

**Arts  
Collaboratory**

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**REPORTS |  
on the Arts Collaboratory  
Assembly Senegal 2015**

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The first day already gave me a taste of what the whole experience was going to feel like, a great warmth and sharing spirit, and a committed will to discuss and generate ideas together. Arriving to the Assembly late my first encounter was a meeting on the collaborative projects with the Minga team. Fernando and Ana from Mas Arte Más Acción led the conversation and each organization's members shared their take on Minga, Utopia. This was also the first time I had the chance to hear the amazing and inspiring projects each organization is running. This first hours together also gave us a glance at possibly the major challenge of the Minga project, the coordination of a collective effort that is actually collaborative and not just a gathering of separate ideas in different places around the globe.

Afterward Kër Thiossane's team presented their space and projects, the artist residence, workshop space, school of commons and FabLab. Working on a local scale, their projects were a really strong cases of direct action in a community, generating capital of knowledge, experience and collaborative work, developing common instances and particular economies that can benefit people in many ways.



At the neighborhood where FabLab is located, Marion from Kër Thiossane explained to us how it's been a constant work with the local community to get them involved in the construction of the Jardin Jet d'Eau and familiarized with the importance of having a shared place for gathering and just contribute together. I guess all our organizations are constantly facing similar situations, related to the involvement and communication with local communities. At the garden we shared garden tools and goodies with Marion and the guys who keep the plants and the space in general.



Right next to the garden is the FabLab, where people from the area are working with open source technology and programming linked to traditional knowledge, producing free culture that is locally useful. Last photo is a group of Kër Thyossane iguanas and some machine parts, cut with the tools made at the FabLab. They also had an embroidery machine, and some others built with recycled containers.





This FabLab volunteer proved to be quite interesting to Arts Collaboratory members, as I've seen him showing up in pictures from some other organizations, here's Sally taking a pic for the official record.



In the afternoon we headed to probably the most photogenic location in Dakar, Librarie Athenas and it's surrounding place, it reminded me of Age of Empires. Here, we attended presentations that I felt were key moments in starting the Assembly.



**“Both Sally and I were too excited/concentrated on Binna’s presentation on commons. Being too busy taking close notes, none of us took pictures in the moment.”**

These were ideas and processes we’re familiar with by experience, but at least for me it was the first time to watch and listen to these concepts depicted and analyzed in an articulate way. It definitely shed light on our activities, both at lugar a dudas and in the larger scale of Arts Col-laboratory network.

Among other things, Binna’s presentation made me think about how contemporary critical thinking is pretty much driven by these ideas, in situations of corruption, poor administration of resources and social fragmentation, the daily practice of possible different ways of sharing, different kinds of capital and ways in which it can circulate through individuals and communities are all things at the core of the most valuable experiments transcending ‘artistic praxis’ on to

economy, social organization and healthy, fare development.

I remember asking myself what kind of commons do we generate with our program, right now I think our contribution to these notions is mainly based on generating knowledge produced by experience and sharing, is like, we provide or facilitate learning experiences for people in the art scene in Cali, that can potentially propel critical thinking and the emergence of new projects with different kinds of impact.

Later these ideas gave me a broader and much deeper understanding of the operation and spirit of fellow projects as Platóhedro in Medellín and Cooperativa Cráter Invertido in México D.F.

A performative presentation is already interesting, and in this case it came perfectly in hand with the voice of their project, but beyond this, their talk got me going back and forth between being really inspired, and then analyzing regular everyday work at my organization.

Cráter is producing meaning with a spirit that is both critical and poetic; their work is committed to political struggles in their context, which makes them an ample platform for activist collectives that are confronting problematic situations. And what impressed me the most is their ability to keep producing works from the organization itself, while at the same time hosting all this collective activism. Their work in drawing, editorial projects and other kinds of situations are super rich outcomes of experiments in alternative communication by sharing and co-creating. This kind of experience made me think about them as examples of the kind of critical and poetic projects that for me, are really valuable in an expanded and politically challenging scenario of contemporary art practices, in which more aspects of life are involved much beyond the art scene or the art world protocols. The value of this kind of projects, for me, is the one of a social experiment.

