part of CAPP.

The four residency projects were formulated as periods of immersion in the local artistic and community fabric in order to facilitate joint creation among cultural agents and other communities. We were especially

interested in the rapport between the artists in residence and their artistic and social context. Hence, the CAPP residencies were conceived as a tool for practical research on the idea of "the other."

As voluntary temporary outsiders, the artists in residence enjoyed an exceptional and impartial view of the specific situations that characterized their new surroundings. This generated an excellent scenario for them to analyze and reflect upon the different communities and individuals—each with their own stance—that constitute those social contexts.

The open question was how this view could lead to meaningful and practical work. Direct interaction with the local surroundings can generate idiomatic and cultural obstacles not easily resolved in the limited period of a residence. To avoid this hinderance, we did not think of these residents as creators, but rather as catalysts for generating community among local agents from both artistic and social settings, who could work together on a project for their community.

While the residencies were extremely varied in terms of subject, they all shared the same underlying structure. Each of the four projects involved a powerful local counterpart, which in three of them acted as a translator and activator of relations between the resident and the local fabric. In *Manta*, the fourth project, the residents where asked to take on a secondary role observing and advising local artists within their work. Moreover, the residencies were not conceived as single stays. Instead, residents returned to their residency locations intermittently, working both on site and from a distance, but always in contact with their local counterpart.

Another frequent concern in collaborative art projects—especially those developed during residencies of fixed durations—is that they cannot (and probably should not) expect the process to lead to a tangible outcome. In such cases, it is fundamental to create a mechanism for documenting the project in order to facilitate a posterior narrative of its development and processes.

Each of the four residency projects were therefore documented, not only with audiovisual and photographic material, but also through a blog on hablarenarte's website[1]. This web included entries from the residents, their local counterparts and participants in the form of video-interviews carried out at the beginning, middle and end of the project as a means of contrasting initial expectations with final results. There were also texts by local cultural agents who approached the projects as independent and neutral outside observers.

This publication consists mainly of those observers' texts and experiences with the four residency projects. Their role was to accompany the residency with a critical eye and to write a text that combines a description of the project itself, a summary analysis of methods and results, and a more theoretical and contextualized reflection.

Manta: art, fight and learning

2016 _____

October
hablarenarte starts developing the residency concept
(Re)searching the social element in art

November 2016—January 2017
Medialab Prado hosts Dr. Michael Birchall as the first
resident of the project

2017 _____

January
Foundation of the Union of Street Vendors and
Can Collectors of Madrid

February
hablarenarte suggests a collaboration to Alexander Ríos
and Byron Maher to support their work with the manteros

February—April
Manta: art, fight and learning, with Alexander Ríos, Byron
Maher and the Union of Street Vendors, co-produced by
hablarenarte and Medialab Prado

July
I National meeting of Street Vendors. Medialab Prado hosts
street-vendor residents Lamine Bathily (Barcelona), Ibra Diaw
(Bilbao), Samba Coundoul (Málaga) and Faye Fadel (Valencia)
Round-table talk *Why Manteros?* and manifestations in front
of Madrid City Hall and the Spanish Parliament

November
Medialab Prado hosts residents Warsame Ali Garare (Ireland)
and Betto Snay Bakongo (Bilbao, Spain), in order to meet with
the Union and take part in public activities

December
Co-cooking events and cooking courses for African food,
run by the manteros. Publicity campaign in Madrid against
institutional racism

2018

January
The Union takes part in a meeting with other street-vendor collectives from France and Italy with members of the European Parliament in order to claim reforms in European immigration policy

March
Death of the mantero Mame Mbaye, who died of a stroke after being chased by the Police through Madrid. Riots in Madrid city centre

May
Meeting of the Union with the Mayor of Madrid

"It is important to know and make known the story
these people have to tell" (Alexander Ríos and Byron Maher)

Through its participation in the CAPP project, hablarenarte undertook practical research on how art can become a useful tool for working in adverse social contexts. That was the reason for launching *(Re)searching the Social Element in Art*, and it proposed that Alexander Ríos and Byron Maher temporarily link this line of work to their personal project with the Union of Street Vendors and Can Collectors of Madrid. Ríos and Maher's involvement with this collective of primarily West Africans—many without legal residence in Spain—consists of a continuous effort to support its members' struggle to improve their situation. This was the initial impetus for *Manta: art, fight and learning,* a project that reflects fundamentally on decision-making and collaborative processes that involve people with very different cultures and life stories.

Manta: art, fight and learning took place between May 2017 and April 2018 and was co-produced by hablarenarte and Medialab Prado. The project was preceded by a research residency with Dr. Michael Birchall and its external observers were Warsame Ali Garare and Dr. Alan W. Moore (text not included in this publication). At the time of this publication, Alexander and Byron continue to work with the Sindicato.

Institutionalising the Social?
By Dr. Michael Birchall

This essay will consider the rise of collaborative practices both in and outside of the conventional museum model. As a consequence of the financial crisis in 2008 cultural workers have began to produce a range of projects that traverse the social, yet often, at their core seek to engage with social issues. During a recent visit to Madrid as part of a residency programme, I experienced a range of practices, collectives and organisations that comprise Madrid's cultural landscape. This discussion is rather a reflection on this period, in that it considers collaborative and participatory projects that have emerged in Madrid in recent years.

As Europe has entered into a series of crises following the 2008 Financial Crash (and arguably before this period), it seems in the context of Madrid a range of practices have emerged that encourage artists to be at the forefront of civic life. As society grapples with social inequalities, can the arts offer mechanisms for as the local context becomes weakened as a place of public provision, there is heightened tension between the site of art and its possible social functions. Indeed, the idea of intervention into a community becomes a crisis point in which notions of community and the breakdown of community are brought into relief. Hence, socially engaged art projects seek to find, where necessary, a transformative agenda for social change. This is why increasingly art projects are being managed with other collaborative partners in the fields of architecture, social activism, urban studies, and social design.

It is important to mention, Hal Foster, drawing on Deleuze and Foucault's famous exchange on representation[1], argues that irrespective of levels of participant engagement and autonomy, community-based artists may invariably (and inadvertently) aid the colonization of difference, in benevolent and well-intentional gestures of democratization. In other words, the targeting of marginalized groups leads to their becoming both subjects and co-producers of their own cultured self-appropriation in the name of their own self-affirmation. In the final reckoning, when the project 'returns' to the art world, community groups who have become involved in short and long-term projects have to contend with the abiding authorial privileges of the artist and his or her

1. Michel Foucault, Donald F. Bouchard, and Sherry Simon, *Language, counter memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, Cornell Univ. Press: Ithaca, NY, 1977.

powers of representation. Hence, Foster is critical of the way artists position themselves as an outsider who has the "institutional authority" to engage a local community in the production of the artist's self-representation. He warns that, "The quasi-anthropological role setup for the artist can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority, an evasion as often as an extension of institutional critique."[2] Indeed, biennials and commissioning bodies reap financial benefits from these collaborative projects – the projects value, or gentrify, deprived areas into "unique" locales[3].

Therefore, the role of the artist in the development of socially engaged and collaborative art practices have entered a special working alliance with the audiences they seek to work within. The curator and the institution have become part of this process, in that curators now wish to engage wider audiences in the programmes they develop. As such, we now see the curator as beginning to ascribe meaning or knowledge to a wide range of projects that become part of arts social relations to a wider society. In the context of Madrid, this can be seen at Intermediæ, a space operated by the city council, that functions as a cross-disciplinary project engaging audiences through community-led projects that build upon relationships in the local context. Projects in this context may manifest outside in the community and then be hosted by the institution; to present the process or the final outcome. It becomes unnecessary to consider who is the artist/producer and who is the participant in these processes, as they traverse the conventional divisions present in the museum context.

As the museum is no longer playing a role as an interlocutor between the locale and the community, it becomes the position of the smaller-scale, artist-run institution to take the lead and deliver innovative practices. The citizens therefore have taken the role as community activists, planners and indeed artists. As Miwon Kwon has noted:

> Community involvement meant the expanded inclusion of non-art community representatives in the selection panels and review committees of public art commissions. More significantly, it suggested a dialogue between the artist and his/her immediate audience, with the possibility of community participation, even collaboration, in the making of the artwork[4].

Socially engaged initiatives are often aimed at marginalised groups in poor areas and aim to empower the community overall, or at least ameliorate some of its difficulties. Arts response to local contexts is focused on the creation of a collaborative process that develops the consciousness of the artist and co-participants[5]. This is very much at play at Intermediæ, as a non-hierarchal structure permits such projects to take place, a dialogue is at play between the artist and the audience in the making of artwork itself; thus blurring authorship and enhancing the role of the participant. When viewers become participants in a work of art, or co-producers, there is a transition in the aesthetic considerations.

Many of the practices being developed at Intermediæ operate in the sprit of community art, particularly those discourses that took place in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s, in what Susanne Lacy called, *New Genre Public Art[6]*. The distinction between community art and socially engaged art, therefore, may institutionally still exist (community art exists outside museums, in community centres, schools and social centres; socially engaged art may take place in the same locations, but it is often verified by an art institution such as a museum or gallery, who has directly commissioned the work), but, intellectually and culturally, community art and socially engaged practice are mutually defining. What is rarely acknowledged by the defenders of socially engaged practice in the art world, however, is how many community art projects operate autonomously and 'invisibly' throughout Europe and North America.

The Madrid-based collective, El Banquete, conduct their practice through community-led projects that build upon social relations in various communities in Madrid, their project *Public work* (2014), uses a public monument in a prominent place in Madrid as a site of interest for both the political and imperial history of Spain. The marble Pegasus exists as a metaphor of the progress of the nation, yet, its position in the central roundabout has ensured that within the public consciousness there is no longer an awareness of its place within Madrid's history. By taking this statue as a focal point, a long-term project including consultations with local residents (taxi-drivers, conservationists, activists and politicians) acts as a starting point to discuss civic life in the city. Although one could say this is an on going work, an outcome for this project manifests in the form of a

2. Hal Foster, *The return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century,* MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass, 1996.
3. Ibid.
4. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004, pp. 81–822.

5. Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press: Berkeley, Calif., London, 2004.
6. Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the terrain: new genre public art*, Bay Press: Seattle, Wash, 1995.

symposium; directly addressing memories surrounding the sculpture and its place in the future of the city. Therefore, the monument has undergone a renaissance of sorts, as the connection it has with the city is both reimagined and acts as a starting point for future conversations about the placement of monuments in the city.

Projects that manifest outside the museums often face being marginalised as they may suffer from low visibility for wider audiences, particularly around having a long-term effect. However, within this realm there exists a greater sense of achievement and accomplishment as participants become connected to local issues and then may go on to develop long-term projects of their own. Therefore, perhaps this allows for an opportunity for the museum to learn from and develop projects that expand their local reach and encourage those socially engaged initiatives to grow under the expertise of the curators and educators who work at the museum. In Madrid, the most radical and interesting projects that challenge the *status quo* are happening outside of the mainstream museum context. This is due, in part to the activist and collective processes that enable smaller organisations, collectives and neighbourhood associations to develop projects without the restraints of the institution. However, the radicality associated with locally based projects feed into the consciousness of the city, and literally blur the distinction between art and life.

Arguably, the museum has undergone vast transformations as a response to artistic practices and demands by the biennial-led model of commissioning, which is present in all major institutions in Europe. In some instances, such as the Liverpool Biennial it has become commonplace for the biennial to deliver projects that transcend between those conventional boundaries of "public" and enter a relationship with the commons. It raises the question as to whether or not the museum is the right sort of context in which to engage in collaborative processes, when the very nature of the exhibition is based on a final outcome which the artist can (potentially) exhibit in another context. When the museum itself becomes a site based around process, this relationship shifts between the conventional viewer and the audience. It is here, in this tension where we see projects emerging in Madrid that enables a set of new working relationships with the technocratic processes of government, which ultimately have a transformative effect on the local context.

Furthermore, the art institution is equipped to deal with the production of art works that deliver a range of outcomes in the form of projects, yet the dependency on final outcome often prevails in this context. Therefore, cultural workers must divert their attention to other models of social interaction that do not depend on this framework, but rather subvert it into new forms of social change. The very nature of cultural production or curatorial practice is to learn from and deliver projects by artists. Beyond the walls of the museum, these practices are emerging as citizens' demand and increased engagement in artistic projects that offer long-term outputs in the form of community centres, places for learning, and artistic commissions.

The Madrid-based collective, Todo por la Praxis, operate as a laboratory for projects concerned around cultural residence, with the ambition to develop tools for generating a range of socially effective actions that benefit wider society. The group is formed by a multidisciplinary team that develops part of its work in the collaborative construction of micro-architectural or micro-urbanistic devices that allow the reclamation of public space and its collective use[7]. Their ambitious projects transcend the boundaries of art and architecture and offer new models of participatory urbanism, through collective construction workshops that generate a collaborative learning process throughout all phases of their projects. This is, of course, only made possible through the involvement of community associations that seek to change their specific neighbourhood in the reclamation of disused or misused public spaces.

