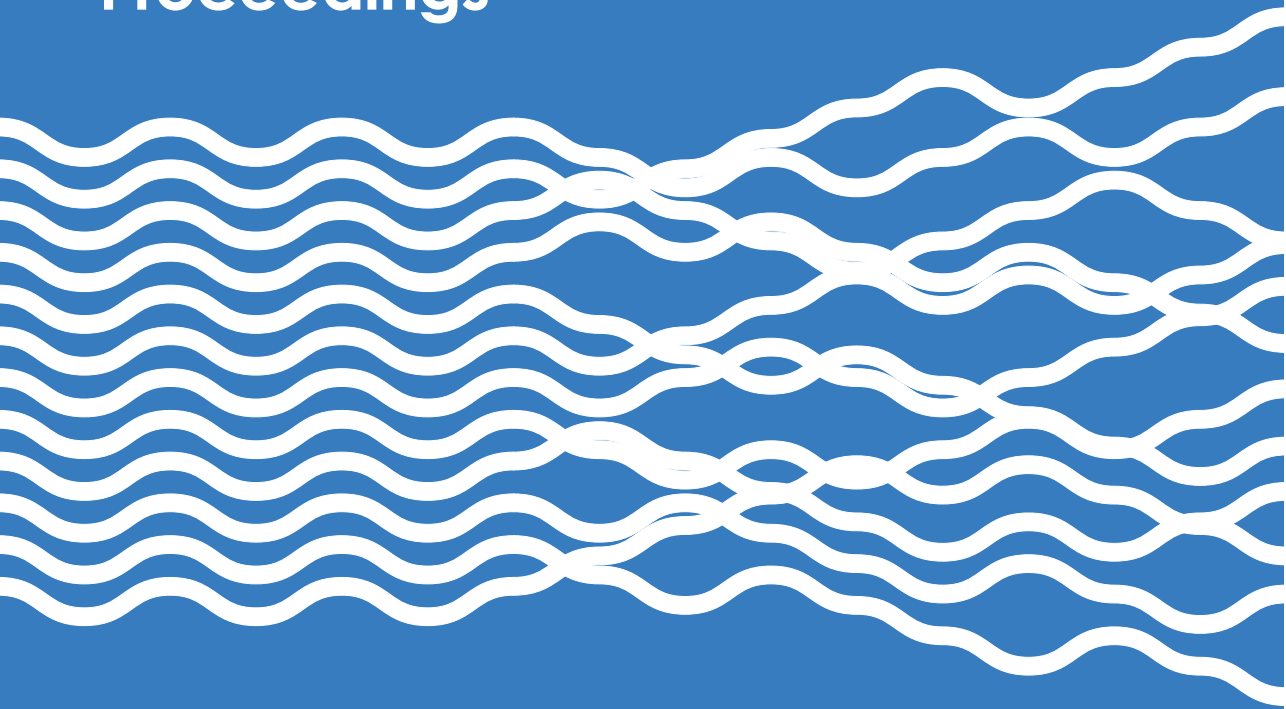


# Conference Proceedings

 Sharing Society



International Conference

# Sharing Society

**The Impact of Collaborative Collective Actions  
in the Transformation of Contemporary Societies**

May 23-24, 2019 • Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea • Bilbao, Spain

Benjamín Tejerina, Cristina Miranda de Almeida and Ignacia Perugorria  
Editors



Universidad  
del País Vasco

Euskal Herriko  
Unibertsitatea

**International Conference Sharing Society** (2019. Bilbao)

Sharing Society : the impact of collaborative collective actions in the transformation of contemporary societies, [Conference Proceedings, May 23-24, 2019, University of the Basque Country, Bilbao] /Benjamín Tejerina ... [et al.](editors). – Bilbao : Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, Argitalpen Zerbitzua = Servicio Editorial, D.L. 2019. – 423 p. : il. Textos en inglés y español.  
D. L. BI-804-2019. – ISBN: 978-84-9082-678-2.

1. Acción social. 2. Movimientos sociales. 3. Economía colaborativa. 4. Redes sociales. 5. Cambio (Sociología). I. Tejerina, Benjamín, ed.

316.42(063)

All authors have assigned the organizers of the *International Conference Sharing Society* the rights to use, distribute, publish, record, broadcast, reproduce and archive the submitted work under the creative commons license *CC BY-NC-SA (Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike)*.

All authors warrant that the work and its presentation are original and that they are the authors of both the work and the presentation. To the extent the work and the presentation incorporate text passages, figures, data or other material from other authors, all authors have obtained all necessary permissions to grant the license above. The authors are responsible for the reproduction of copyright material from other sources (by obtaining the necessary permission or by quoting them according to academic ethical rules).

Furthermore, all authors have granted the organizers of the *International Conference Sharing Society* the permission to use, distribute, publish, record, broadcast, reproduce and archive, their ORAL presentations and comments at the conference in any format or medium, exclusively for academic and non commercial aims under the creative commons license *CC BY-NC-SA (Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike)*.

Finally, all authors have confirmed that they have the power and authority to make and execute this statements. For jointly authored works the main author signed as authorized agent for the others.

Editors do not assume any responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, topicality or quality of the information provided. Authors are responsible for the quality and accuracy of the information provided. The opinions contained in the publications of this Book of Proceedings are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or the publisher.

All papers published in the Book of Proceedings passed a double-blind peer review process.

Recommended citation: Tejerina, Benjamín, Cristina Miranda de Almeida, Ignacia Perugorria (editors). 2019. *Sharing Society. The Impact of Collaborative Collective Actions in the Transformation of Contemporary Societies*. Proceeding of the International Conference Sharing Society (Bilbao, May 23-24, 2019).  
Leioa: Universidad del País Vasco/ Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

© Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco  
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateko Argitalpen Zerbitzua



ISBN: 978-84-9082-678-2

Depósito Legal / Lege gordailua: BI-804-2019

Benjamín Tejerina, Cristina Miranda de Almeida and Ignacia Perugorria  
*Editors*

*Edition and book cover design:* Mikel Azpiri Landa · mikelazpiri.com

## Collaborative Collective Art Actions and Sensible Politics<sup>1</sup>

Cristina Miranda de Almeida<sup>2</sup>

Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

**Abstract:** *In the history of humanity there are several collaborative practices and actions based on sharing that, among others, generate deep social bonds: potlatch, reciprocal altruism, cooperatives, and mutualism. These practices are based on generosity and collaboration, rather than in competition. These historical links were broken by modernity and the expansion of capitalism and globalization. As a result, art also suffered from this rupture of bonds with society, transforming itself into an art whose end, in general, is situated in itself and in the market. However, there are countless examples of collaborative artistic action. We will explore 2 kinds of collective art strategies, those that (1) make visible the problems of the public sphere in postmodern and hypermodern society and those that (2) aim at creating new forms of common through art.*