Also these guys had a particular understanding of what we were doing back in Dakar, like a sharp and panoramic view of the larger image of this discussions, and from this perspective inspiring contributions and stories from them just kept coming throughout the assembly.

All this fangirling could be about any other organization of the network, but Cráter's story specially resonated in my personal experience; I returned home thinking about ways to work together, and I feel meeting them left me with a clearer and more complex sense of what it is that organizations as us are doing, how, and what for. In a few days they'll be in Italy, taking part in the main exhibition at the Venice Biennale.



Jazael and Yollotl interviewing each other to present México's Cooperativa Cráter Invertido.



Portes et Passages atelier and gallery



Amadou Kane-Sy and Muhsana Ali's project is located in a desert road, in a former military facility. Both of them come from successful art careers and remarkable experiences in community based work, and now they're joining energies and knowledge to run this center, with an agenda of various ways of direct operation in the community of Nguéniéne, from raising awareness about creative values already present in their context, to capacitating people in crafts that can be useful for their sustainability, and also being a platform for inter-cultural exchange that can contribute to a holistic development of the community that participates in their program.

Their story is full of struggle, as they face obstacles in every possible way, starting with natural and monetary resources, the ownership of the land and the building, and then their own family life, the only way the project could be manageable was moving there with their three kids, and the process of building their home had multiple problems.

By the end of this visit I was wondering how much time they have to spend solving problems related to the living conditions in this place, and how much sacrifice is implied in the life choice that is keeping this project. And also how difficult it must be to sustain this sacrifices and constant struggles –precisely- as a life choice.



On a lighter note, Rocca from 32° East, in the back of a little boat.



Regional sessions at Sobo Badé

These sessions consisted of group discussions organized by language or regional clusters; latin american group had members from Plathedro, Teor/Ética, KIOSKO, Cráter Invertido, Más Arte Más Acción and lugar a dudas. While talking about passions and obstacles as part of Arts Collaboratory network, we got to some interesting ideas and shared notions.

Perhaps one of the principal subjects of this day was an analysis of true possibilities of collaboration, we got to agree that collaborative projects should not burden each organization with more work, but instead finding intelligent ways to connect already existing projects, this is also a procedure of getting to know better each other's work. Having the experience of coordinating



MINGA, members of this group stated how the absence of minimal contributions from some organizations and lack of communication is serving as a meter of how much commitment we can provide for collaborations.

It was also a reflection on how smaller scale collaborations built on affinity are more likely to have significant outcomes in short time, which can later serve as experiences to share for other similar collaborative projects in other places. We also explored a common interest about sustainability not only in terms of funds but also intellectual sustainability, of ideas and content, which I think is an accurate way to think about our constant challenges as spaces for critical/poetic projects.



L'Ecole des Sables, is an international center for traditional and contemporary african dances, founded and directed by Germaine Acogny. Ayrsson Heráclito, Brazilian artist in residence at Raw Material Company told us how important this woman has been for the development of dance and performative languages in Africa, we didn't get to meet her, but we shared a wonderful dance session at the Ecole.

Issa Samb has been a key figure in contemporary art and culture in Senegal. His practice as artist, writer and as part of the group Laboratoire Agit'Art has introduced ideas of process based work, non-authorship and ephemerality in recent Senegalese artists. His experiments and work ethos have been an important reference for contemporary cultural agents, as Koyo from RAW material expressed during this visit, she told us that Issa is a person whom she always recurs to, looking for advice to take important decisions related to her projects. Samb's home and studio is sort of a chaotic installation of found objects and materials in constant transformation.

We also met Gérard Chenet at the Theater of l'engouement. For being part of a revolutionary movement in his native Haiti, he went through a long period of political exile, landing in Senegal in the 1950s with the support of president Léopold Sédar Senghor. Since that, he has continued a committed work supporting and developing theatre, poetry and architecture among other media. At the theater he shared some of his poetry and an interesting theory based on a holistic take on the idea of rhythm.