In many regards their practice operates on the basis of the user experience, and eludes to Stephen Wright's, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*. In this lexicon, Wright examines the institutional context and lexicon that dominates our institutional repertoire, suggesting that this task "requires both retiring seemingly self-evident terms, while at the same time introducing a set of emergent concepts." Throughout his argument there are a range of terms, which should be dropped (such as *expert culture and ownership*), and a model of 'usership' should be adopted that underpin a new form of political subjectivity, as seen in Todo por la Praxis' work. Crucially for Wright, he is very outspoken against the framework used in museums for collection, display, and spectatorship:

7. See <www.todoporlapraxis.es/about> (Accesed 6.4.17)

Museums these days find themselves in the throes of a crisis of self-understanding, hesitating between irreconcilable museological paradigms and userships. On the one hand, their physical architecture of display is very much top down: curatorship determines content, which is oriented towards spectatorship. On the other hand, while concerned about protecting their 'vertical dignity,' to the degree that they have tried to keep pace with the musological turn in the field of culture, museums have embraced elements of 2.0 culture[8].

Consequently, if we abandon this cultural mechanism, museums are thus able to operate on the basis that users are able to make their own selections and determine their own level of participation. To that end, models of participation that place the user at the centre are able to do so beyond conventional artistic models, in that the artist and the participant enter into a dialogue that is beyond the exhibitionary framework.

This is, in part due to a shift in arts relationship to knowledge, in that artists and curators who are involved in the delivery of art activities do this in the form of knowledge and pedagogical programmes, which may not produce art objects. In this re-functioned role, the artist becomes a researcher, involved in both participation strategies and knowledge production. Their practice is not dedicated to the studio – as an object-making mission – but rather to the form of a planning role, as is usually associated with that of the educator. In this model, artistic practice and curatorial practice interact with the pedagogical and become practices delinked from their institutional associations. The pedagogical function offers an alternative methodological possibility where people can learn about a specific topic. However, this also develops into a "sociospatial, participatory activity", in that it is removed from additional market objects of education – schools, universities and colleges – in these spaces learning is seen to be "instrumentalised and disciplined"[9].

Projects, which take on pedagogical elements, such as talks, screenings, and lectures, are able to operate in a flexible way, and thus attract different audiences at each iteration. Although the overall project may be connected under one theme, the audience may elect to only attend one part of it, which is appealing to them. The diversity of the audience may also reflect the different needs of the project, which require experts who are present in the audience to contribute to and change the dialogue that is going on. What remains at stake in this new regime of knowledge and production is far beyond what is known as "the social turn" in art[10]. Socially engaged art has moved into other areas in society, operating outside of art institutions and indeed the art world. It moves beyond the norms of artistic production and into service providing, social commentary, activism, community organisations, urban design, and ecology. Twenty-five years after Suzanne Lacy coined the term "new genre public art", the art practices that constituted these practices are no longer "new" and instead they function in a system of convergence between society and art.

The development of artistic practice from site-specificity in art in the public sphere, and from community art, to socially engaged art, the self-organised forms of today, are in fact a novel form. As collaborative and collective art practices, these forms of art, move away from the methods of the studio-based modernist art, dedicated to the transformation of the aesthetic logic of specific media. Instead, these post-institutional practices continue working with the de-materialised practices of the 1960s and 70s by infusing everyday values into art. And in the process, make the practice of living and surviving, communing and networking itself into an art form[11].

8. Stephen. Wright, Nick. Aikens, and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), *Toward a lexicon of usership*, Van Abbemuseum: Eindhoven, 2013.
9. Andrea Phillips, 'Education Aesthetics', in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn*, Open Editions ; De Appel: London; Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 83–96.

10. Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, 2006, pp. 178–183.
11. Marc James Leger, *Neoliberal undead, the: essays on contemporary art and politics*, (Zero Books imprint of John Hunt Pub. Ltd: Lanham, PA, 2013).

The Role of Art in Social Contexts and with Political Issues
By Warsame Ali Garare

Overview of the Situation

The dignity of every human being is inscribed in article 1 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a promise of 'equality and dignity' for all people, in all countries across the world. The opportunity for African migrants to legally enter countries perceived to be a safe haven, is next to impossible. There are thousands who lose their lives every year in search of a place of refuge. Equally inequitable, is the fact that an unreasonably high number of migrants are detained or discriminated against and placed in conditions of hardship. These practices are happening in advanced democratic societies who themselves have significant diasporic communities, a blind spot for the governments and citizens of host countries. One possible interpretation for this could be described as 'politics of social distance', an arrangement that distinguishes "us and them", and by consequence, leads to an imposition that can easily be forced on powerless people seeking a better life. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has described this intolerable situation for migrants as 'bare life'[1], host countries enforce a state of exception outside of the normal legal framework, legalising the use of detention and incarceration.

Sadly, it is also a reality in the current climate, that those who are fortunate enough to survive threatening journeys across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, arrive to face further hardship when they are subjected to often horrendous treatment by many European receiving countries. Accordingly, the situation of African migrants who arrive in Spain, many in Madrid, have also endured cruel hardships during their journeys, they share a common struggle with others in the same situation in Southern Europe. The *manteros*, (so called in Spain because of their use of a blanket to display their merchandise) are not exempt from this either; however, what touched me most during my visit, is how their lives fade into oblivion; they are in constant fear of police crackdowns, while struggling to survive in their daily lives. Most of those I spoke to, informed me that they didn't choose to become illegal street venders or *manteros*, but had no other options; they are undocumented and cannot work legally, they are living in an enforced state of limbo, hoping

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1. Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Standford University Press, 1998.

that one day their situation will be regularized. However, the reality on the ground is that those who are caught by police on the streets, are fined, their goods seized and they are detained for deportation if they cannot show identification proving the right to reside and work in Spain.

What is The Role of Collaborative Art in?

Collaborative and socially engaged art might function in a way that is unlike the operation of state power structures, the enormity of the task in supporting migrants to live in a state of 'equality and dignity' must not deter us, but encourage us to prioritise and mobilize the values of non-hierarchical art to generate critical and creative thinking outside the box.

My expectation of art is to shed light on the unequal power-structures society is bound by as well as creating the potential of agency for migrants who have been excluded and Othered by hegemonic European migration policies. I also think art has to generate a space of potentiality, to be non-prescriptive and activist. Socially engaged art presents us with an opportunity to avoid the choke hold of neoliberal economic policies functioning outside the limitations and constraints of the mainstream galleries, and a media industry that reflects the ideological position of the wealthy. Collaborative art can reveal fresh perspectives and open up dialogues with groups like *manteros*, who are suspicious of everything that surrounds them because of a perceived immanent threat to their survival from both the state and unsympathetic citizens.

The objective of this art project with *manteros* community according to the team (Alexander Ríos & Byron Maher), was the hope that art would provide a way for the *manteros* to regain their own agency and have the confidence to tell their own stories, in a way re asserting a sense of 'home' and a promise of 'equality and dignity'. When I arrived from Ireland to participate in the project, my perception was that I would not have any difficulties to 'integrate' and contribute to the Union because I had shared a similar history having made the journey from my home in Mogadishu to reach Europe, but that assumption soon evaporated. I now realise how difficult it is to explain the objective of our project. The main objective as I understand,

is to share the tools that will encourage participants to tell their stories, their dreams and their anxieties in a 'universal language'. Alexander expressed this feeling in our first meeting. It is clear that the artistic line of this temporal art work in the framework of CAPP has its own difficulties — this is particularly acute because the idea of what art means and its potential to transform is understood very differently between the various participants. However, what is clear is that the goal of any collaborative art work is to move out of our comfort zones and deal with unfamiliar challenges.

It is important that we recognize that art can be used as a powerful advocacy to tell stories, but art can also provide a tool for self-development and personal expression, this is not a panacea for the *manteros*, but instead, an incremental step towards transformation. There is a growing need for similar projects to harness a creative process and actively assert the claim by the UN Declaration of Human Rights, a promise of 'equality and dignity' for all people.

Manta: art, fight and learning, 2017. Photos: Byron Maher

Manta: art, fight and learning, 2017. Photos: Byron Maher

Afluents

2015

July
Workshop by Santiago Cirugeda. *Urban Recycling Laboratory*

2016

October
Workshop by Francesc Muñoz. *Ordinary Landscapes, emerging heritage: the landscape as a collective creation*

November
hablarenarte starts the development of a residency concept with ACVic and A +

2017

May—June
Seila Fernández Arconada, starts a residency with A + collective, co-produced by hablarenarte and ACVic

June
17-30 June. Neighborhood workshops and start of the collaborative documentary *Afluents Visual*

July
July 4, 2017. *Converses amb el pruner*, performance and collective conversation

July 17th. *Popular Vermouth*, first neighborhood meeting on the banks of the river

September—November
Seila Fernández Arconada, *Afluents*, production residency

Social Archeology of the Mèder River, collection of images from the river archive

Floating sculptures workshop with students of El Escorial school

October
Talks and visits, *Studying the Mèder river*, quality analysis and incidents in the social and environmental environment

Initiatives linked to the conservation of the Mèder river, foundation of the river custody group

November
Debate in relation to the river and adjacent neighborhoods

Design and construction of architectural structures through neighborhood collaboration

18th November 2017. *Afluents*, final event of the residence with a neighborhood meeting on the banks of the Mèder river. Exhibition. Presentation of the collaborative documentary *Afluents Visual*

"The process we have carried out is already in the memory of Vic's inhabitants, and I want to believe that this will remain and advance." (Seila Fernández Arconada)

The QUAM workshops co-produced by hablarenarte and ACVic in the CAPP framework during 2015 and 2016 brought out the opportunity of working with and on the neighborhood adjacent to the Art Center, especially Vic's Adoberies quarter.

This challenge was issued to Seila Fernández Arconada, an artist and multidisciplinary researcher exploring collaborative and participative art methodologies, their hybrid borders and their experimentation with social processes. Along with the A+ collective—a group of artists, architects and Vic inhabitants linked by a shared interest in the Adoberies neighborhood— Fernández Arconada generated the project *Afluents*. Together, they worked with the neighborhood and other citizens initiatives to raise ecological awareness of the Mèder River that runs through the quarter as a silent witness to Vic's industrial past and present.

Afluents was carried out between May and December 2017 as a co-production of hablarenarte and ACVic. It was accompanied by external observers Toni Coromina and Anna Recasens.

An Alternative to the Postcard of Les Adoberies and the Polluted River
By Toni Coromina

All towns have a characteristic postcard, a sort of icon or showcase of their story and souls. In the case of Vic, also known as "the city of saints", it is an image of Les Adoberies (the former tanning factories that were the nerve center of the local fur industry for decades) with the Romanesque Queralt Bridge over the Mèder River and, in the background, the monumental cathedral with its imposing Romanesque bell tower. But postcards sometimes lie, omitting aspects than cannot be conveyed by a photograph, such as the ruinous state of Les Adoberies, the polluted river, the exploited workers or the stinking fumes that filled the air in this apparently idyllic setting for over a century.

Meeting Seila

One warm morning last June, I took my children to the banks of the Mèder River, beneath the Queralt Bridge, where a popular picnic had been organised by various entities in collaboration with the local inhabitants. Open to everyone, the relaxed repast marked the end of *Reactivation and Collaborative Processes*, a workshop led by artist Seila Fernández Arconada at the headquarters of ACVic (Centre d'Arts Contemporànies), just a few meters from the river. This event included the participation of various collectives, including La Clota, ExAbrupto, Espais en Transició and A+.

The picnic was inspired by a performance carried out in 1987 by a countercultural collective intensely involved in public activism for many years. To protest the river's polluted condition, on the first of May, 1986, some twenty Bohemians who were regulars at the legendary Cafè Vic transformed the foul-smelling, unhealthy, nettle-choked area around the Queralt Bridge and *Les Adoberies* into a stimulating aristocratic garden with parasols, Rococo furnishings and peopled dressed in their best finery. The actors turned an open-air sewer into an idyllic setting. As the scene unfolded, along the opposite bank of the river, a group of 300 demonstrators celebrated Labor Day[1]. The contrast between the workers and the idle aristocrats was of deadly forcefulness.

Thirty years later, a group of cultural activists linked to the debate on Les Adoberies handed out the publication *VERMUT DE VELLUT*, an exquisite parody of gossip magazines, with photos and texts recalling the mentioned performance. This proposal was part of *Exercicis Subversius: Adoberismes*, a project led by Helena Muñoz in collaboration with students from La Plana high school, the A+ collective and other organizations. On the river banks, while leafing through the pages of the parody magazine, I met Seila Fernández Arconada. After chatting with her for a few minutes, we agreed to meet the next day at a bar called L'Snack.

At that meeting, Seila explained her research on urban planning, migrations, identities, regional crises, creativity, climate change and water, to mention just some of the subjects she works with. She commented that, since arriving in Vic, she had "seen, felt and smelled", and, beyond the debate about the future of *Les Adoberies*, she had become interested in the river and its use as a waste canal, but also as a leisure area and a generator of identity. "I realized that my project could help build ecological awareness without overlooking the pollution caused by the former tanning factories and the toxic effects of current pig farming."

A History of the Mèder River

In successive meetings, I drew on the personal archives I had gathered during some thirty-odd years as a journalist to inform Seila about the river's history and the artistic and ecological activities related to those subjects between the nineteen sixties and our time. I began with a personal experience: fishing with my Carlist grandfather under the Queralt Bridge as a child. Even though the air was already noticeably fetid by then, the impassive fishermen still managed to catch fish from time to time. However, the rodents and contaminants finally imposed their will on the fluvial ecosystem and the fish disappeared from what had by then become a cesspool.