*The methodology used is mixed, based on a review of various theories of collective action applying them to art (LeBon; Blumer; Kornhauser; Smelser; Davies; Gurr; Morrison; Olson; Lichbach; Chong; Opp; MacCarthy; Zald; Benford; Snow; Diani; Jasper; Emirbayer; Cefai; Meg McLagan and Yates McKee) and a series of interviews.*

*Orsi proposed the concepts such as 'economy of sharing,' 'politics of sharing' and 'practices of sharing' and of truly collaborative economy. The hypothesis is that the concept of Collaborative Collective Action (CCA) amplifies Orsi's concepts by posing that collaborating is more than sharing and, therefore, collaboration in art is more than sharing art.*

*CCA in art involves actively enrolling society in all phases of a process so that the ultimate goal is the development of a sense of belonging, a recovery of social bonds between equals, through a conscious commitment to the commons and society. Art, thus understood, would contribute to restore the bonds between subject and community lost with modernity from its specific creative processes, and emerge through collective practices generated by individual artists and collectives that focus on the relationship and the creation of bonds, not on the creation of objects for the market. Common strategies are, among others, the creation of platforms and events, actions of empowerment and education to recover the commons in the public sphere. When art is understood as collaborative collective action there are impacts in relation to various dimensions of the art system.*

*One of the best-known effects is the challenge it poses to the concept of authorship, what affects the relationship of artists with the art system. Another effect is the transformation of the processes and methodologies of creation, production, distribution, knowledge transfer and reproduction of art. Co-creation, co-production, remix, reuse, hacking and copy-left processes emerge. In synthesis, art collaborative collective actions make visible obscure areas of public sphere and address a possible reconfiguration of contemporary commons, personal and collective data sovereignty, and other kinds of open processes.*

**Keywords:** *collaborative art, commons, sharing society*



## 1. Introduction

In 1990 Elinor Ostrom proposed these eight design principles for the governance of commons to avoid what, as early as 1833, Lloyd had called the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968): (1) define limits on access to the common-pool resources (CPR); (2) create rules of appropriation and provision adapted to local conditions; (3) establish agreements that allow participation in decision-making; (4) monitor; (5) establish sanctions for those who appropriate the resources and violate the rules; (6) have mechanisms for conflict resolution; (7) allow official recognition of the community; and (8) agglutinate CPRs in multiple layers of nests, maintaining small local reserves at the grassroots level.

Similarly, Janelle Orsi (2015) proposed six essential principles for a truly collaborative economy, its policies and practices. Through her six principles she proposes sharing: (1) wealth and prosperity; (2) power and decision-making; (3) capitalization and risk; (4) resources and efforts; (5) knowledge; and (6) responsibility for the common good.

In this text, the set of principles proposed by Ostrom and Orsi is broadened by the ‘collaboration’ dimension proposed by the concept of *collaborative collective action* (CCA). According to Tejerina, “Collaborative collective action (CCA) is the set of formal and informal practices and interactions carried out between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations that share among themselves a sense of belonging or common interests, on the basis of collaboration and conflict with others, with the aim of producing or slowing social change through the mobilization of certain social sectors” (Tejerina, 2010: 19-20).

The research, the results of which are partially presented in this article, starts from this definition of the CCA and asks the following research questions: what is the effect produced by artistic collaborative collective actions (ACCA) on the revitalization, production and reproduction of the commons and social bonds? What effect do they have on art?

There are historical practices of creation and production of commons based on sharing that generate deep social bonds and that to some extent partially or totally comply with the eight principles proposed by Ostrom. These include potlatch, reciprocal altruism, cooperatives and mutualism. These practices, based on generosity and collaboration rather than competition, also form the basis of artistic creation in various cultures (e.g. Australian Aboriginal art). From this perspective, we consider art as a specific form of common pool of symbolic and technical resources; an art that creates a collective imaginary, is capable of making visible problems of the public sphere in order to increase social awareness about them and allows the revitalization of social bonds.

With the expansion of capitalism and globalization, this role of art, understood as a common pool resources (CPR) or a common reserve of specific resources, clashes with the privatization of authorship (intensified in modernity) and the capitalization of the work by the art system. Links with society are broken and, as a result, art becomes more and more individual, with an end in itself and subject to the rules of the market.

Despite the fact that art has distanced itself from society, different forms of artistic collaborative collective actions exist, and have been increasing both in quantity and quality in recent years,

especially since the influence of the Internet on art. As Lopéz Cuenca states, “artistic work has occupied an ambiguous place in capitalism, to say the least” (2016:7). It is a form of “(im)productive” relationship.

However, collaborative collective actions are not welcomed by all art agents. Bishop questions collaborative artistic practices understood as relational, socially engaged and collaborative art (Roche 2006) because she considers that aesthetics is sacrificed on the altar of social change. Relying on Bishop, we ask ourselves under what conditions artistic collaborative collective actions remain art.

Our hypothesis is that the effect of artistic collaborative collective actions on the production of the commons and on art is variable in relation to different phases of the artistic process.

We affirm that collaborative collective actions in art can be evaluated through a set of indicators combining the principles of Ostrom and Orsi with the phases of the artistic process (including pre-production, production, post-production and capitalization of results; see Figure 2). The identification of the results of collaboration as art depends to a large extent on the stage of the collaboration.

## 2. Objectives

The objective of the research is threefold:

- 1) Create the Artistic Collaborative Action Matrix analytical tool (Figure 1) to analyze artistic ACC;
- 2) Identify the effects of artistic CCAs on the production of the commons and the restoration of links between art and community; and
- 3) Identify some of the conditions for CCAs to continue to be considered art for their practitioners and other agents of the art system.

## 3. Methodology

The project is in process and is developed through a mixed methodology, direct and indirect and the application of the matrix. From the revision of theories of collective action, in particular the concept of collaborative collective action (Tejerina, 2010), theories of the common good, theories of collaboration (Himmelman, 1994), the main concepts are extracted to apply them to the analysis of artistic CCAs. They are contrasted with specific concepts of art, such as relational art (Bourriaud, 2006), collective and participatory art (Bishop, 2012).

At the same time, secondary data collected on different artistic platforms are analysed: texts, statements, interviews on social networks, blogs and videos.