During these days we met other important creators and key agents in contemporary Senegalese culture



Knowing these people and places, and finding out about their stories, highlighted something that had been around conversations and talks during those days, and is also an aspect that I think is an enforcer of the kind of work we do. These creators were introduced to us as references, advisors and sort of predecessors for our host organizations and contemporary artists and thinkers in Senegal. Trailblazers whose work has set the fertile conditions in which recent initiatives and explorations have emerged and developed.

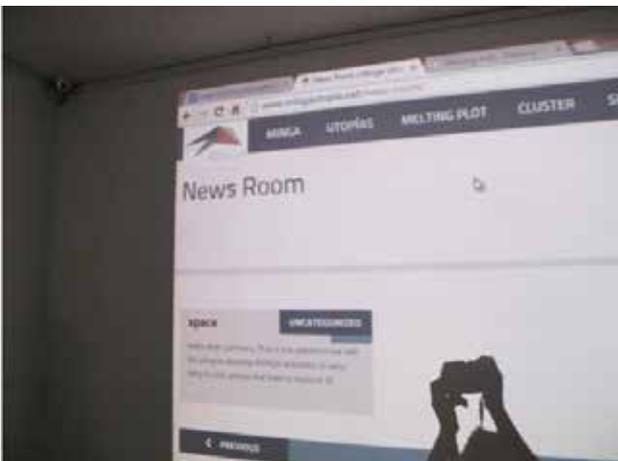
I think not just drawing inspiration, but also actively acknowledging contextual precedent voices can be a crucial operation to have in mind. I see it as tuning in to dynamics and fluxes already existing in every context. Revisiting and exploring the experience of collectives, artists or other agents in our territories can definitely trigger powerful local processes, activating memory of people, places and operations in our scenarios. To recall and replicate this historical antecedents would be a way to explore this possibilities, but also critical revisions of this experiences can be equally interesting and productive.

These can be ways to take on explorations and contributions that have local significance, and also opportunities to have a critical, more interesting part in dynamics of generational shift, or take-over. Trans-generational collaborations are often beautiful and –again- powerful experiences.

## **“Trans-generational collaborations are often beautiful and – again- powerful experiences.”**

*At lugar a dudas* we have a recent landmark/ antecedent in the group called Ciudad Solar, a trans disciplinary collective that propelled important productions in visual arts, cinema, curating and theatre in the seventies. Oscar Muñoz, director at *lugar a dudas* is part of a late offspring of this collective, and at our organization we keep close contact with artists from that generation, looking for constant encounters with their voices and work, in our cineclub, exhibition program and projects like Clásicos de la Provincia and A la hora del té.

Overcoming a nostalgic approach on these predecessors, their work is being constantly quoted and revisited in recent critical curatorial and research practices, as well as artistic production. It is also subject of international festivals, screenings and art and cinema theory writing.



Last meetings on collaborative projects were mostly about communication (in the case of MINGA) here members of the participating organizations are having a first view of the webpage and newsroom tool. Which is going to be the platform for everyone's contributions and will later determine what will feed the outcomes, and actually the final form of these outcomes.

Again, there was a common concern about the actual collaborative nature of this outcomes, but what we got to agree on as a methodology, was to commit to the feeding of the newsroom, understanding this is the tool that will shape the future processes between us.

Next week we'll have Skype tutorials to learn how to sign in and post our contributions in this platform.