Until the nineteen seventies, local inhabitants continued to frequent the bucolic rural springs, especially Font des Frares, where we youngsters swam and caught crayfish, minnows, frogs and tadpoles, ate reed roots and filled our canteens before leaving. Today, most of those springs (almost two hundred in number) are either completely polluted or have simply dried out, and La Plana de Vic has become one of the areas of Catalonia most damaged by slurry, pesticides and industrial waste. According to independent analyses carried out at the behest of the GDT (Earth Defense Group)—an ecological collective with which Seila collaborated during her residency in Vic, thanks to its president, activist Ginesta Mary—half of the springs analyzed contained over 50 mg/l of nitrates, surpassing the threshold of what the World Health Organization considers polluted water. These figures indicated a faulty application of animal husbandry models and an indiscriminate use of slurry. GDT's annual report indicated an average nitrate concentration of 57 mg/l, although some springs surpassed 425 mg/l.

Nowadays, no one visits those springs to fill their jugs. The only potable waters are the chlorine-treated tap water or bottled water from the Montseny aquifer, which is what is most consumed. In fact, the bottling plants have turned the Montseny mountain range into a gigantic Swiss cheese, exhausting the natural springs and leaving local farmers high and dry.

Admittedly, water pollution was even worse thirty or forty years ago. The rivers were particularly affected, and there were even a few rather ironic protests at that time. In 1977, for example, the Grup d'Ecologia staged a "Miraculous Fishing Contest", which the regional government prohibited because its promoters "were neither federated nor constituted as a fishing company." In 1979, the zany clients of the Cafè Vic presented themselves metaphorically as *Astileros del Ter* to organize a non-competitive crossing of the Sau reservoir's putrid waters with non-contaminating and unconventional vessels. For two decades, some thirty boats and a hundred-odd intrepid sailors, took part in this annual event. In 1982, countercultural organizers held an outlandish nocturnal happening called *La pubilla del Mèder*, a satire on pollution in which a sow dressed in regional costume arrived at Les Adoberies by boat and was then paraded through the city streets on a donkey cart, accompanied by a band of musicians playing the *Funeral March* and some twenty young torch bearers.

In 1989, GDT drew attention to the pollution by wrapping the Romanesque bridge in a monumental sheet of plastic fabric, and in May 1993, that same group took advantage of the foam floating on the Riera del Sorreig to stage a virtual barbershop with a huge poster that read "Barbería Puigneró" in reference to the region's most important textile magnate, who was later imprisoned for ecological damage following accusations by GDT.

While the rivers have recovered to some degree over the last twenty years, and the occasional fish or duck can be seen in the Ter River's tributaries, the outlook is far from rosy. Last year, GDT echoed a CERM (Center for Studies of the Mediterranean Rivers) study, lamenting the degradation of the rivers and denouncing the lax enforcement of environmental legislation. The study indicated that some stretches of the Gurri, Mèder and Rimentol Rivers had considerable levels of ammonia, nitrates, nitrites and phosphates in densely populated areas with considerable agricultural activity.

The Uncertain Future of *Les Adoberies*

The history of the Gurri and Mèder Rivers cannot be separated from that of the tanning industry. The first buildings in the Les Adoberies neighborhood were tanneries. Constructed in 1733, they remained a major part of the local economy until the recent delocalization of the fur industry. Since then, they have been progressively abandoned. In July 2015, when the QUAM organized a workshop on Les Adoberies for cultural, educational and social policy managers, artists, architects, educators, social researchers and art students, the architect from Seville, Santiago Cirugeda, suggested possible future uses for this dilapidated building complex. The workshop recognized the need to call for an urgent intervention by the Generalitat's Department of Culture to declare Les Adoberies a "national cultural interest site", to diagnose the situation, to put an end to the failure to comply with responsibilities, and to save this shared asset from impending loss. However, problems derived from the buildings' private ownership and complicated legal status made it clear that the neighborhood's transformation and rehabilitation had to be led by the city government in direct negotiation and cooperation with those owners.

A year later, under the direction of Francesc Muñoz, professor of urban geography at the UBM, ACVic and hablarenarte organized a new workshop on Les Adoberies. Closely linked to the previous one, it gathered thirty researchers from different fields, countries and European Universities from the UNISCAPE network. Once again, the possible future use of Les Adoberies was discussed, but the deterioration of the site continued unabated. This is not the first time that local sectors have met to attempt to solve this urban-planning dilemma.

Youths from the "Salvem Les Adoberies" platform tried to do so years earlier, as did their successors at the CUP and the local ERC group.

Each sought to transform a shabby reminder of the region's industrial past and bring new life to a highly degraded area. In this sense, the initial idea of this residency was to combat longstanding pessimism about the future of this heritage site; but reality refuses to budge: the former tanneries, now little more than ruins, have no future.

Amidst the trumpeting praise heaped on that sector's businessmen—especially the "great patron", Colomer Munmany—one misses references to the thousands of workers who dedicated their efforts, sweat and health to Les Adoberies. Besides the contributions of the magnates, we must remember that during the tragic days of the Spanish Civil War, workers collectives took charge of the city's tanneries under the name "Industries de Curtits CNT-AIT". And, while this collectivist experience was short lived and subject to the adversities of war, the workers acquired new machinery, made technical improvements to the production process and generated unprecedented social benefits. The results brought considerable profits and vastly improved the economic situation—so much so, that they even loaned funds to the city government. And yet, there has been no praise for the workers who did so much for those factories, not even for those of the Colomer Munmany group, whose owner found himself with a fully recovered company after the war and was able to rake in the profits for decades.

The post-war period was characterized by a blackmailing of the labor forces that often turned into a Stockholm syndrome. During the Franco period and the first years of the democracy, for fear of losing their jobs, no one dared to criticize the working conditions or the pollution of the Mèder and Gurri Rivers. After all, factory owners were the guardian angels who gave people jobs.

25,000 People in Vic's Main Square

On the 3rd of October of 2017, Seila returned to Vic to begin the second part of her residency. When she got off the train, she found the streets so full of people that she had considerable difficulty reaching the main square, where 25,000 people had gathered to protest police violence during the *illegal* referendum on

Catalan independence held three days earlier. That day, a general strike had paralysed most work. And paradoxically, the October third demonstration was the largest in Vic's history—rivaled only by the concentration of citizens for Generalissimo Franco's visit to Vic in May, 1947. That day, Seila wrote in her blog: "It is a moment of uncertainty but an interesting time for a new beginning in Vic. I therefore accept the challenge of working on collaborative initiatives over the next six weeks from my base at ACVic. And these initiatives will combine local interests and ideas arising from the group that took shape during the first stage of my residency in Vic".

During that second part, Seila, along with the A+ collective and ACVic, became involved in the neighborhood *fiestas* and the gathering of photographs, stories, traditions, uses and resources associated with the river in order to create an archive of social and environmental culture. With Lorda Cruselles, she also launched the audiovisual project *Afluents Visual* and began collaborating with a local sketchcrawl group that made sketches of the Mèder as part of the development of "a new postcard of Vic", as well as a shared consciousness-raising project called *Rius, ciutat, ciutadania.*

Sowing the Seeds for Future Actions

Seila knew little about Vic and its inhabitants when she first arrived in June 2017, but she was very curious about the *Les Adoberies* project. Time, and the experience acquired through her immersion there led to changes in the project's original concepts as a way of drawing it closer to the reality she was living and feeling in a direct way.

By mid November, shortly before leaving Vic, Seila was aware that, during her stay, she had acted as a catalyst to help the *Afluents* project's collaborative processes take root and push towards something new in the immediate future: continuing rather than ending when she left the city.

Seila has made friends, spoken with artists, ecologists, cultural activists and inhabitants of the city's riverside neighborhoods. For her, being, feeling and sharing with them, meeting people that led her to others, has generated a fabric of interwoven and shared interests. "The first part of my residency involved

mapping as a way of locating myself, interacting and asking questions, talking with all sorts of citizens in a way that surpasses mere digital communication. The second part took place in a context of political uncertainty that has transcended the initial project. It has been a moment filled with values, concerns and interests that can only be felt when one experiences them directly. During my stay, my mind has opened to curiosity, especially in terms of my relation to nature, the Mèder River and its urban fabric. I have also established links for the future, beyond my time in Vic. I believe that this legacy, my grain of sand, has continuity, because I have found that the collaborators feel that this is *their* process. People's desires do not stagnate, they endure."

Walking around the city's oldest neighborhood on a cold day in November, Seila reminded me of the recent sketchcrawl session, in which a local artist's collective involved in defending the river made on-site sketches of the Mèder's surroundings: an alternative postcard of Vic that reaches beyond the typical visual aspect to embrace the vibrations borne of the senses and experience, a longing for life and hope.

Nocturnal happening, *La pubilla del Mèder*, Vic, 1982

Art Tactics for Ground-level Urban Planning
By Anna Recasens

QUAM's[1] latest workshops have been developed to consider Vic's *Les Adoberies* district[2], and a variety of proposals for art and urban renovation directed towards this location, and its immediate surroundings. The 2015 and 2016 workshops were directed, respectively, by Santiago Cirugeda and Francesc Muñoz.

To continue this line of work, the 2017 edition of QUAM included the participation of the A+ collective—a local interdisciplinary group of Vic residents focused on studying and proposing possible ways of recovering the *Les Adoberies* district.

Between July and November 2017, as part of the CAPP Programme[3] shared by hablarenarte[4] and ACVic[5], the A+ Collective was invited to collaborate on a series of activities and workshops open to the community. Moreover, United Kingdom-based Cantabrian artist Seila Ferández Arconada[6] was present as artist-in-residence. This collaborative process focused on experiencing the location from both individual and collective perspectives, and setting up multidisciplinary art processes to activate a platform for continuous and collective work on aspects of shared space and heritage. The goal of these activities, and of the artist's residency, was to test collaborative and participatory methodologies, using a variety of art practices to influence

1. Founded in 1988, QUAM is an initiative that links art and training. Since its founding, the different viewpoints expounded in its workshops and conferences have offered opportunities for complementary training to new creators, critics and mediators linked to contemporary art practices. H. Associació per a les Arts Contemporànies has been organising and managing since 1992 and has always attempted to meet emerging needs. This justifies its changing orientation and form through a variety of stages and its emphasis on pursuing future possibilities.
2. The *Les Adoberies* district in Vic.
3. CAPP (Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme) Berlín, Budapest, Dublin, Helsinki, London, Liverpool y Osnabrück / Donosti, Huarte (Pamplona), Madrid y Vic.
CAPP is a European programme for the investigation of collaborative art and the proliferation of these types of practices. The CAPP programme has a duration of four years (2014-2018), CAPP receives international support from the Creative Europe programme of the European Union and national support from Acción Cultural Española (AC/E)..
This programme's members are: Create Ireland (Dublin, Ireland), Agora (Berlin, Germanty), Heart of Glass (Liverpool, United Kingdom), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (Osnabrück, Germany), Live Art Development Agency (London, United Kingdom), Tate Liverpool (Liverpool, United Kingdom), Ludwig Múzeum (Budapest, Hungary), m-cult (Helsinki, Finland) and hablarenarte: (Madrid, Spain).
Web CAPP – Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme <www.cappnetwork.com>
4. hablarenarte website <www.hablarenarte.com/es>
5. See <www.acvic.org>
6. See <www.seilafernandezarconada.net> and <www.hablarenarte.com/capp/residencias-en-acvic>

the development of new plans for using the location.

Les Adoberies comprises a number of buildings extended along two streets, one of which faces the river. This space holds historical significance for the city, and remains alive in the memories of both workers and local inhabitants. The area has greatly deteriorated, especially since the leather tanning and dyeing industries, previously situated in this location, died out.

This context exemplifies some of the conditions that characterise post-industrial cities: a multiplicity of vacant sites, deteriorated buildings and sombre ruins—a landscape in crisis, where the closure of previously active areas has caused a rapid transformation in the urban fabric. Moreover, those spaces have become the setting for successive urban plans, or renovation generated and conceived in a top-down manner, leading to processes of gentrification which cause a loss of identitary space, displacement of the social fabric, and a rethinking of public space. The streets lose their democratic nature as dissuasive physical and architectural barriers, erected to discourage what is considered anti-social behaviour, hinder access by local inhabitants, favouring commercial rather than popular uses. A new social reality emerges from the transformation of these spaces into mere waypoints lacking any precise identity.

At the same time, some spaces (both central and peripheral) are left out of this process. As Ignasi Solà-Morales observed:

> ...they are internal islands. Stripped of all activity, forgotten remains, excluded from urban dynamics, uninhabited, unsafe and unproductive. In sum, these places are outside the urban system. Mental exteriors in the physical interior of the city, they emerge as its counter-image in both a critical sense and as a possible alternative[7].