On the other hand, we have 3 in-depth interviews, participant observation (LaAgencia<sup>3</sup>) and auto-ethnography (personal participation in previous CCAs such as in *Introvisión*<sup>4</sup> and *On the Grapevine*).



The collection of direct data was structured from a selection of indicators and axes of analysis common to the research group, but adapted to art. Subsequently, two in-depth paradigmatic case studies (Fair Saturday and Ideatomics) will be analysed.

## 4. Results and Discussion

We present 2 types of partial results.

The first type is the creation of the matrix and the second is a brief synthesis of the first reflections on its application to the cases of artistic ACC studied.

To understand the matrix, let's start by considering a system of 2 axes that cross in the center, forming a field with 4 areas (Figure 1).

The first vertical axis is that of autonomy versus collaboration. In the upper pole is located the autonomy of art and in the lower pole is located the collaboration in its most radical form, with a society is artist and generates art, according to the idea proposed by Beuys (Bodenmann-Ritter, 1995).

The second axis, horizontal, is that of the internal or external origin of the objectives of the actions. In the right pole is the objective of the actions proposed internally by each artist and, in the second, the socially negotiated objectives (external to each artist or group of artists). In some cases this pole corresponds to examples of commissioned or curated art.

In an ideal situation of collaboration between society and art there would be a coincidence between the 4 poles at a central point of equilibrium at which they would line up: (1) the autonomy of art and the collaboration with an artist-society, and (2) the objectives of the artist and the social objectives.

Let us also consider that these dimensions must be differentiated according to the phases of artistic creation (see Figure 2) and according to 5 phases of collaboration, understood as contact, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and convergence (Himmelman, 1994).

In order to apply the graphic to the analysis of artistic CCA cases, it is necessary to know how each case behaves, in each phase, during the artistic creation process, during the collaborative process and in relation to each area of the matrix. In this sense, specific matrices must be generated for each ACC, in each phase of creation and collaboration to analyse the effects on:

- 1) the creation of links;
- 2) awareness of social problems in the public sphere;
- 3) the creation of common goods; and art itself as a common good;
- 4) authorship;
- 5) the process of artistic creation and,
- 6) interdisciplinary knowledge.

Next, in Figure 1, we will see the graph of the matrix, its 4 areas and its 4 poles:

Vertical axis: art autonomous versus collaborative art

Horizontal axis: external objective negotiated with society versus internal objective of the artist.



**Figure 1. Artistic Collaborative Action Matrix**

Note: Elaborated by the author, 2019

In Figure 2 we present the phases of the analysis of collaborative artistic collective actions:



**Figure 2. Phases of Analysis of Artistic Collaborative Actions**

Note: \*Preproduction; Production; Postproduction; and Capitalization. Elaborated by the author, 2019

Analyzing the selected case studies and taking into consideration the different phases of creation and collaboration, we observe that collective and collaborative action has effects on:

- 1)** The creation of links: the ambiguous relationship between art and capitalism determines the modes of production, reproduction, transmission, dissemination and reception of art, re-configuring both the relations between art and society and the internal relations to the art world.
- 2)** Awareness of social problems in the public sphere: in many cases the specific objective is to critically question the public sphere and its problems (climate change, gender, digital control, identity, lack of privacy and authorship among others) and to generate greater levels of consciousness in society through art, from the sensitive.
- 3)** The creation of common goods and artistic creation itself as a common good: artistic CCAs



seek to reactivate the commons, working directly with society. This artistic reactivation of the commons takes shape both in relation to the content produced (images, sounds, texts) and with the tools and methodologies of production and circulation of know-how (processes, methods, techniques) and ideas. This last phase of the collaboration continuum is usually the most developed in digital collaborative art processes, in the creation of open artistic knowledge, or through the use of creative commons licenses for appropriation, remixing, and other collective creative strategies.

- 4) The process of artistic creation: this circulation of open knowledge reveals the impact of collaborative art on authorship and on the process of artistic creation, but this impact depends on the phase.
- 5) In the margins of this rich ambiguous territory arise diverse collectives and collaborative artistic platforms dedicated to *artist* practices that work in local, national or international networks.
- 6) Currently the volume of artistic CCA is increasing: (a) exclusively located in physical spaces and with specific communities; (b) through delocalised networks organised in online platforms or (c) in a hybrid way (practices that take place in a physical way in specific places and at the same time supported in networked platforms. An increase in interdisciplinary collaboration is also identified.

## 5. Partial Conclusions

From the analysis of artists' declarations of intent and manifestos we observe differences in how these collective actions align with Ostrom's and Orsi's principles depending on the phase in which they occur. Proposals are produced that are understood more as a contact between artists and social groups outside of art -what Orsi understands as sharing knowledge and information.

Artistic collaborative collective actions question the identity of artists, based on the concepts of the autonomy of the subject and of production, destabilizing the relationship of the work with the artistic system, the type of works created and their distribution, the role of the community and the public, but the degree to which this questioning of identity is produced depends on the phase in which the collaboration takes place.

Other proposals correspond to processes of cooperation or coordination, as they function as agglutinating platforms for art collaborative collective actions focusing on problems in the public sphere. They tend to be proposals with a strong one-way tendency, in which participants are invited to contribute, but not always to generate ideas or capitalize on results.

In this type of collaboration, it is very common to find coalitions that usually perform functions such as convening, catalyzing, channeling, promoting, providing technical assistance, training, allying (being a partner) and facilitating projects.

The analysis of artistic collaborative collective actions in a few cases shows that similar goals are assumed by collectives of artists and curators who work as transforming agents in neighborhoods or communities. These collectives often assume the role of catalyzing, convening, or organizing discussion of public sphere problems in specific communities and places.



If artistic collaborative collective actions capitalize on content and results, limiting the role of participants to mere content generators, the framework of trust is broken and the artistic collaborative collective action begins to operate through a system other than collaborative.

Artistic collaborative collective actions are produced both at the level of local communities and in global networks. The cases analyzed are located at different points in the matrix in relation to co-creation, co-production and the questioning of the role of the author. There have been no examples of centrality between the axes at all.

In summary, the concept of artistic collaborative collective action proposes that collaboration is more than sharing, it expands the principles of Ostrom and Orsi and proposes that the phases of the creative process and the collaborative process should be included in the analysis of artistic collaborative collective actions. The production of a 'true' artistic collaborative collective actions would imply actively inscribing society in all phases of the artistic process, so that the final objective to be achieved would be the recovery of social bonds, through a conscious commitment to the common good and society through a kind of art that, without ceasing to be considered as art, gets as close as possible to the central point of the matrix.