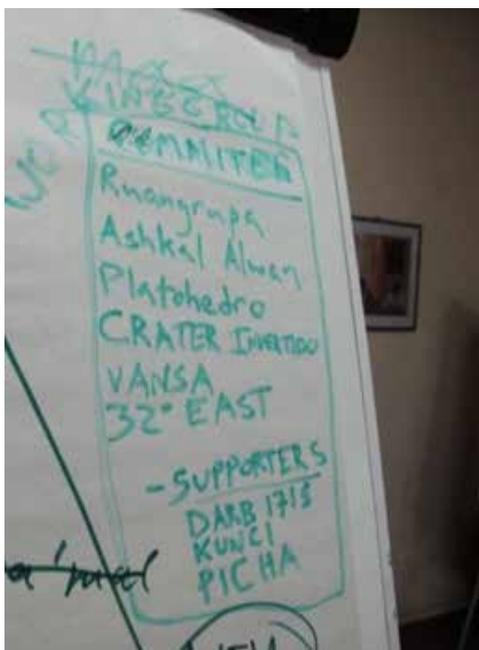


We also had group sessions about the future, about possible models to be implemented for the whole network in a near future. We examined aspects of our relationships with other organizations and donors, trying to imagine other possibilities emphasizing on subjects like the administration of funds, the need for activity reports, levels of autonomy and self-management and supervision.



As different groups got to different proposals, or model outlines, the situation was kind of a tension between models that trusted in the way the network has been functioning up to this point as a methodology that we should keep with slight variations, and models that adventured on to explore shifting committees, cluster coordinators and rotating responsibilities through organizations.

Aspects that remained at stake, and were actually the most challenging to explore, were time as a resource in the case of the new rotating models and new kinds of roles for donors and facilitators that could function beyond a dynamic of donor and recipient.

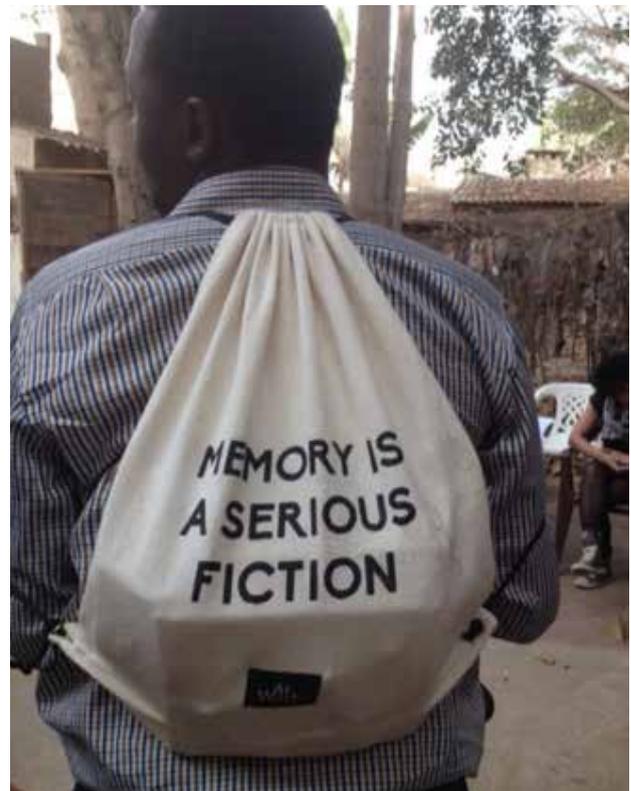


I was kind of afraid that we would result in a model that could feel exciting and revolutionary, but would not be sustainable because of the amount of work and time it would take from the organizations to coordinate. Fortunately at the end there was a committee conformed for the further design of this future model, a group that will meet in Amsterdam later this year and continue with the discussion.



The experience of those days left me in a high level of excitement and just enthusiasm from getting to be a part of such an awesome group of people. To have experienced the larger picture of what we do back home, triggered some ideas that I hope can be developed soon, it activated some mind connections that I hadn't made yet. Thinking further about the future, even when there a lot of important things at stake, I have a special trust in that this powerful energy and dynamics that I got to know back in Dakar, can only transform for the better, I think the strength of this system, as much as it can change, will have each component finding it's place, to make the most interesting flux possible, circulating people, knowledge and ideas throughout.

I think organizations, donors and advisors like Casco, can already see the whole experiment working, and can anticipate different outcomes, ways to activate and form a constant movement towards the improvement of human relations and the activation of thought.



If the reading of this document feels a little too personal or incomplete, keep in mind Moses' backpack wisdom.

Regards from Cali,