Solà-Morales also argues that those uncertain and borderless spaces contain expectations of mobility, wandering, free time, freedom [...]. And thus, emptiness as absence, but also as promise, encounter and space for the possible...[9]

If traditional architecture presupposes the creation of space by "limiting" emptiness, and that same architecture, when applied to rural or formerly industrial zones, presupposes development processes that generally involve invasive construction, then it would be wise to consider other approaches in which, rather than worry about empty spaces, we think about the principle of creating spaces—sites where regeneration does not involve architectural reconstruction and can, instead, be based on initiatives involving reactivation and awareness of the value of space itself as a public asset, as well as the possible participatory and shared management of those spaces in an ephemeral manner.

Re-placing versus Regulating: Re-appropiation Processes

When abandoned sites are viewed as spaces for the possible, a regeneration engineered from the bottom up becomes a possible reality in which historical, identitary and community-based re-appropriation of those spaces reaches the level of *re-placement*. This redefinition has to begin with DIY urban planning involving "the creation of places," rather than urban design based on regulated planning that views unoccupied sites in terms of productivity rather than habitability.

As opposed to the regularisation processes generally driven by the speculation of real-estate promoters, *re-placement* calls for collective approaches to creative "place-making" that involve imagining and reinventing territory, "relinking" it to people and sharing experiences and knowledge. Such innovative and cooperative processes eschew rebuilding (the sort of reconstruction that most pleases conservatives) as a means of shaping public space. The substitution of one constructed site for another arises from a sort of *horror vacui* in which some administrations panic at the thought of losing land-value options; or from an urban-planning interpretation that justifies placebo-options involving false façades and fake interiors, and other architectural elements presented to us with a wink as new uses for yesterday's spaces. In the best of cases, they offer cultural uses in a way that frequently pays homage to the collective memory and identity of that place (art-production factories, for example), and in the worst, a commercial use that renders preservation efforts meaningless (young fashion franchises, for example).

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7. Igansi Solà-Morales, *Solá Terrain Vague*, 1995, p. 127.
9. Ibid, p. 126.

As a form of *détournement*, *re-placement* seeks not to recover and fill spaces, but rather to re-endow them with meaning. What detracts from the urban landscape is not empty space, but rather the constant processes of re-zoning and reassignment; real-estate adventures stripped of criteria, and hyper-regulated planning designed to densely cover the terrain with no concern for the fact that the resulting landscape can be totally artificial and incompatible with the location's habitability. In that sense, while the terrain may now be filled with buildings, it is no less fragmented. Empty spaces, uninhabited architecture and even ruins are generally not residual—that is, spaces in which no action is possible. Instead, they are often places where things can occur—empty spaces that bring dynamism to the urban landscape, turning it into a setting for social creativity. At the same time, by favouring a lesser density of commercial occupation, they bring a more amiable aspect to the city.

When these collective forms of place-making through *re-placement* are applied to more-or-less abandoned or dilapidated spaces, they promote new uses and activities and define the city from a humanising perspective based on its habitability. They generate surroundings that are more inviting, connected, attractive, navigable, engaging, accessible, immediate, interactive, cooperative and diverse, among other characteristics that are not necessarily incompatible with memory or productivity and may well propose an innovative narrative about how to live and experience the city.

Artistic Tactics and Practice

In recent decades, the practice of art as a tactic for visualising those places and promoting projects from the bottom up has provided a better means of approaching these empty or abandoned spaces in a variety of contexts. It has become clear that urban development or regeneration initiatives based on cultural and artistic projects can be very effective. First, they serve to orientate listening, encouraging a dialogue with the space, its surroundings and the people who inhabit or transit it. Second, they serve to map and recover intangible and identitary heritage; and third, they expand the areas of action, experimenting with other fields of knowledge, activating social space and processes of co-creation and co-production.

To question, communicate, and propose solutions that affect these settings, it is necessary to understand that all of those fragments and overlapping layers link time, people, memory, actions and constructions. In general, this artistic practice in specific contexts begins by creating spaces for meeting, exchanging and reflecting, inviting citizens' participation and proposing a framework for meetings free of intermediaries or filters, along with exploration, observation and the collection of materials useful for investigating the place and its narratives.

If exploring the materiality of the invisible (collective memory and emotional geographies) makes it possible to imagine shared spaces in which to recover human relations and encourage a greater social commitment to everyday surroundings, activating those spaces through the community itself and its resilience, it also paves the way for a more lasting work, and thus, a culmination of the re-placement process without need for architectural intervention. From symbolic micro-actions that move from the individual towards the shared (Levalet's work in France, or Lego Street Art), to multitudinous proyects (El Último Asalto Festival, or Voodoohop in Brazil), these projects share a tendency towards short durations. In fact, most are ephemeral. This is not a matter of negligence, but rather of recovering a space open to different proposals and managing agents, favouring community involvement in its use and the emergence of new opportunities for the zone's economic development.

Another remarkable aspect of artistic practice as a tactic for urban regeneration is its capacity to promote emotional ties to spaces, their meanings and a sense of place. In the case of *Les Adoberies* in Vic, especially in proposals by the A+ citizen's collective, emphasis has been placed on the natural surroundings and the Mèder River. Intimately linked to the industrial activity at *Les Adoberies* and long affected by its pollution, the river, which was formerly a meeting place, domestic laundry, fertile and vegetable-growing zone, has become an anticlimactic, unappreciated element, excluded from the city's historical centre. This is especially true of its passage through the abandoned *Les Adoberies* space.

Today, both Vic's city administration and citizens' initiatives have reclaimed the Mèder river as an urban landmark and a space for common use. The

artistic proposals formulated within the CAPP framework have broadened the range of meanings of *Les Adoberies* and of the river that constitutes its immediate surroundings. Activities such as the recognition of flora and fauna, the use of dowsing to locate underground water, the analysis of water pollutants, exploration of the significance of alimentary self-sufficiency and local products have made it possible to bring out the importance of the river as a place for action, rest, leisure and exchange. Thus, rather than understanding *Les Adoberies* as an abandoned, decaying ruin, it can be viewed as an area where nature reclaims the enclosures as its own, enveloping and merging with them. Despite its situation as an ambivalent and chaotic space, it can also be considered an opportunity for improving the area's habitat and biodiversity, in terms of what Gilles Clément called the "third landscape," that is:

> The group of residual, abandoned or unproductive spaces that, as such, constitute refuges for diversity, spaces that emerge as a Third Landscape when we adopt the position of contemplating them in terms of landscape. Only then do residual territories become fragments of a third landscape that belongs to a larger reality: that of the Planetary Garden[9].

In this case, the artist stops being a producer or a mere translator of the space, to become, in what Latham calls an "incidental person" who will connect, for the benefit of the public interest, the abandoned space and users, creating situations of encounter and dialogue, that will return value as a common place to what has been a scenario of conflict up to now.

[9]. Gilles Clement, *Manifesto of the Third Landscape*, 2007.

Site visit, *Studying the Mèder River*, quality analysis and incidents in the social and environmental environment. Marc Ordeix / Habitat Association, 2017

Rethinking the Container

2016 _____

June
Conceptualization of the residency with Centro Huarte

September
Open call for the residency

October
Selection of Enter This as residents

2017 _____

November (2016)—June 2017
Rethinking the Container, residency programme with Enter This and Orekari Estudio co-produced by hablarenarte and Centro Huarte

November
24-27 November 2016. First phase of the residence. Laboratory / Workshops on architecture. Research of the needs of the space and possible collaborators

January 28, 2017. *Aperitifak*. Analysis of the common spaces in Centro Huarte, together with people from the town

April—June
Third phase of the residence. Development

May
12-30 May 2017. Dynamics. Ideas development sessions on how to create a link between the town and Centro Huarte

June
9-30 June 2017. *Totems I*. Collective construction of a new mobile furniture for the development of activities in the public space by artists and citizens

30 June 2017. *Totems II*. Public presentation of the works

"For us, Centro Huarte is like an isolated
mammoth with enormous potential." (Enter This)

Centro Huarte was conceived as a large exhibition center in a natural setting in Huarte, a small town near Pamplona. From the very beginning, this Center found it difficult to fill such an enormous container with meaningful proposals, due to both budgetary limitations and its scarce acceptance by the local population.

Under the title, *Rethinking the Container*, hablarenarte and Centro Huarte launched an open call for a residency won by Enter This collective. Their local counterpart, Orekari Estudio, provided fundamental support. The shared project consisted of research to redefine the Center's architecture and stance, and work based on a clear awareness of the Center's historical and geographic relations with the town of Huarte. *Rethinking the Container's* proposal was not limited to the building's space; it also addressed the Center's social responsibility with regard to the local context.

Rethinking the Container was carried out between November 2016 and July 2017 in the framework of CAPP and was co-produced by hablarenarte and Centro Huarte. Javier García Clavel collaborated as an external observer and here he narrates Enter This and Orekari Estudio's work with the town of Huarte. This project's participants continue to collaborate with Centro Huarte in the manner initiated by *Rethinking the Container.*

From the Home of the Totem
By Javier García Clavel

Portico

An outside author's role is important for an overall view, analyzing and weighing the pros and cons without being involved in the process, reading the project not from an architectural or artistic viewpoint, but rather from that of a citizen—a key question when dealing with participative and collaborative processes. As someone trained in literature, my role consists of attending all of the activities related to the project and describing them, as well as critically addressing the questions that arise throughout the process. I converse with all of the collectives involved, and at the end of the project (if, in fact this project has an end), I draft personalized questionnaires for each participating collective, asking them about a series of subjects that I consider key aspects of *Rethinking the Container*[1].

The Concept

What is *Rethinking the Container* about? After the Huarte Contemporary Art Center's new directors were appointed in summer, 2016, they launched a process of reflection to analyze the Center's place in its surroundings, a question already posed and, to a degree, prepared by the former directors. The starting point is recognition of the fact that the Center's situation in its context is neither comfortable nor organic, and that it is necessary to involve the greatest possible number of people to propose a reformulation of its nature. It has sometimes been said that, rather than turning its back on the village, the Art Center needs to be opened, that is, brought closer to it. This brings out many nuances that are worthy of consideration: the idea of "opening" the Center is inexact, the concept of "bringing it closer" can be problematical, and the concept of art does not seem to be linked to

an institution that must do something (for example, being permeable), or to an organism that has a pending responsibility. It is therefore important to clarify each concept.

If we assume that the Center is experiencing difficulties caused by the degree to which its surroundings accept it, as well as its budgetary problems; and if we also point out, even before beginning the process, that the solution lies in changing its nature, starting with the need to address the village in making those changes. What are the meanings of concepts like "fill" (occupying emptiness) and "container" (a space for storing) in the context of contemporary art? Once you define an art center as a space for research and production, where do exhibiting and conserving stand? What does it mean to link an art center with its surroundings? How bound is the center to this context? And how bound is it to its own directors? What is an art center's social responsibility?

The Drama's Protagonists

Give that there is a conflict, there are also characters. If this were the publication of a theater work, the *dramatis personae* preceding the action would read as follows:

a) Coordinating Collectives:

hablarenarte:

An association that works on projects that support the creation and proliferation of contemporary culture. hablarenarte is part of the CAPP (Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme), a network of European cultural institutions dedicated to the support of collaborative art. In the framework of this program, hablarenarte conceptualized and published (along with Centro Huarte) a call for a collaborate arts residency at Centro Huarte between January and June 2017. The association's visible figure in this project was Georg Zolchow.

The new directors of Centro Huarte:

Elisa Arteta, Nerea de Diego, Betisa Ojanguren and Oskia Ugarte, who began work in late June 2016, are the first all-female team of directors in Spain. Since their first public appearances, they have defined the Center as, a "center for production" rather than as a "center for exhibitions." It thus seems clear that *Rethinking the Container* does not refer to the center as an art container, but rather to the architectural cube that, in principle, limits what is done in that center. In other words, it focuses primarily on the physical elements.

Enter This and Orekari:

These are the architectural collectives charged with carrying out the collaborative art project *Rethinking the Container*. Enter This, a collective based in Berlin and Vienna, won the contest for this project, and its local counterpart, Orekari, is an architecture studio with experience coordinating participatory processes in the city of Pamplona. Salomé Wackernagel is the architect from Enter This who occupies the residency in Huarte and Pamplona, and her off-site colleague is Florian Rizek, who also spends some periods of time in Navarre. The Orekari team consists of Ioar Cabodevilla, Itxaso Iturrioz and Xabier Urroz. This team lays out the map of the actions to be taken, organizes the events that punctuate the strategy, conceives the key concepts and invents and constructs the materiality arising from all of this. In that construction, the meaning of the word itself is questioned, as are the implications of participating and collaborating in those constructive processes.

Collaborations:

From the start, Enter This and Orekari open the process to all of the citizenry through meetings in the plaza and at the Art Center, interviews, workshops, visits to locales and urban spaces, conversations, and so on. They want everyone to be involved in thinking about the container so that each, from his or her own perspective, can offer ideas about what it is, what it could become, and by what means. From village residents to architects, by way of cultural agents, artists, teachers and social

activists, the degree of involvement by people outside the coordinating team is fundamental for participative processes. In fact, it can become the touchstone that legitimizes the decisions make during the process. Besides these occasional collaborations and participations, a team of youths involved with architecture worked very closely in the conception and generation of the final proposal. These were Maddi Berraondo, Mario Pérez, Uxue Pérez de Pipaon and Idoia Zaldizuri.

b) Contextos:

Two fundamental agents in the context of this project would be the story of Centro Huarte and the village of Huarte itself. The first time the conversation of building an art space in Huarte took place, was during the search for a place to install the foundation dedicated to artist Patxi Buldain, an internationally known artist from Huarte. The idea was to construct a building to house his work, and it was also supposed to function as an art center, with programming that would revolve mainly around him. Huarte village government commissioned architect Natxo Barberena to design it, and he spent over a year doing so. Suddenly, however, the Huarte administration unilaterally and unexpectedly shut the process down and announced an international contest for the design and construction of a contemporary art center, which would be the first in Navarre. This contest was won by Barcelona-based architects Carles Puig, Franc Fernández and Xavi Vancells.