## 6. References

- Bishop, Claire. 2006. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *Artforum*. 44(6): 178-183.
- Bodenmann- Ritter, C. 1995. *Joseph Beuys: cada hombre un artista*. Madrid: Antonio Machado.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2006. *Estética Relacional*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo.
- Hardin, Garrett. 1968. "The tragedy of the commons." *Science* 162(3859):1243-1248.
- Himmelman Arthur. T. 1994. "Communities Working Collaboratively for a Change". Pp. 27-47 in *Resolving Conflict: Strategies for Local Government*, edited by M. Herrman, Washington, D.C.: IC/CMA.
- López Cuenca, Alberto. 2016. *Los comunes digitales: Nuevas ecologías del trabajo artístico*. Puebla: Mala letra.
- Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Roche, Jenniffer. 2006. Socially Engaged Art, Critics and discontents. <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivesfiles/> Accessed March 14, 2019.
- Orsi, Janelle. 2015. Creating the Next Economy. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3oIFvyzZZE>. Accessed March 3, 2019
- Orsi, Janelle and Emily Doshkow. 2009. *The Sharing Solution: How to Save Money, Simplify your Life and Build Community*. Berkeley: Nolo.
- Tejerina, Benjamín. 2010. *La sociedad imaginada: movimientos sociales y cambio cultural en España*, Madrid, Editorial Trotta.

## 7. Abbreviations

- **ACCA** Artistic Collaborative Collective Action
- **CCA** Collaborative Collective Action
- **CPR** Common Pool Resource



## 8. Biographical Note

Cristina Miranda de Almeida holds a European Doctorate in Art (Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 2005), a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts (UPV/EHU) and a degree in Architecture (USU, Rio de Janeiro). She holds a Master's Degree in Industrial Design (DZ-BAI, Bilbao) and a Specialization in Urban and Territorial Planning (Fundicot Madrid/Universidad de Valencia, IBAM, RJ, Brazil). She is currently affiliated to the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) where she teaches in undergraduation and in the Master in Contemporary Art, Increatea.

She had postdoctoral periods in the Digital Culture Research Program of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3/UOC Barcelona); McLuhan Program of Culture and Technology, University of Toronto (2007-11) and École Nationale Supérieure de Beaux-Arts, Paris (2010). She is Research Fellow in Mediaccions / Open University of Catalonia and coordinator of the Mediated City Research Program, University College of London.

Her research focuses on issues related to (1) hybrid art (impact of the digital technologies and Internet on experience and new materialities) and (2) collaborative and interdisciplinary art.

She has participated in several research projects in competitive and commissioned calls (MINECO, UPV/EHU, BEAZ), some as the principal investigator. Among her publications are her PhD thesis "The Tree of Art: Trans-sensorial and intersubjective matrix for non-visual art and the silence of the artistic self" (UPV / EHU, 2006), *The Point of Being* (2014, co-edited with Derrick de Kerckhove) and several articles in specialized journals, book chapters and proceedings of International conferences. She has been guest and keynote speaker in Seville, Bilbao, Frankfurt and Prague among others. Founder of Universal Margin, her artwork (installations, performances, photography, video and drawing) has been exhibited both internationally and locally in museums, cultural houses and public exhibition halls as well as in museums and private galleries.

## 9. Notes

- 1 This article presents part of the research on collaborative art that is part of the project "Sharing Society. The Impact of Collaborative Action. Study of the Effects of Practices, Links, Structures and Mobilizations in the Transformation of Current Societies" (MINECO CSO2016-78107-R).
- 2 To contact with the author, please write to [cristinamiranda.de@gmail.com](mailto:cristinamiranda.de@gmail.com)
- 3 See more information about LaAgencia in : Laagenia. Retrieved April 10, 2019 (<http://laagencia.net/laagencia/>).
- 4 The author has been a member of different art collectives among which one of the most relevant was the art collective *Introvision Group*, together with Inmaculada Jiménez and Manya Doñaque, during 5 years (2000-2005) The collective worked and exposed its work regularly. For more information see: *Cristina Miranda de Almeida. Art Portfolio*. Retrieved April 10, 2019 (<https://cristinamirandade.myportfolio.com/intro-vision>).

## ART TOGETHER HOW Collaborative Art Practices in the Crossing with Methodologies and Techniques Coming from the Social Sciences

Saioa Olmo Alonso

Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea and Wikitoki, Laboratory of Collaborative Practices

**Abstract:** *Does contemporary art have social agency in relation to our present challenges? The article sets out what kind of contributions can art do to the problems that we currently have as society. It focuses on the relationship between persons and suggests that to face those challenges, we need to empower in ways of relating to others within collectivities. For that, it proposes examining the junction between the arts and the social sciences. Firstly, it frames the relationship between the social and the arts reviewing the functions that art has had across different ages, and advising, that even if what we consider as “social” could be taken under a wider frame (including the notion of the agency of diverse materialities) the article centers in interpersonal relationships in certain contexts. Then, it presents art projects that practice collaborative processes, showing that sometimes, artists use concepts, methodologies, and techniques coming from the social sciences. To that extent, it lays out references of art projects that are carried out through group representations, group dynamics, surveys, simulations, audiovisual documentary tools, systematic observations, data visualizations, lab-experiments, communities of practice, force-field analysis and operational groups. Finally, it explores the agency of collaborative art and, as a toolbox, it proposes three types of practical compilation of references, methodologies and techniques: a collection of art projects that deal with ways of relation, a collection of group dynamics and techniques to use in artistic processes, and a compilation of artistic mechanics to use in group work. These are more widely exposed in the thesis Transart. Collaborative art practices, relational technologies, and social performativity.*

**Keywords:** *Collaborative art, relationships, agency, social sciences, tools*

## 1. Art

### 1.1. Art Functions

What art is and what art is capable of, have changed a lot throughout history, and probably we will see major changes in the 21st century. If we analyze the function of art in the past, we will see that the conceptualization of art has been linked to the needs of each age, accomplishing imaginative, symbolic, magical, religious, economic, social, communicative, educational, political, experimental, therapeutic and aesthetical functions.

Today, the challenges that society is facing are among others, the exploitation of natural



resources, the economic globalization, the unbalanced distribution of wealth between countries, migratory flows, the power of large corporations, gender inequality. It seems necessary to pass from an individualist consciousness to a more collective one, to overcome these transnational challenges, because it seems that no change will be achieved if it is not pursued in a collective way. Intentionally or indirectly, several types of art initiatives pose ways of socializing, discussing clashes that appear when working in groups, choreographically playing with collective movements, practicing modes of consensus and disagreement, experiment with people's participation. Nowadays, if we think that one of the functions of art could also be contributing to social transformations, it looks like a good idea to consider how we can do art together *Art Together How*, that is, how we can relate among ourselves through art, to come to see unexpected paths at the crossroads that we face.