That entire process has at least two polemical aspects: first, how and why the original project was changed, and second, the pertinence of the new project. The construction of a contemporary art center in Navarre could be pertinent, but the decision to locate it in Huarte—several kilometers from the city of Pamplona—as part of an "art belt" linking Pamplona, Huarte and Alzuza[2] is more conflictive. Huarte had, and continues to have a strong artistic fabric, but probably not enough to justify its choice as the central location for the region's contemporary art center. According to some, its distance from the city of Pamplona—a more adequate and logical location—was only justified by the economic and political advantages that could derive from its construction.

Added to this is the fact that the definitive building's design was not especially well received in the village. The Barcelona architects' intention was to create an open space, a container suited to any sort of desired activity, organically framed by its surroundings. To the village people, however, it appeared to be quite the opposite: an impenetrable and aesthetically displeasing container which so strongly clashed with the landscape that some of the locals call it "the morgue." According to the team of architects, the problem may stem from something totally outside their control: the programmed activities were neither as interesting and intense, nor as accessible—hence the idea of impenetrability—as had been expected. From an architectural standpoint, this question is crucial: how does a building have to be in order to be considered "open"?

Therefore, generally speaking, the people of Huarte have never considered the center to be a part of the village. They had no say in the decision to build it, nor in how or where it was built, nor in its programming in recent years, which has also not met the needs of the context where it is located.

And there is also a third, transversal matter which has to do with the Center's identity as such and which is also related to the lack of understanding of contemporary art in that setting (possibly due to a regional lack of arts training). The process of opening the Center to the people of Huarte is further complicated by the fact that the Center's own nature is in question: to what degree can people with no interest in contemprary art decide the future of an institution dedicated to that art[3]? Will this call for collaboration and participation in the project, and its results be heeded by the Center? Orekari and Enter This's collaborative art project open the doors to anyone who wants to voice an opinion and respects the consequences derived from that decision, but to what degree can the Center enact the resultant proposals? And does the village grasp those limits, if in fact they exist?

2. In this, as in all the conflicts generated by this process, there are dissenting voices. Some, for example, argue that the distance from Pamplona to Huarte is no greater than that between distant parts of the city itself. Also, the observation that there would be more circulation in a city center has been met by the assertion by some that one of the most important exhibition zones in Pamplona's central area, La Ciudadela, doesn't have a very large flow of visitors, either.

3. It is relevant to mention two concepts that are in the minds of the people who approach a collaborative art project linked to a contemporary arts center, even if only here in a footnote: The nature of museums and the nature of contemporary art. The museum is an institution born as a space to preserve and exhibit established art works, and in most people's minds, that is still its function today. Ever since it was founded, the Huarte Center's outer appearance has been that of a museum-container. The arrival of its new directors marks the decision to transform it from what had previously been a museum into an arts production center. That explains the considerable efforts asked of participants in the *Rethinking the Container* project: grasping the idea that it can be a center rather than a museum and imagining what sort of center they want. But if "center" is an unfamiliar concept, how can one imagine its possibilities? And if we are talking about an arts production center, what weight does public opinion have?

c) Participation and collaboration

Participating is not the same as collaborating. To participate signifies taking part in a transparent process. It is a tool for empowering society, a political act, another way of doing things. But you are not who draws up the rules for the process in which you participate. On the other hand, collaborating involves combining the responsibilities of everyone involved in the process and building together. In collaborative art, various agents work together with equal and shared responsibilities. In participative art, an agent's proposal is followed by a group. The nature of the art project for Centro Huarte is precisely that of collaboration, and yet, despite the intentions of Enter This and Orekari, and the means they provided for carrying them out, it ended up being participative. And if the process that invites those involved to rethink the container is a participative one, then their decisions are not binding. They are invited to think together, but they should not misunderstand the distribution of responsibilities for the results. In their participation in *Rethinking the Container*, the inhabitants of Huarte intuited that their decisions were not binding; they believed that the team formed by Enter This and Orekari wanted only to know their opinions, ideas and desires. But actually, when the process began, that team wanted to create an effective working group with members of any origin and discipline.

But where does the need to participate come from? From the village of Huarte? or from the Center that needs the village? This is a determinant factor that differentiates this participatory process from others that have taken place or are currently taking place around us. Here, the opening of the process does not correspond to a need expressed by the public. At this point Huarte did not seek to express its opinion of the center in order to transform it, although they may have, some ten years earlier. This characteristic marks the process and decisively influences its result.

We should also mention another circumstance that will shed light on this project: 2017 was a fundamental year in the history of participatory processes, at least in the autonomous community of Navarre. And in the

The second question refers to the idea of contemporary art. Turning one's back on a museum-like institution may have to do with wariness and general ignorance of contemporary art itself. Hence, the question: Should contemporary art open up and become more understandable? In the questionnaires, the response was clear: no, art is not a box to be opened. At most, it is something one approaches (and the educational departments at art centers are working on that). The R*ethinking the Container* project questions neither contemporary art nor contemporary architecture: the new container will not question the art being promoted. These are somehow different (and separate) departments.

state, we also witnessed the consolidation of projects that had been launched on this basis ten years earlier. Participatory processes are launched to decide collectively, for example, how to improve mobility in the old quarter, how to carry out neighborhood fiestas or to choose street names, and so on. At those moments, the process is a fragile one. Its growth is driven by institutions who are responsible, through their approach, for its successful development. Some of the people who collaborated with *Rethinking the Container* took part in the first participatory processes fostered by the town government *(Lo viejo se mueve, Plazara!)*.

There are noticeable differences. Processes can be more open or closed, more or less binding, more or less publicized. I believe that rigorously evaluating processes and annulling those that have not reached quorum is necessary for the future because, besides the voices that praise this participative way of doing things, there are others who oppose it. This process can always be examined, but according to what criteria? How many people are necessary for a participatory process to be valid? Should each person's participation be evaluated in terms of its quality (greater or lesser, lasting or sporadic, constructive or passive, for example)?

The Calendar of the Drama's Action

The blog of the *Rethinking the Container* project, which is part of hablarenarte's[4] webpage, offers a detailed visual explanation of this project, enumerating its fundamental phases and briefly commenting on certain outstanding aspects. These could be the structural determinants of the story's action and the significant acts by its characters.

First Phase: November 2016
Orekari workshop, *Rethinking the Container*.

This workshop for rethinking the building was enlivened by Orekari and open to Huarte residents and architecture professionals. It can therefore be understood as a prior phase to the project/residency. Besides representatives of studios and collectives such as M-Etxea, Hiritik-At and Ph Positivo, it included architects interested in joining the project, such as Natxo Barberena, who was part of the

4. See <www.hablarenarte.com/capp>

Huarte village government with the initial plans—they were later substantially modified—for what became Centro Huarte. Two main difficulties were identified: that the plan was to modify a building, not to create one; and that the process should take into account the opinions of other agents. In other words, while one of the workshop's first ideas was to knock down the building's entrance, demolishing the wall in order to definitively open the container, this rapidly proved inviable due to a lack of budget and to the convenience of not substantially and irreversibly transforming the original design by the architectural studio that had built the building, and with which constructive dialog was held throughout the process.

Two questions arise: first, that fact that, in the end, this turned out to be a meeting of architectural professional (no one else attended) to rethink a space that was actually going to be directed at artists; and second, that while the space is large, the budget and scope of action would be limited.

Second phase: January-February 2017
Aperitifak. Building the community: common spaces in Huarte. January 2017
Research

Aperitifak is an initiative by Centro Huarte to promote dialog among artists or collectives and the public. The idea is to talk about a project in a way that eschews the customary roles of speaker and listener. In this case, the *Aperitifak* of late January was occupied by *Rethinking the Container* and transformed into a walk around Huarte, visiting the village's public spaces and learning about their uses, history, characteristics and needs. A large number of people came to this event—it was probably the most-followed activity of all those proposed by the project, except for the final event—and the walk was very instructive. The *Aperitifak* consisted of starting at the Arts Center and walking around the village. The walk symbolizes the project's objective: that the center and the village be connected. During the walk, thought is given to the question of what a public space actually is and what the Center's nature is (even before its ties to art), as well as the desires and needs of those occupying that space. Now, the center is conceived by the citizens, rather than by the architect or artist.

This activity is accompanied by interviews of agents linked to the center, the village and to art making[5]—the so-called *multipliers*. Both *Aperitifak* and the interviews definitely broaden *Rethinking the Container*'s scope of participation and shape the research leading to the practical part that will follow.

We have wondered why many of the people who attended the *Aperitifak* did not continue to follow the project as closely in posterior phases. One answer lies in that event's nature: participants were asked to indicate what they liked about their village and what they thought should be improved. The idea of thinking about common elements and transforming them wound up being only the expression of opinions about those shared elements. Once the walk was over, after each person expressed their proposal (expanding a part, shortening a building, reordering some orchards, increasing the number of school places), the group dissolved. Participants in the walk had come together because they had many different things in mind, but when they realized that they had already said what they had to say, and that they had already done what they could do—what they had the capacity to do—they disconnected.

Another answer has to do with the time periods. Beginning with *Aperitifak*, the pre-established times for the residency called for a pause of several months in the project. What was originally conceived as a time for reflection after the initial phase of idea development may actually have led to a progressive dissolution of the initial energy. Moving things forward in order to carry out activities directly after the *Aperitifak* might have helped maintain interest in the project.

During this phase of the project, the concept of nature came into play. Specifically, this took the form of Huarte's orchards, which were identified as historical village spaces with which the inhabitants identified spontaneously. This led the team in residence to understand that bringing the orchard into the space for reflection might be a way of building bridges between the center and the citizenry. From then on, the materials used to construct those orchards provided inspiration for the working group's conception of the final product. Just as nature influences its surrounding, so too, can architecture.

5. Interviews with Anabel Barberena, Fermín Díez de Ulzurrun, Jon Echeberria, Harri Larunbe Anderson and Oihane Uribeetxeberria can be consulted on the project's blog, <www.hablarenarte.com/capp/category/residencias/residencia-centro-huarte/blog-residencia-huarte>.

Third phase: April-June 2017
Dynamic-Huarte Center, May 2017
Dynamic-Plaza San Juan in Huarte, May 2017
Dynamic II-Plaza San Juan in Huarte, May 2017
Inauguration Totems and workshop with Itsaso Jiménez Iribarren[6]. June 2017

During the months of April and May, the work passes from reflection to action. Dialog with the citizenry is implemented to define the definitive (or partial) solution to *Rethinking the Container*, and construction begins. Participation and collaboration converge at that moment: the surroundings participate, while the building team (architects linked to the project) collaborates. This is the project's key phase, leading to something that is tangible, consistent and useful specifically because of all the previous work.

As one of the project's most important phases, it merits detailed description here. The days were divided between dynamics with participants, the design of the construction, and the construction itself (the limits between the latter two are not always easy to determine). Each of these processes brings into play the concepts of participation and collaboration defined earlier. As usual, the starting point called for the involvement of the greatest possible number of people to work together on the design and creation of the residencies final phase. To obtain this, invitations were sent by e-mail and posted on social media. At the same time, flyers were distributed and posters hung in different meeting points around the village.

At that moment, a key decision was made: moving to the village plaza. The working team had realized that participation was considerably smaller when events were held at the Art Center. As had already become clear, the Center's walls are imposing and distancing, and people do not come. Therefore, it was necessary to take the project to the streets, a simple move that generated a logical growth in participation, though not so much in collaboration. Over the following weeks, workshops were held there and anyone who so wished—there was a sizable group of children and adolescents—was invited to imagine the arts center they wanted, and the relation they wished to have with it.

In the end, the design and construction involved limited collaboration: teams of five to ten people, most of whom were linked to architecture, and the group of youths mentioned above. The construction phase occupied three weeks of full-time work at the Center, in a space set up in the open garage. While both time and money were limited[7], the participation of volunteers—some from the diverse working groups created over the course of the project—helped make it possible to meet the deadlines, although with some adaptations: rather than four totems, two were installed, and some of their elements were replaced with others, or eliminated, with the idea that they could be constructed after the inauguration.

At the end of June 2017, Huarte's central plaza was again chosen, this time for the presentation of *Rethinking the Container*'s final product: the two totems. The totem figure has been linked to the village for many years through the installation in a plaza nearby of sculptures with that form by local artist Julio Urdín. Those totems belong to the village, and there is no need to "open" them. These are precisely the three characteristics desired for, and by, Centro Huarte: to become a place for participation, to become something that the village considers its own, and for which it feels responsible; and to be accessible without having to learn a complex and singular language. In that sense, the park's totems are ideal models.

Orekari and Enter This's totems were used for the first time that same day, June 30th, in an experimental workshop with images by artist Itxaso Jiménez Iribarren called *Rethinking the Landscape.* The totem presents a series of characteristics born during the residency: it is a Swiss knife that responds to the citizenry's needs, surpassing or overflowing the Center's walls, leading to the plaza. Its process of construction is craftspersonlike, domestic, and characterized by the precision and care of the handmade, in the most economic possible fashion. It moves and can be transferred[8]. It contains stools and desks, useful for gatherings. It is easy to expand or contract, it can bear a screen for films or ideas. Anyone can use it, and it can contain anyone's expression. There have been no changes to the building's façade. The entrance walkway has not been eliminated, nor have indoor walls been torn down. The lighting has been neither altered

6. Besides this workshop, at the beginning of the workshop phase, there were also plans to offer a woodworking workshop to share knowledge of this material and its different building possibilities, beginning with the style visible in some bars, cafés, discotheques and homes in Berlin and the Raumlabor Architecture Collective's experience. In the end, there was not enough time for this activity.

7. Budgetary limitations, or insufficient time sometimes made it impossible to obtain or distribute the proper tools for handling materials. However, the Center was supportive at all times, and the collaboration of maintenance technician Iñigo Zubicoa was absolutely fundamental.
8. A symbol: part of the wooden panels that make up the totem's interior are perforated in the same way—and this is a fecund image—that the building's walls could be. The passage of light and air—permeability—is organic.

nor reprogrammed. There are simply two totems: two tools from the Center and from outside the Center. A walkway totem and a vehicle totem.

The Drama's Resolution

Two totems are not the only result of months of work. they are part of the conclusions, a horizon of expectations, a tool that makes the debate or discussion something that can be told; one step in a long journey. More time is needed. This is just the beginning.
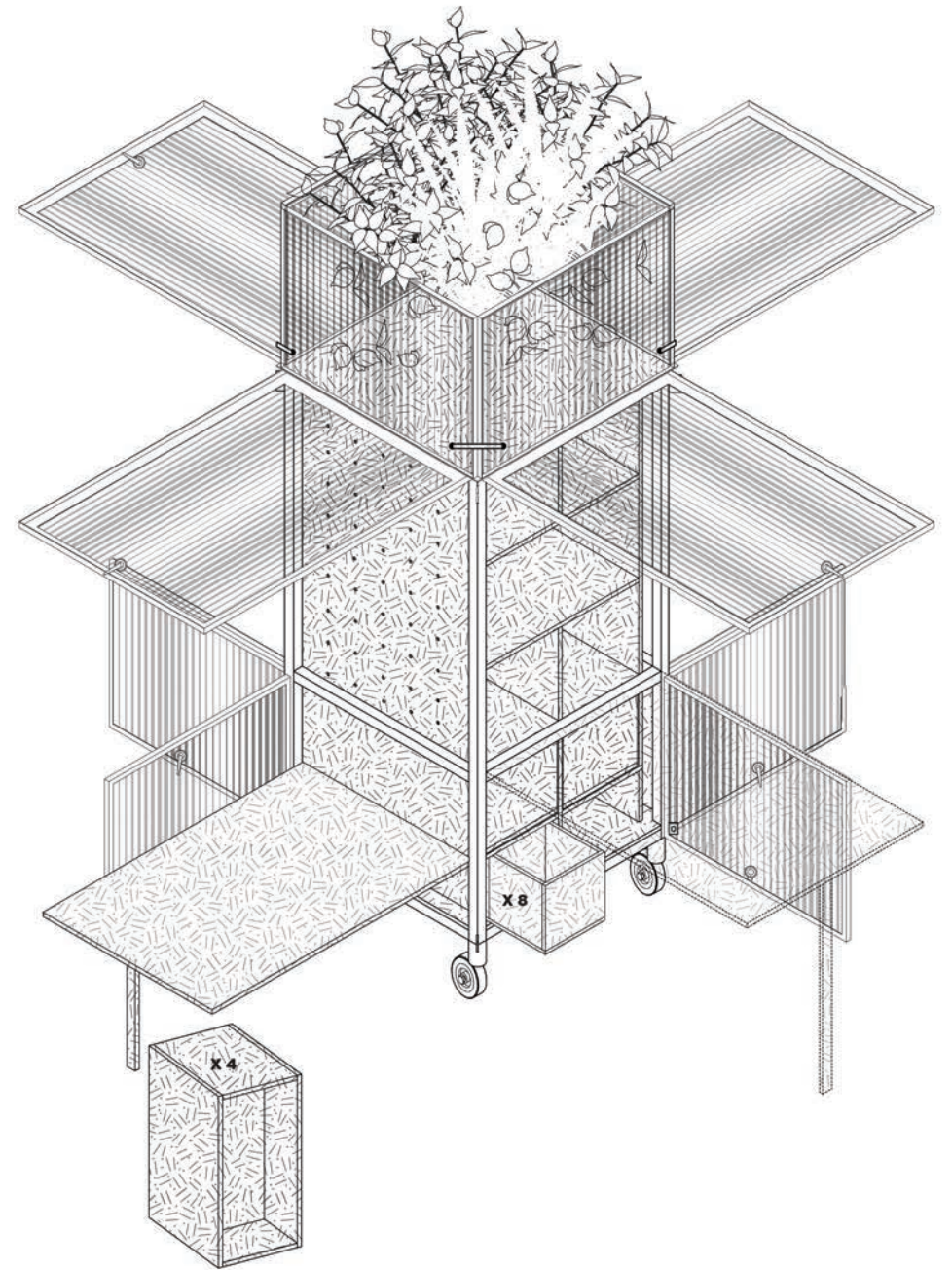
As I have explained, the process was complex—because the idea of the Center was changing, the participants were changing (as were, to a degree, the goals); and because participatory processes are flexible and must respond to the fruits of such participation, because the means and materials were what they were, and the time was limited. Orekari and Enter This faced these circumstances, and they overcame them. Speaking with those agents who took an interest, and with those who didn't; they constantly encouraged participation, drawing concepts from architecture, and others from the people. They maintained a continuous dialog with the Center's directors, working for many, many hours on the design and construction of the product and going as far as humanly possible in their research on participatory processes and on the meaning of rethinking a container.

What is the next step, if indeed there is one to take? Perhaps offering more time and resources, because the horizon is visible, and the energy is available. Time for the directors to solidify the new nature they want for the Center, for it to enter public awareness, and to reach other participants who are active in this presence for sustained periods of time. And resources that make it possible for everyone to know what is being done and what they want to do, with the same fluidity as any other information relevant for the village's day-to-day existence.

Rethinking the Container, residency programme with Enter This and Orekari Estudio, 2016-2017
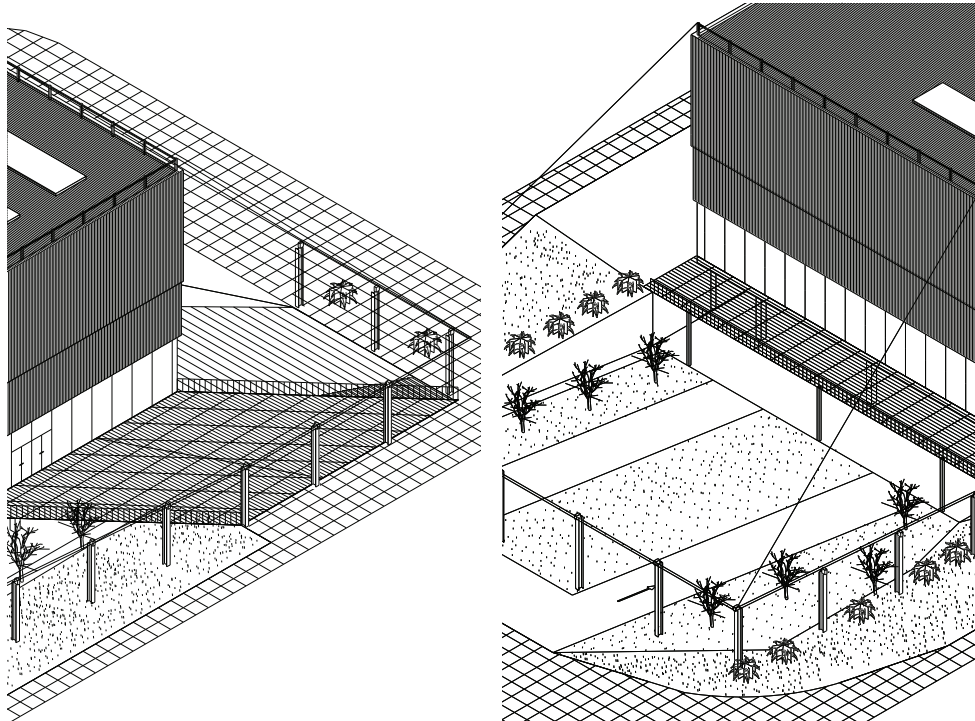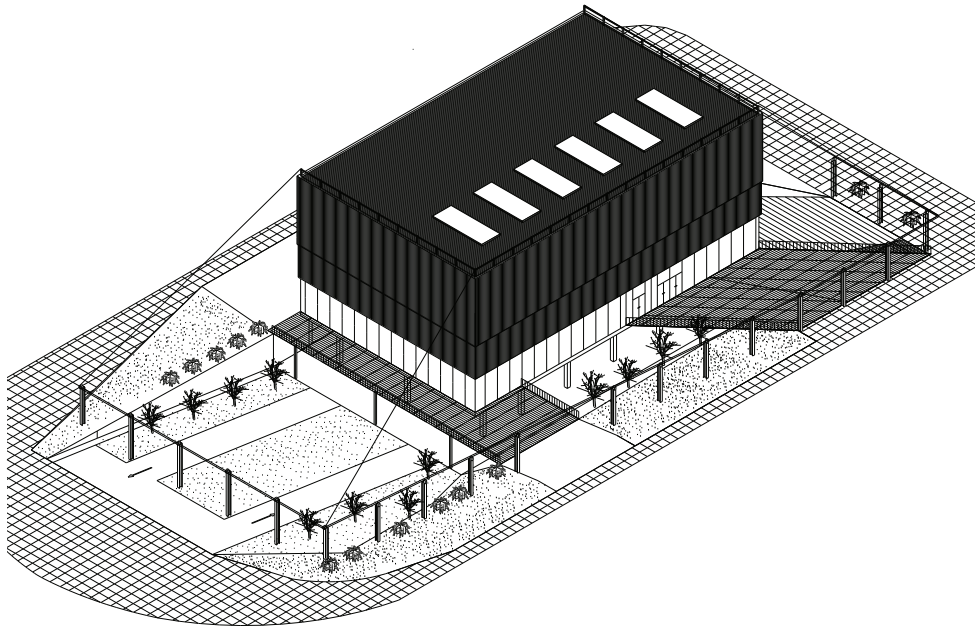
Picture and prototype of the Totems, Huarte, 2017

Harrotu ileak!

2016 _____

November
Conceptualization of the residency with Tabakalera

2017 _____

January—June
Felipe Polania and Oihane Espuñez selected as the artists
on residency together with the mediation team of Tabakalera,
co-produced by hablarenarte and Tabakalera

January
First phase of the residence. Investigation. Mapping of the
problems through testimonies of the people who inhabit those
spaces

February—March
Photography exhibition on youth identity in the Prism. Artists
such as Rineke Dijkstra, Rania Matar, Miguel Trillo, Olya Ivanova,
among others

Action *Harrotu ileak! Posatu, selfie*

March
10-11 March 2017. Video workshop *Harrotu ileak camera, action!*

17 March 2017. Streetdance training Harrotu ileak, jump, dance!

24 March 2017. Exhibition in Tabakalera of photographs taken
with young people and publication of the book *Harrotu Ileak!*

July
5-7 July 2017. Rap workshop taught by La Basu

"These activities' objective was to get to know these youths, not only through words, but also through other languages in which they had something to say" (Oihane Espuñez)

Tabakalera has many open, unprogrammed areas known as "street spaces." With the arrival of cold, rainy weather in the fall, these tend to be occupied by groups of youths.

Tabakalera's mediation department has always been especially interested in working with this collective, and in the framework of the CAPP program, Tabakalera and hablarenarte jointly organized a program for residencies between January and June, 2017, focused on mediation with adolescents who frequent the cultural center. They invited artist and educator Felipe Polania and San Sebastian creator Oihane Espuñez to work in close collaboration with Tabakalera's mediation department.

With the slogan *Tabakalera is yours, too. Learn to love and defend it!*, the project *Harrotu ileak!* proposes a dual approach: on one hand, it encourages youths to rethink the surroundings they are using, to consider them their own and to become involved with them from the standpoint of rights and responsibilities. And on the other, it seeks to foster institutional reflection on how Tabakalera's public spaces can be used and occupied.