**Figure 1. Tania Bruguera and The Association of Useful Art.  
The Symbol of Useful Art in the Flags, since 2008**

Source <http://www.arte-util.org>

## 1.2. Art Creations and Ways of Relation

Contemporary art sets multiple ways of relation. If we think about relationships, frequently what comes to our mind first are human relationships, even if we know that relationships can be thought in a much broader sense, among diverse materialities: organic, digital, mechanical, mineral. Relationships can be of multiple ways as well: formal, performative, conceptual, physical. Normally, neither elements nor relationships are of just one type, although often certain characteristic can stand out. At the same time, the types of agents and relationships are not fixed entities and may vary over time. The type of relationship shapes the elements and the characteristics of the elements condition one kind of relationship or other to happen. There are endless combinations in a dynamic and generative process.

Across the times, we have mainly considered contemporary art through the relational structure: artist-artwork-spectator. We have put artwork in the role of an intermediate agent, as an element that allows circulation. We have focused on the subjects when creating and when experiencing artworks: we have adapted artworks to satisfy our needs, we have mainly

made art in which we were the final receptors, (both tangible artworks and intangible artistic experiences) and even considering that in certain epochs and cultures, art could also be oriented to other beings, spiritual or natural ones.

The actor-network theory and the new materialisms in general put at stake humanity's centrality within the concept of society. Even if the actor-network is a social theory, it integrates persons and machines (or technical artifacts) without differentiating them as social and non-social, it is a theory of the assemblage of elements. The human is not isolated as the object of the gaze as anthropocentric perspectives may display. And anthropological studies of indigenous cultures such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2013) approach on the Amerindian perspective, questions the universality of Western cosmogony.

Even acknowledging the interest of the material turn, this article is especially centered on relational technologies among people, and we will leave other perspectives for following developments. We will reflect on collaborative art through the western way of thinking, perhaps, to remember something that we once knew but then forgot, and maybe reach to feel like just one entity together with the environment in which we live.



**Figure 2. Pierre Huyghe, *After A Life Ahead*, Münster Skulptur Projekte, 2017<sup>1</sup>**

## 2. Together

### 2.1. When “Together” Means Working as a Group. What Is a Group?

Lately, collaborative practices are becoming more and more common in contemporary art. This does not mean that before, artists didn't collaborate with or interact with other people, but that now, they are deliberately committed to collaborating, consciously and ideologically. Therefore, as choosing to collaborate is not by chance, and because there is a special interest in the process itself to be collaborative, there is also interest in making these processes more satisfying.

Social psychology has profoundly investigated group dynamics and organizational systems. In our argument, to frame the analysis of the functioning of the group, we will use some knowledge



coming from the social sciences in the crossing with the arts. In order to analyze what a team is like, which its powers are, and how we can work within this structure when doing art, we will examine the performance *Atlas* directed by Ana Borralho and Joao Galante.

This project is a participatory performance made with 100 people. The structure of the performance is based on a children-song that says: “If an elephant disturbs many people, two elephants disturb much more. If two elephants disturb...” The number continues to infinity. In the case of this performance, each participant walks from the back to the front of the stage, and instead of saying ‘elephant’, each one says her profession; for example, “if three carpenters disturb, four carpenters disturb much more ...” The number of people in the front progressively increases, and their presence is important, as well as the personal phrases chosen to identify themselves. The motivation of the artists for arranging this performance is thinking that art should have an active role in society, which is in consonance with Joseph Beuys’ core ideas “we are a revolution” and “we can all become artists.”



**Figure 3. Ana Borralho and Joao Galante, *Atlas*, 2011**

Source: <https://anaborralhojoaogalante.weebly.com/atlas.html>

Often, when we see a lot of people together, we can wonder whether they are a group or just an addition of persons. What is exactly a group? In this performance, are we in front of a group, are they an addition of individuals or perhaps a temporary community?

People adhere to the groups mainly to fulfill a need, although quite often the team members do not consciously know what benefits they are getting. Within a group, we find accompaniment, security and survival, affiliation and status, power and control, achievements.

There are some conditions that people who consider themselves as a group fulfill: people have to be interdependent, there has to be social interaction and communication between the teammates, all teammates have to take themselves as team members, and they come together for achieving a common goal.

Thus, some definitions of group focus on the identity of the team members, others on

the interaction of members, and others on how they organize to carry out a function. In terms of identity, John Turner (2016) argues that from the point of view of the theory of the *self-categorization*, the group is an ensemble of individuals that consider themselves as being part of the same category, and that share emotional involvement. From the group's dynamic perspective, Kurt Lewin (1988) considers the group as a dynamic whole in which interdependencies play an important role. Another approach is thinking that an ensemble of people can have different degrees of grouping, and to differentiate them, some criteria by Joseph E. McGrath (1984) are used: size, interdependence, and time-frame. Lastly, for identifying a group, the concept of *entitativity* can also be helpful, that is, the conditions that something needs to fulfill, to be considered as an entity, and the consequences of this perception. To understand the group as an entity, having a common destiny, similarity and proximity are taken into account.

In the chosen case of the *Atlas* project, we can consider that the participants make up a temporary group. It is a large group (100 people on stage), and there are many types of people involved in it (different professions, origins, languages, ages, genders, skills...). Diversity is expressly requested in the submitted call for obtaining volunteers. Participation is voluntary and there is no financial benefit for it. Therefore, the aim of this group should be searched somewhere else: the experience of participating in an art project could be attractive; the ideology that the artworks may transmit matches with the participant's ideology; it could be that the affiliation to an artistic activity provides a desirable social state to the participants; perhaps they're looking for being accompanied by others; maybe some of them think that participating in the action and the learnings coming from the process will be useful for their own professional achievements. Being in a group can fulfill many needs, and the common goal would be bringing the performance to an end.

To achieve this goal, all participants and even the organizing team are interdependent. If some people fail to rehearse, or if the artists and their colleagues fail in the organization of the action, the team's goal is compromised. The group is formal; the objectives and rules of the artists and of the organizing institutions structure the behavior of the participants. In that sense, it's autocratic, and roles are also assigned that way. Even if the social contact can be a factor of attraction to the initiative, the process does not take place to respond to this necessity, though it takes advantage of the pleasure that the social contact provides for the play to be materialized in the best possible way.