Harrotu ileak is co-produced by hablarenarte and Tabakalera's mediation department in collaboration with residents Oihane Espuñez and Felipe Polania, accompanied by external observers Gorka Bereziartua Mitxelena and Samira Goddi. Through its mediation department, Tabakalera continues to work with adolescents in *Harrotu ileak!*

A Tuft of Hair
(in the City Where not Even the Wind Gets Mussed)
By Gorka Bereziartua Mitxelena

Tabakalera still smells new; like a renovated place that continues to show the marks of what it once was (the wooden staircase you come upon when passing through the main entrance, the very structure of the building, the parts where the physiognomy of the old tobacco factory has been retained) and the scars of that renovation have yet to heal, as nothing has been used enough, yet. In fact, two years is hardly enough to insure a level of wear and tear that would hide the marks of the new masonry. I think it is the act of walking through a recently remodeled building that makes sporadic visitors experience something close to agitation, something quite similar to what we experience when first visiting a friend's new apartment. Their presence has yet to transform the place, and you don't quite know where to step or how to behave in these unfamiliar surroundings. It doesn't seem right for you to be the first person to use a new piece of furniture so you remain standing, moving like an astronaut, without getting too far from the entrance until your friend returns, beer in hand, and says "take a weight off your feet" pointing to a soft sofa that rests proudly in the middle of the living room, oblivious to the experience of having a person lounge in it.

But your friend's house is a living space, while Tabakalera is an International Center of Contemporary Culture, with every one of its capital letters. Your friend's house is a private space, but Tabakalera is public. The former is part of an acquaintance's life project; but the second is part of a city's project. In the former, the owner can decide who has access and who doesn't. In the latter, at least in theory, anybody can enter, regardless of their origin, age, race, sex or beliefs. The type of user "expected" to come in is another question: Some are expected, and come without having to offer any sort of explanation; others are not expected at all, and then there are those who arrive at this house "uninvited."

I recall the photographic coverage of Tabakalera's opening published by the weekend press. Many people came to explore the nooks and crannies of the new building, and the numbers were staggering: 28,000 people visited it during the opening weekend, alone. If we observe the people that appear in

those images, we are struck by their age. At first glance, many appear to be over forty; not precisely millionaires, but certainly well off, and white. These are "normal people" from San Sebastian.

And there is something else that does not go unnoticed by anyone who has returned to the cultural center: in September 2015, on the ground floor near the entrance closest to the Egia tunnel, there was a sort of container that had been proposed as a provisional purveyor of breakfasts and lunches until the cafeteria finally opened six months later. The day the center opened, there were other empty spaces, including the "Prism," a 472 square-meter plaza that crowns the roof with a glass enclosure and a 140 square-meter terrace with views of the city's Romanesque quarter. The visitor was also supposed to find a restaurant on that same floor, but it had not yet opened—in fact, as I write these lines, work continues there. While awaiting restaurant clients, the prism is visited by all sorts of people. It could actually be considered a sort of passageway that calls only for a rapid visit: you arrive, contemplate the view from the terrace, and leave. The Center's unwritten user's manual says there is no more to do there, that it is not a place to stay, and that is why there are no benches on which to sit. You begin to get that "astronaut" feeling again, like when you visited your friend's house for the first time, except that here there is neither beer nor an inviting sofa. Just in case, you don't stand around for very long, you don't touch anything, and you don't even let yourself be carried away by the view—just in case they come to charge you, because looking from here must be very expensive.

I am talking to you from a body well into its thirties, a body that has become less flexible, even though I stretch out every morning. When I sit on the ground, I'm soon numb and cannot find a comfortable position. For younger or at least less-rigid bodies, the lack of benches in the prism is not reason enough to leave, because they can spend hours on the floor, and besides, the space is enclosed—an important factor in San Sebastian—and has free wifi access. In other words, it's a nice place to hang out with your friends. Tabakalera's director, Ane Rodríguez, reported on this situation just a few months after the center opened, at a roundtable discussion published by the *Kulturaldia* website. The questions that arose during this conversation among the directors of various cultural initiatives in the city were: why do cultural offerings find it so difficult to connect with people

under a certain age? Where are the youths? Among giggles, Rodríguez answered: "They are in Tabakalera, on the wifi." She went on to explain that this might constitute a fine opportunity to work with that sort of public.

Still, the situation is undeniably paradoxical: on one hand, the center has something many other cultural spaces long for—adolescents who use it habitually—but on the other, most of those youths are not at Tabakalera for its programming or cultural services, but rather for the characteristics of the building itself, or because it allows them to spend a comfortable period of time in a place like the prism, which is not entirely regulated. They are not tiptoeing around in fear of committing some sort of error, and in fact, they are more often seen doing acrobatics on the terrace, or in groups, here or there. They seem unburdened by any worries, arranged at will in a place they can use in many different ways. And this variety of possibilities may well be due to the building's inner structure: rather than a place separated from the street, Tabakalera considers itself an extension of the street, and indeed, much of its area consists of street-like spaces: passageways and other transition points open to everyone.

In his work, *The Public Animal*, anthropologist Manuel Delgado analyzed certain types of social behavior linked to urban life, and while that book dates from around 1999, some of its chapters seem to directly address the sort of situations that led to the *Harrotu ileak!* initiative. Delgado explains that the urban space is not made up of citizens who own it, but rather of users who have neither property rights nor exclusivity over it. City planners foresee concrete uses for each space, but they never manage to create a completely closed system: with their practices, users of public space—"public animals"—defy the authority that seeks to tame them with its urban organization. Delgado identifies certain types of people for whom the urban lifestyle as a natural habitat. They are 24-hour pedestrians who, in the author's words, constitute monsters from the edge, "in the sense that they cannot be classified." Among them are migrants, adolescents, lovers, artists and outsiders in general. "Physically, of course, they are among us, but in fact they are perceived as somehow occupying a different space [...] trapped in a pure trajectory. They are cause for alarm, but they also fuel hopeful expectations, thanks to their capacity for innovation and questioning"[1].

1. Manuel Delgado, *El animal público*, Colección Argumentos, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1999, p. 114.

This is the context of concern and hope in which the *Harrotu ileak!* initiative emerged, and it encourages us to reflect upon the cultural center's community of users, on the space's inner life, how it is regulated, and the opportunities and limitations presented by contemporary cultural practice when it attempts to reach younger generations. The project opens a space for thought, and that is precisely its strong point, especially since I do not believe this artists' residency was conceived in terms of a final result or "product." The artists, Oihane Espuñez and Felipe Polanía, have launched various dynamics to open debate about the role of people in cultural activity. They have not sought to treat Tabakalera's users as a *sujet trouvé* to be publicly exhibited, nor have they assumed the status of artist-demiurge. That has never been their approach to understand collaborative art. On the contrary, they have paid greater attention to the relations established in their proposed actions than to the cultural benefits they might obtain from them. No outside observer will be able to avoid posing certain questions about such an unusual approach. Are they legitimizing how the youths use the space? Are they assigning cultural value to those uses? Is it possible to mutually agree on certain norms—for example, the *Peace Treaty* proposed by this project— with a group of people who do not define themselves as a subject? How, then, can one go about getting those youths who use Tabakalera in similar ways to identify themselves as part of the same group? What other identitary vectors are at work in their relations?

Espuñez and Polanía began with a diagnosis of the youths' use Tabakalera, and they structured the project around collaborating with this segment of the population. In analyzing the center's uses, they identified types of activities outside the realm of cultural practices proposed by the center. There are people who go there to pray, to maintain anonymous and sporadic sexual relations in the bathrooms, children with their parents who use the spacious ground-floor area, and people who spend hours playing table tennis on the second floor. A small society coexists in Tabakalera, and just as one finds in the larger society outside its doors, they are writing a narrative on what happens therein. That narrative emphasizes certain practices and leaves others in the background, or even hides them. In this sense, the effort to include all of these unrecognized activities in the center's diegesis is positive, as it demonstrates the institution's intention to explore and transform what is happening there, rather than simply setting out rigid limits.

But once the situation is accepted, how can relations be established with those subjectivities that are outside Tabakalera's public image? I think the strategy they have employed in their work with youths is outstanding. The two artists in residence identified those youths' cultural practice and drew on it as the basis for organizing activities, abandoning their artist/author status and approaches and fully entering the task of motivating the center's users. This "disappearance" of the author, this infiltration of the users, has facilitated relations between those responsible for this project and the users. And as those youths perceive that they have been approached in order to propose activities that are close to them, the distance between them and the institution has at least partially diminished.

That does not mean that the activities organized as part of this initiative are identical to what those youths were doing in Tabakalera before the project. They use the same type of language, but *Harrotu ileak!* constituted a framework in which to reflect upon different subjects, and we might add that this reflection should not be limited only to what the youths are doing—we will get to that later on. A flyer was handed out to invite the youths to participate in *Harrotu ileak!/Posatu selfie*, the first activity/workshop offered as part of the artists' residency. A computer was installed in the Prism and the youths were offered the opportunity to edit photos they had taken in Tabakalera for a posterior exhibition that would include all of those images. This activity was designed to establish relations and to get to know those users' tastes. The youths' invitation to hang their images in that space coincided with an effort to explain that it was also "their" space. This could be considered an exercise in territorialization, as well as a first step in constituting a subject that would have its own voice: the photos make the group recognizable as such and relate it to a specific place.

On the 12th of May, we received the results of that workshop in the final session that Espuñez and Polanía carried out in San Sebastian. There are all sorts of images, but their technical quality is not important. What matters is what they reveal about the center's users—especially when compared to the press photos published when the center first opened. As Tabakalera's mediation group wrote with regard to the photo album: "they are young bodies, vulnerable bodies, innocent bodies, racialized bodies." This quickly brings

to mind the frontier dwellers mentioned by Delgado: adolescents, migrants, lovers. They are not on the border; they *are* the border. That is, they are outside public representation. They are not a part of the official narrative, and the mere fact of making their presence visible brings into question the narrative of this city constructed by dominant news channels, because it shows us just how many people are excluded from the reigning discourse.

Thanks to *Harrotu ileak!*, we have discovered a different story, one narrated by its own protagonists—Tabakalera's users—in their own language. The photo activities were followed on the 10th and 11th of March by a video workshop, and we also viewed the results of this workshop at the final session on the 12th of May. We saw small audiovisual pieces made by those youths: invented stories set in the cultural center and based on their experiences there. Among others, we were struck by a piece titled *They Threw Me out of Tabakalera*, which narrates the experience of being ejected from the building. This question had already come to light in other exercises from the same session, as some of the youths complained about how they are treated by the security personnel, adding that they have also had bad experiences with the *Ertxaintza* (the regional police). Judging by the experiences narrated in another video, we can conclude that the regional police and the building's security personnel are targeting specific users on the basis of race. One of the boys mentions that they are always afraid of the police. Despite the fact that the police never find anything when they search these youths, their constant surveillance generates a negative image and converts them into suspects. In the final session of the workshop, the organizers attempted to explore other possible problems arising among the youths, such as the males' sexist attitudes towards the women, or respect for Tabakalera personnel—especially the cleaning staff. The objective of this last session was to begin defining certain norms for sharing Tabakalera, but the group dynamic did not bear the desired fruit. At any rate, it became clear that the users who attended this final session trust the project's organizers, and the conversation is ongoing. If Tabakalera manages to keep those channels open, it will be easier at some future time to reach the sort of agreement sought by *Harrotu ileak!.*

In my opinion, however, if this is to be an integral process, it will be imperative to complement the initiative discussed in this text by also promoting reflection

among other collectives that are part of Tabakalera's community. Clearly, the youths who are the backbone of this project represent only one part of the Center's users. Above, we mentioned other unusual uses, and there is also need for questioning certain aspects of those uses not considered conflictive. Do we merely consume what is programmed? How can we actually participate? What kind of people are we with in Tabakalera? Who are we not with? Do we consider our fellow users people like us?

Now, two years after its inauguration, Tabakalera may still smell new, but enough has happened within its walls for us to begin addressing those questions and reflecting upon the Center's community. On that basis, I believe it has much to contribute as a cultural center, because in this city where not even the wind gets mussed, the dominant cultural perspective is closely tied to an overly rigid ideal of beauty and firm essences that function as symbolic structuring elements. Here, art is still somewhat distanced from people, even physically. It is made of other materials and it is stable, transcendental and practically divine. A more adequate starting point for proposing a different way of experiencing culture, would involve thinking about bodies, faces, hair, sweat and ways of walking; thinking about the movement shaped by all of those bodies as a whole and the collective construction that is a city. About the public animal, and the space that has become its habitat. Everyone is invited to this cultural center, which belongs to no one and must become an indefensible bastion, in step at all times with the people who are constantly conquering it.

**And if "The Others" Come to
the Party and Occupy the Walls?**
By Samira Godoy

Originally, Tabakalera (1913-2003) was a state-owned tobacco factory with many employees—especially women. Following a profound renovation, it reopened in 2015 as a center for contemporary creation. It has a vast, open layout, with large dimensions and a variety of aesthetic nuances depending on how the space is used, but always coherent in an overall way. When you enter the building through the large main doors, the first impression is of a continuum with no barrier at all between the street and the inside. Moreover, the space invites you to enter, thanks to its aesthetic, its services and its own symbolic and discursive status.

In that sense, it is interesting to observe that those arriving at Tabakalera do not come simply because they are attracted to the programming and agenda organized by Tabakalera itself, but also because they want to use other unprogrammed services offered by that space.