For participating in the project, commitment to assist to the rehearsals is required. In a first phase, the team is divided into two halves, as in three-hour four-day rehearsals it is easier to work with half of the group; then, 5-hour two-day rehearsals are performed all together, and the show is played in two days. The initiative is pretty demanding for the participants in terms of time. In terms of size, interdependence and timing, the smaller the number of members, the more interactions between members, and the longer the duration of these interactions, so easier the constitute as a group.

In a show, the perception of the audience is essential. To ensure the public to perceive people on the stage as a group, entitativity plays its role. A group shows entitativity when it has a common destiny, when the similarity between its members is perceived, and when there is proximity. Closeness lies on the occupation of a common space, and that is facilitated by the boundaries of



the theater. Referring to similarity, the artwork itself demands diversity among participants, but at the same time, it uses a mechanism that unifies all: the phrase and choreography that repeat. The third point, the common destiny, is in the own framework proposed by the play: such a large and diverse group being able to accomplish a performance together, showing that when a diverse people come together, they are able to have and show a powerful presence. That's art's artifice and performativity: we do not know whether this group will come together again, or if their attitude will be performed somewhere outside the play, as the sentence "If you 99 people disturb, 100 people disturb much more" powerfully suggests. At the same time, watching it from the stalls and acting under the protection of the theater, can leave us satisfied enough, and with no desire to take that attitude any further. In any case, the *Atlas* performance offers a challenging fictionalized representation of the power of a large group, and we can consider watching and living it as transformative, even if it remains in the field of the fiction.

## **2.2. Ways of Thinking About the Group**

There is something aggressive and intrusive about wanting to know about people, about researching people, about looking for other persons' reactions... Having an observing gaze on ourselves, can provoke our fear of being more controllable, more easily manageable, more vulnerable. That can happen both in the arts and in the sciences. On the other hand, the researching gaze can adopt a playful role, as the hidden cameras or audio recordings in tv and radio programs, and it can also have an onanistic nature, as in the psychological tests of magazines.

To study the characteristics, behavior, and performance of the groups, there are different types of studies in social psychology: field studies, laboratory experiments, field experiments, natural experiments and simulations. Likewise, in order to unify group data, some techniques are used: group observation, self-reports, and documentary techniques. There are also different types of group observations: participant observation and systematic observation. In self-reports, questionnaires, scales, reports, and sociometric tests are used. And, as documentary techniques are used: the observing method, the correlative method, and the experimental method.

Some artists interested in the way people socialize use those researches and techniques. However, the objectives are different, as well as the ways in which those techniques are applied, the consequences that are derived from them, and the effects on specific contexts.

For example, the artist Hans Haacke used surveys and polls to make institutional critique in the seventies. Politically controversial questionnaires, polls, and graphs were made under the form of art installations within renowned art institutions, as for example, at MoMA- Museum of Modern Art of New York, within the exhibition *Information* in 1970. In that case, setting out a question to the visitors of the exhibition through a voting, "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina Policy be a reason for your not voting for him in November?" tried to set under evidence the collusion of interest among politics, economics and culture, in that very exhibition space, as the own Nelson Rockefeller a major donor and board member at MoMA.





**Figure 4. Hans Haacke, *The World Pool and Other Works, All the World's Futures*, 56. Venice Biennial, 2005**

Source: <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2015/05/venice-hans-haacke-at-the-central-pavilion/>

If we look at documentary techniques, we could also mention the audiovisual work carried out by the Chilean artist Juan Downey with Yanomami tribes in the 70s. While living with them, he facilitated the Yanomami people to watch themselves and other Yanomami of close villages with an interruption of two or three days, anticipating current communication systems, and got to obtain very iconic images of the relation between “observer and subject of the observation.”



**Figure 5. Juan Downey, *Yanomami Playing a with CCTV*, 1976-77**

Source: <http://ensayostierradelfuego.net/field-notes/trans-america/>

Referring to other techniques such as the systematic observation but modifying who is the analyst, and adding the data visualization, Pablo de Soto's *Situation room* artwork (2010) at LABORal Art Center is an interesting case. It proposes a similar kind of control rooms used in The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, but it is the civil society who can have a panoramic view of the data. This room, similar to the screens that monitored the context, was used by artists, geographers, biologists,



economists, computer scientists, and spectators to create common knowledge, and it was like an experiment of simulation.

Apart from specific techniques, we can also pay attention to the types of group learning. Laboratory experiments are also common in the field of art, as well as artworks that expressly refer to laboratory experiments of social psychology. For example, Itziar Barrio's *The Perils of Obedience* is an experimental project of video-theater, inspired by Stanley Milgram's renowned experiment. In 1963 the psychologist showed that people used to follow more frequently the instructions of an external authority than her own ethics. Itziar Barrio invited some actors to perform scenes of a movie under the orders of a theater director, and from time to time actors were requested to go out of the space of the fiction and answer questions that referred to situations of the represented play and of their personal life.



**Figure 6. Itziar Barrio, Obedience Risks (Bilbao)**

Source: <http://www.itziarbarrio.com/new-page>

On the other hand, Artur Zmijewski's *Repetition* artwork (2005) repeats the experiment of *The Stanford Prison* by Philip Zimbardo. In 1971, Zimbardo collected 24 young people through some advertisements to make an experiment. In a closed space of the Stanford University, he emulated the conditions of a prison, assigned the role of guards to half of the group and the role of prisoners to the others (distributing uniforms and accessories, changing the names of the prisoners by numbers, giving rules...). Seven days later, earlier than what was planned, the experiment had to be finished, due to the degree of violence reached and because its ethic was put under question. Artur Zmijewski repeated the experiment, providing to the participants similar conditions to those of the original experiment, but 34 years later (a different temporal context), and with more video cameras placed behind hidden mirrors. In this case, the end was different, and all the participants agreed to abandon the experiment within a few days, which can take us to different reflections in the blurring field among art and social psychology. Apart from that, it is also interesting noticing that the experiment takes advantage of *the exemption space of the art* as nowadays proposing that kind of experiment from the social sciences, would encounter ethical difficulties.