For the users, Tabakalera is attractive for three reasons: it is open daily for many hours (which implies availability); entering, being there and leaving are totally anonymous acts (which implies freedom); and its cultural agenda is tied to elements so simple and basic in appearance as the fact that it is a warm, sheltered space with bathrooms, chairs, tables, electricity and unlimited Wifi coverage (which implies services).

In light of these three reasons, I ask myself: are culture and basic services opposing, or mutually complementary elements? Does one prevail over the others? And what does each of these aspects signify for Tabakalera? I am inclined to think that they operate at the same level, creating a triangle: the consumption of regulated culture, self-regulated youth culture, and the consumption of basic services.

These three lines of consumption are intermingled, especially in transitional zones such as passageways and other high-traffic areas that Tabakalera has declared public spaces. Originally assigned no other purpose than that of interconnecting the "programmed" spaces, these

passageways have suddenly been inhabited by collectives calling for their own spaces.

These collectives consist of inhabitants of the social and/or cultural periphery seeking the anonymity of a space of their own with no regulations and no obligation to identify themselves, and thus ideal, as a sort of blank canvas where they can create their own identities with, so to speak, their own multiple colors and forms of painting. The emergence of these uninvited collectives whose use of Tabakalera was not even imagined, is astonishing. Someone not even invited to the party occupies, appropriates, takes over, makes use of, and becomes a part of what is, in this case, space. They arrive at this shared place that seems to lack any owner or clear referent. And that is what prompts the need to approach these youths, while also creating the possibility of establishing a dialog with them. It is interesting to get to know them and discover what lies beneath the surface: who they are, what their intentions are, and how long they plan to stay. This apparently virgin territory needs to be cultivated, and to do so, we must negotiate a shared framework with this group of youths. This has been done by creating *Harrotu ileak!*, a project that emerged from the collaboration of different organizations through CAPP, a European project on collaborative practices. The principle on-site protagonists are the artists/mediators in residency, Oihane Espuñez and Felipe Polanía, along with the Tabakalera mediation team.

The first approach and offer consisted of generating areas of trust with a collective that, *a priori*, kept its distance. This activity stems from an adult idea of youths based on a stereotyped image. But at least partially, it permits greater knowledge of that "other" in order to define more realistically and objectively its characteristics while simultaneously generating direct ties with its members. Especially since, until then, the only information available to the artists/mediators in residency and the Tabakalera mediation team was based on observation and negative rumors.

It seems pertinent to pose the following methodological question with regard to that first phase: to what degree is it convenient to begin with a stereotyped image when approaching a collective that has, until now, kept its distance? Does it make sense to assume that adolescents automatically like new technologies or breakdancing? To what degree is it legitimate

to try to attract them by baiting the hook with a hip-hop workshop, a cell phone or a camera?

As I understand it, perpetuating the creation of activities based on a certain "taste" is an error. And yet, there is some interest in using this method to build bridges and establish contact with the "other." In fact, it is customary to resort to using folklore or participatory methods when managing cultural diversity. Still, once the diversity that characterises that category is known, it is necessary to take a step forward so that the proposal can be more attuned, risky and closer.

It is important to keep expectations or a general goal in mind; in this case, the resolution of a conflict created by a use of the space not allowed by institutional policy. Once interaction with that group is established and more is known about it, however, the information obtained must be analysed in order to propose a new dynamic or activity. Any intervention carried out obliges us to take account of the micro-opportunities or micro-conflicts that arise at that time, in terms both of their relevance and the fact that they may have been unforeseen.

What follows is a list and description of certain outstanding conflicts that may arise from this project's methodology:

— These youths are highly mobile and their use of Tabakalera's services is determined by a very volatile agenda. It is therefore not possible to apply ideas such as consistency, routine, durability or faithfulness to the space when thinking in terms of groups, uses and times. For example, the experience of previous years suggests that, in summer, the city's beaches will become the preferred location for youths to socialise, so they will spend less time in Tabakalera.

— The time will come when the dynamics of connecting with the group of youths (ties and shared creation) shifts to debate on the limits of using the space, and the creation of a shared and mutually agreed agenda. Among this group of youths, some will share, some will accept, and some will resist. Moreover,

the collective in question is not a fixed, homogenous group. When new youths arrive, they will not know what agreements have been reached previously.

— Adopting a negotiated normative framework that establishes conditions for the use of common spaces does not imply abandoning our considerable capacity for intuition, improvisation and continuous adaptation. It will always be possible to create new tendencies that we have not even imagined yet, just when we thought everything had already been discussed, foreseen and established.

In that same sense, I would like to point out some of the opportunities implied by this project, which are, in part, linked to its limits:

— *Harrotu ileak!* main activity is based on the cell phone, a digital device used here in a creative and shared way in a physical space. This consists of taking photographs to be exhibited in Tabakalera's hallways as a way of giving these youths an opportunity to display themselves to their peers through an artwork. Thus, we seek to help them get to know the place, fostering a sense of belonging to it and sharing their personal gazes with that of other people through a very individual and personal device (the cell phone): in short, making something personal into something collective and participative.

— By the end of their stay, the artists/mediators will have left a fertile terrain. They began their residence by facilitating and mediating, but their departure does not imply an end to the process. As mentioned above, I believe that their presence has created an opportunity to open a channel for constant communication and participation.

I have not found a way to gauge the relations between the institution's natural power over the space, and the youths' underlying power over its use. On one hand, the power over the space is obviously in the hands of

Tabakalera, which is partially subsidized with public funds and thus belongs to everyone. On the other, the youths' power lies in their unimaginable diversity, which leaves us with the feeling that we are unable to foresee their actions. That is what makes the distribution of powers less unequal than might first seem to be the case, although it would be difficult to compare them using uniform parameters.

The main opportunity offered by this project is undoubtedly rooted in the fact that we have begun a process to generate mutual knowledge by fostering creation, an artistic and creative dialog that helps us jointly determine the rules of a game that is closer to sociology than to play: encountering coincidence between the youths' viewpoint and that of the rest of the citizens who also frequent this space.

Harrotu ileak! allows the youths to embark on a journey towards what could become a major turning point for Tabakalera's space, thanks to what they find, what they are looking for, and what they can build and invent there. To establish a parallelism, society should not be ruled solely by those who have a right to vote. Anyone living there should be able to express their opinions and take part. Listening to those people who have a voice but not a vote provides a highly valuable and truly interesting opportunity for any policy aimed at the sort of prevention, intervention and evaluation of practices and acts that we carry out anywhere. A key tool for enabling this process is undoubtedly getting the different parties to know each other and build mutual trust. Their shared horizons are also essential. Any project intended to foster coexistence, no matter how broad the gap between the different parties (in terms of ideology, culture, religion, generation and so on), must be understood and shared by all participants. Motivation will make the voyage more relaxed and insure that the travelogue is written by all the travelers, rather than only by the person driving the vehicle on such an adventure.

On-site Observations

Below, I will propose three blocks of quotes as a means of approaching the subjects inhabiting Tabakalera. For the first block, I randomly chose young

people who are there. For the second, I speak with one of the *Harrotu ileak!* coordinators, and in the third, I chatted with a young participant.

In order to collect direct declarations from the youths, I visit Tabakalera on a holiday Monday with bad weather around four in the afternoon. I randomly choose a different group of youths on each floor of the building and ask one member of each group their name and age, what they like and what they dislike about the place.

Outdoor terrace: Viviana, 19 years old, chats with a group of six friends. She likes "the atmosphere" but recalls that "there have been some arrests here, and one of the detainees was a friend of mine."

Ground floor: Maddi, 4 years old, is playing with her father. She likes "that my friends are here."

First floor: Keita, 26 years old, is watching the news on her cell phone with a friend. She finds Tabakalera "a nice place" but comments that "they have reduced the number of electric outlets."

Second floor: Dalaipurev, 15 years old, is waiting in line to play table tennis with nine family members. "I like UBIK and playing table tennis but I always have to wait for the table to be free."

Third floor: Inge, 11 years old, is eating candies with two friends. She says: "I like UBIK" but she regrets "that it is now closed."

Fourth floor: Silvia, 17 years old, is doing her homework with two friends. She likes that Tabakalera is big but "on Sunday, the library is closed."

Prism (glass-enclosed roof structure): Mohammed, 19 years old, listens to music with a friend. He likes "being with my friends, listening to music" and hasn't found anything he dislikes.

On a sunny workday, I ask similar questions to Leire San Martín, who directs Tabakalera's mediation department and is one of *Harrotu ileak!* originators. I also speak with a young participant in the project.

Leire is particularly interested by the interaction in Tabakalera between established programming and the room available for diversity. However, she does not like that this can become an unsafe space for anyone. I ask what she is afraid of, and she expresses her fear "that Tabakalera could become an area of exclusion". Finally, I ask what her ideal version of the space would be, and she answers without hesitation that the optimum outcome of *Harrotu ileak!* would be a space where both youths and the institution are comfortable.

I don't ask the young participant on the third floor his age or origin and I only ask his name near the end of our conversation. It is the final day of the exhibition and like the others, he has come to pick up his self-portrait, which has been on show on the building's first floor, where he hung it. At a relaxed moment, I ask him in a direct and informal way what he thinks about the project and the place. Despite some slight difficulties with the language, he tells me three things: that he feels at home here, that this place transmits tranquility, and that it is the best thing in San Sebastian.

As a closing reflection, I would like to propose three different ways of handling cultural diversity in a public space:

Assimilation: the "other" cannot publicly display his or her cultural diversity and must instead practice or show it at home.

Multiculturalism: accepts cultural diversity, but only in spaces prepared for it.

Interculturalism: this is the ideal model, but it calls for permanent dialog in order to create something new, which requires mediation and negotiation.

Felipe Polanía and Oihane Espuñez, who were in residence at Tabakalera for *Harrotu ileak!*, have experienced the project first hand—often amidst conflict—and are able to see the diversity of people present in this space with their multiple identities and life stories, as well as just how those aspects persist. They also observe that the space's hybridization, the newness of Tabakalera's project, creates a degree of distortion in the institution itself, and they understand why Tabakalera proposes control and security in ways that the youths reject. They therefore propose permanent mediation as a

means of handling some conflicts. A figure that interprets, translates and prepares the parties and the multiplicity of profiles present in this space to understand, live, respect, view and care for it. When using this figure, this project could be the beginning of a laboratory valid for those challenges which society today does not want to face.

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Opening of the photography exhibition *Harrotu ileak!*, Tabakalera, 2017

Streetdance open training, *Harrotu ileak, jump, dance!* Tabakalera, 2017

Biographies

Warsame Ali Garare
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Gorka Bereziartua Mitxelena
(Hernani, 1984) is a journalist. He works at the media company Argia, where he coordinates the culture section and is in charge of the web edition. He has collaborated in various media such as Diagonal, ETB, Euskadi Irratia or Hala Bedi and was part of Kevin Heredia, pseudonym with which a collective of writers published the novel *Hor hago Kevin?* (Meettok, 2010).

Dr. Michael Birchall
is Curator of Public Practice at Tate Liverpool and Senior Lecturer in Exhibition Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. His curatorial practice and research concerns socially engaged art, performance, and notions of publicness in museums. He has previously held curatorial appointments at The Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre and The Western Front (both in Canada), and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (Germany). In 2017 he co-curated *O.K. - The Musical* by Christopher Kline at Tate Liverpool.

Toni Coromina
(Vic, 1955) is a writer, journalist and screenwriter. He collaborates in La Vanguardia (opinion, cultural works and social chronicles). He has published several books: *El que la sigue la persigue (El Ultimo de la Fila* biography), *Café Vic* (portrait of a generation of rebels and pranksters), *A favor o en contra* (diary of a dreamer hairdresser), *Òxid de Boira* (Vic artists) and *El bisbe ludópata i altres contes*.

Javier García Clavel
(Murcia, 1980), is a cultural manager, editor and professor of literature and creative writing. Doctor in Hispanic Philology with a doctoral thesis on political commitment and Spanish literature in the twenties, he has been Director of the magazine *Poesía Digital* and has worked at the bookstore Auzolan. He currently collaborates with Pre-Textos publishing house and coordinates the reading club for young people of Noáin Library, among other projects.

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Anna Recasens
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Credits

Narranting Collaborations is a publishing project by hablarenarte that comes out of the residencies within CAPP. This edition of 2018 is comprised by the following texts:

COLLABORATIVE
ARTS PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAMME

The Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) is a transnational cultural program (2014–18) focusing on the field of collaborative and socially engaged arts practice across artform and context. CAPP is made up of a nine-organization network, led by Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts in Ireland.

CAPP is a diverse range of dynamic cultural and artistic organizations supporting the development of artistic projects of excellence. Partners include: Agora Collective (Germany), head partner Create (Ireland), hablarenarte (Spain), Heart of Glass St Helens (UK), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (Germany), Live Art Development Agency (UK), Ludwig Múzeum. Museum of Contemporary Art (Hungary), m-cult (Finland), and Tate Liverpool (UK).

The overall goal of CAPP is to improve and open up opportunities for artists who are working collaboratively across Europe, by enhancing mobility and exchange while at the same time engaging new publics and audiences for collaborative practices. The different strands of the CAPP program consist of national and international professional development opportunities, artist residencies, commissioned works, touring and dissemination, and a major showcase in Dublin (Ireland), 2018.

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