**Figure 7. Artur Zmijewski, Repetition, 2005**

Source:<http://www.polishculture.org.uk/visual-arts/news/article/artur-zmijewski-at-cornerhouse-manchester-58.html>

Apart from laboratory experiments, field-experiments are also practiced within the contemporary art sphere. In this sense, it is interesting the project *In the Name of Place* made by the GALA Committee led by the artist Mel Chin, inside the TV program *Melrose Place* of the 90s. Artists, students, colleges and television producers made their way into the TV series producing artworks, artistic decorations and some adaptations of the script. The operation was not intended for commercial purposes, but to facilitate the transfer of art. They used about 200 artworks; some of them were shown at the MOCA museum, and then, all of them were put on an auction, giving the profits to a charity entity. The project can be considered as a case of subliminal information and we can connect it with the experiments from other fields of knowledge. In 1947, James M. Vicary put the term of subliminal perception into force, although the experiments that he made on subliminal perception ended up being a scam. *In the Name of Place*, played with the strategy of the *product placement*, not to sell artwork, but to experiment with the possibility of greater dissemination of art in daily spaces.



**Figure 8. Gala Committee, In the Name of the Place, 1995-1997**

Source: <http://melchin.org/oeuvre/in-the-name-of-the-place>



As we have seen in the previous examples, art takes advantage of methodologies and techniques used by the social sciences to experiment with the dynamics of groups and with people's behavior. That is sometimes to think about a concrete matter, to provoke reactions in certain contexts, to affect people's experiences, and quite often for a mix of all those in different proportions.

### **2.3. Group, Art and Agency**

Historically, it has always been claimed that art affects society. Referring to it, David Slater, artistic director of the arts company Entelechy Arts, agrees with this affirmation, but at the same time, he asserts it cautiously, because, although he considers that art has this capacity, he notes that it often does not do it (Olmo, 2018:part 1,178). When can we say that an artwork is affecting the social context? Could we say that artworks have agency?

From the point of view of the philosophy and the social sciences, an agent is one that intentionally has the potential to start a causal event in its immediate vicinity. Thus, the agency would be the capability of an agent (a person or another being) for acting in a certain context. In order to reflect on the agency of groups of human beings and their works of art, and specifically to realize on the agency of art made within a group, we can take under consideration several authors and examples.

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, Albert Bandura (2001) explains that some characteristics are assigned to the human agency: intentionality, planning, self-regulation of motivation and ability to self-reflect. According to this author, the agency can be carried out in three ways: personally, by representation and collectively. He also asserts that the unpredictable (precisely the management of the unexpected) is an element that must be considered. These features and abilities, the ways and circumstances to perform the agency, would set up human agency. Depending on these variables, the effectiveness of the agents can be evaluated. As the human agency is rooted in social systems, the personal agency is involved in a wider network of social impacts, and people and groups get the most out of their agency when their psychological orientation is convergent with the social structure of the system.

Alfred Gell (1998) allows us to take a step further in this discourse in the book *Art and Agency* because the matter of agency is placed in the artwork itself, as he also considers artworks as social agents. To do this, we need to overcome the "barrier of the intentionality". In this line, he argues that we also give agency to other beings, for example when we assign thinking and intentions to animals and material objects (as a child does with her doll or an adult with her car). This is easily understood when we explain that some agents –primary agents (those who have intentionality)– distribute their agency with secondary agents (things and artifacts). For example, the agency of a person who uses a weapon would be distributed between the person and the weapon, because that relation happens in a given context (for example, when a soldier puts an anti-personnel mine in a field). According to the author, artworks have agency in the proximity of an agent and in a causal context; therefore, the agency could be regarded as a contextual factor as a whole.

On the other hand, in society, as art functions in a micro level, when thinking about the

agency of art, it is interesting to know which kind of links are between what's happening in the micro and the macro levels. In this regard, sociologist Randall Collins (1998:242) argues that "micro-sociology is the most solid part of what we know about the social world, and that we understand the larger and more long-term patterns when we see how they are composed of such micro-situations".

Sometimes, the work done in a group (such as *The Perils of Obedience* or *Repetition* artworks), suggests links between what happens in a daily situation and more structurally, too. What happens in the micro can be a representation of what happens in the macro, and vice versa, which is represented in a micro level (as in the case of *The Name of Place*) can be found to have social effects in a macro level. Interestingly, Collins (1998:246) argues that this micro-machine translation, apart from being a single direction, exceeds specific cases and finds repetitive patterns that are structural in the social organization, and at the same time, "whatever macro principles may exist, are constrained to take that form because of micro explanatory principles".

Finally, to reflect on group agencies, we will use force-field analysis by Kurt Lewin (1998) to think about the West London Social Resource Project by Steven Willats and the Pichón Riviere's (1975) Operational Method in ColaBoraBora's *Hondartzan* project.

The method used by the British artist Stephen Willats is very similar to the modes used by the social sciences, and the *West London Social Resource Project* (1972-73) artwork that we will review, has similarities with the phases that Kurt Lewin raises in his force-field analysis. Kurt Lewin's theory can be useful to explain the transformation of a group, as well as to work as a guide for group transformations. Lewin considers the field as a specific moment of the psychological context of an individual or of a group, and establishes that in any field there are forces to motivate and to block people, and therefore to provoke changes in the field, so the whole situation should be considered. The force-field theory is the basis of Lewin's *formula for change*. The model is organized in three phases: phase of *defrosting*, the phase of *change* itself, and the phase of *refreeze*.

Stephen Willats uses tools from the social sciences in his projects, and the *West London Social Resource Project* was organized in similar phases to the ones of the *formula of change* of Kurt Lewin. For this project, the artist worked with four London residential areas; each area was a representation of a social group. He made an advertisement to look for the participants and those who wanted to participate had to describe the relationships with their context and their objects at home in a notebook. He showed these responses in the neighborhood's public library. Later, he sent a remodeling book to indicate how they would transform their home and the surrounding area. These were shown in the public, to receive feedback and vote, and then, the participants made the latest models. During that time, the results were shown in The Gallery House - Behavior Art Center, formalized in the manners of contemporary art. We can do a similar reading of the phases of the organization of this artwork: firstly, some of the features of the participants' lives were analyzed together with the participants, as well as with other participants. This helped to move the established situation (phase of *defrosting*). Then, the participants were asked to think about some possible changes (phase of *change*). And finally, a general representation, a synthesis installation was used, which was carried out in the field of art, a structure that joined the last proposals: it would be the moment of fixing and installing ideas (phase of *refreezing*).



**Figure 9. Stephen Willats, West London Research Project, London, 1972**

Source: <http://stephenwillats.com/work/west-london-social-resource-project/>

Another example of art-practice to collectively work and achieve transformations is the community of practice *On the Beach (Hondartzan)* that ColaBoraBora directed in Bilbao from 2010 to 2014. For this initiative, people who wanted to experimentally research on affectations in collaborative practices and learnings for accomplishing collective processes joined forces. They organized sessions together once a month the first year, and a bit more spatialized in time during the following years. Each session focused on a topic: tools for teamwork, knowing each other's projects, cohousing, the types of capitals, the fears... and some sessions called *Mareas (Tides)*, were also organized together with the participants who wanted to propose specific themes. Some people attending the sessions were frequent members of the community, and others were more sporadic. People were attracted to the setup issues, as well as to the ways of working because they were designed to be creative, playful and through group dynamics. Likewise, tools of representation were used to create and make clear returns, as the open culture and the DIWO (do it with others) were basic principles of the philosophy of the initiative. We can consider *On the Beach* as a process close to Pichón-Rivier's works with operational groups. The operational group is a team theory and methodology for the group, which uses the team as a tool for change, focusing on the team's project. Participants experience significant relational situations while studying and discussing the evolution of the group. *On the Beach* initiative, focused on "working on the commons and the collaborative practices" while practicing them.



**Figure 10. Stephen Willats, West London Research Project, London, 1972**

Source: <http://stephenwillats.com/work/west-london-social-resource-project/>

### 3. How

Along these lines, we have put many examples of ‘how’s in collectively art processes and of “shaking” relationships using artistic strategies. Examples are useful to find out how to join different elements in a specific situation and from that concrete assembly of elements, which consequences happen. Putting these examples of art projects in relation to social theories and techniques let us looking at group matters and rethink them from new perspectives.

Further developments in the ‘how’ axis have been proposed in the thesis “Transart. Collaborative art practices, relational technologies, and social performativity” (Olmo 2018, part 2, pp. 165-203), with the intention of creating ongoing compilations of references, techniques and practical cases, like tool boxes to share with others, which in that publication have been called soft-technologies. Next steps will be given with the intention of organizing this knowledge even more systematically. First, with a collection of artworks centered on relationships; secondly, with a collection of group dynamics possible to be used in artistic processes; and thirdly, with a collection of artistic mechanics for its use in collective processes”. In this sense, the *Everybody’s Tools Box* website (2006), the *Hondartzan DIWO Kit* of ColaBoraBora (2014), Cristian Figueroa’s Book *TejeRedes* (2016), *CTR- Composition in Real Time* by Joao Fiadeiro (2018), are interesting examples of this kind of collections of techniques and methodologies.

There are many possible ‘how’s that can empower us in micro-fields. The challenges of today’s society are complex because of the scale, the implicated agents and the ways in which these agents are assembled. We know that complex challenges require complex solutions, but we also know that the micro can influence the macro, depending on the analysis, perspective and strategy over the situation. Does contemporary art have agency in current social challenges? It can be helpful, and for that, we can create, experiment, mix and share social tools and artistic resources and put them into practice.



## 4. References

- Bandura, Albert. 2001. "Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective". *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52: 1-26.
- ColaBoraBora. 2014. *Hondartzan. Kit DIWO*. Retrieved April 15, 2019(<https://es.slideshare.net/ColaBoraBora/hondartzan-kit-diwo>)
- Collins, Randall. 1988. "The Micro Contribution to Macro Sociology". *Sociological Theory*, 5 (2): 242-253.
- Everybodys. 2006. Retrieved (<http://everybodystoolbox.net>)
- Fiadeiro, Joao. 2018. *Anatomia de uma decisão*. Portugal: Ghost Editions.
- Figueroa, Cristian. 2016. *Libro TejeRedes – Trabajo en Red y Sistemas de Articulación Colaborativos*. Madrid.
- Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewin, Kurt. 1988. *La teoría de campo en la ciencia social*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- McGrath, Joseph. 1984. *Groups: interaction and performance*. Englewood Cliffs: University of Illinois, Urbana.
- Olmo, Saioa. 2018. *Transart. Collaborative art practices, relational technologies and social performativity*. Bilbao. Retrieved April 15, 2019 (<https://transarte.wordpress.com/2018/11/08/phd-tesis-tesia>)
- Pichón-Rivière, Enrique. 1975. *El proceso grupal. Del psicoanálisis a la psicología social (I)*. Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión.
- Turner, John C. and Katherine J. Reynold. 2016. "Self-Categorization Theory". *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2013. "Perspectivismo y multinaturalismo en la América indígena". *Cosmopolíticas: perspectivas antropológicas*, España: Trotta.

## 5. Methodological Appendix

The methodology followed in this article has been setting out an argument and bringing together examples that illustrate that reasoning.

## 6. Biographical Note

I am artist, associate professor in the Fine Arts Faculty of the University of the Basque Country, and member of Wikitoki-Laboratory of Collaborative Practices. My artistic practice deals with group behaviour. I propose situations where participants are given certain guidelines and then the event is open to their wishes, reactions and improvisations. I have been working about "cultural identity", "gender & feminism" and "mechanisms of desire" through collaborative and participative processes with the public. I pay attention to relationships from the disruptive field of art mostly to unveil the array of power relationships. I am also coming to delve into social behavior not only among humans but also in connection with other entities. After a wide artistic creation in the Basque Country on participatory art, I have recently concluded my PhD "Transart. Collaborative art practices, relational technologies, and social performativity". Related to it I have written articles such as: "Transart. Transactions, Transferences, and Transitions in Participatory Art", *Brac Magazine* (2018); "Mecánicas Transaccionales en las Prácticas Artísticas Participativas", *Telonde fondo magazine* (2017); and "Tecnologías Relacionales en las Prácticas Artísticas Participativas", *Ausart magazine* (2016).



More info:

[saioaolmo.com](http://saioaolmo.com); [transarte.wordpress.com](http://transarte.wordpress.com); [susurrandoelfuturo.wordpress.com](http://susurrandoelfuturo.wordpress.com); [tecnologiasblandas.cc](http://tecnologiasblandas.cc); [sobrelorrelacional.wordpress.com](http://sobrelorrelacional.wordpress.com); [wikitoki.org](http://wikitoki.org)

## 7. Notes

- 1 The artist created an artificial environment on an ice rink. In a space with resemblances with an extraterrestrial place, it combines several elements. The flooring is removed, and with the ground under the floor, a landscape is created. At the center, there is an aquarium with a poisonous sea snail that causes the aquarium walls to be transparent or opaque, and at the same time, it is connected to the openings in the ceiling, from where the bees from a beehive come out. Likewise, there is an incubator with cancer cells, connected to the intake of the visitors by means of sensors. Visitors can see some black shapes of augmented reality through their mobile phones, that were in interdependency with the incubator. It is an artificially connected ecosystem, that once arranged, the artist didn't interfere with.