



**Arts
Collaboratory**

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

**Going Back in Time
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Atlantic Ocean seen from Dakar

*Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter.
Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.*

—Samuel Beckett



Fishing in Dakar

I returned to my home in San Jose, Costa Rica, sixteen hours after leaving Dakar, Senegal. It was a Sunday lived above the vast Atlantic Ocean, and then relived—in time—on the American continent.

During the layover in Washington DC, at the third checkpoint before boarding the plane, the security officer reached into my backpack and asked with a smile that distracted me from my paranoia: “Is this your first time in Costa Rica?” Not only was I returning to my starting point, but also to the land where I was born, I replied “No.” Minutes after this event, while preparing my waist for five more hours of travel, I felt that the moment I was facing had nothing to do with returning, nor even because I was going back in time.

During the 2nd Assembly of Arts Collaboratory in Senegal, I was part of a confidentiality agreement signed at the entrance of Raw Material Company, with Sally, Gabriela and Barto, with the motto “what happens in Senegal stays in Senegal.” I shared my concern with Yolotl and Jazael, asking if the long days of meetings were not breaking some kind of human rights treaty? We concluded that if so, we were all suffering from a deep case of Stockholm Syndrome, because we all wanted to stay there giving it our all, deeply in love with Hivos and DOEN. I laughed



In front of Raw Material Company, Dakar



Village des Arts de Dakar

with Molemo and Rocca when I heard them say that actually all the dynamics of the meetings were an alleged conspiracy, planned by Gertrude, Yu Lan and Tanja, because they already knew the future of Arts Collaboratory and they just wanted to see what the heck we were going to say, or even if we would be able to meet specific directions to each of the activities.

I also have other memories that qualify as clues or pieces of a puzzle. As I write these lines I do not know if I will be able to assemble and recognize the image they form altogether. For example, when we entered the Atelier at Galerie de Portes et passages, Kan-Sy turned to us and said, "I did not expect you at this time, I thought you were going to the village first and then coming here. I'm not ready, but it doesn't matter because you are a group of people that give me great energy, so welcome." Or the MINGA meeting in the amphitheater of Ecole des Sables, where Moses assembled the most beautiful and friendly revolution that I have ever witnessed, of someone extremely against everything this collaborative project has tried to advance so far. And so, in five minutes, an event that could have ended in blows, insults and even disintegration became a rather fertile ground for tolerance, acceptance and the possibility to go wrong and start again.

I also have this clear image of a round sticker with a black background and purple letters that

said: "What commons?" stuck on Binna's and Gertrude's shirts. Contrary to some sort of subliminal propaganda, it was a direct and incisive question that set the topics of discussion right from the start: the common, the network, the concept of sharing, the exploration of alternative models for arts and culture organizations, and how to develop a collective vision for the future of Arts Collaboratory.

And consequently, a cascade of questions arose: Why do we gather? What is there in the common pot? Is it something more than money? How do we make it work? Is it through sharing



Street scene in Joal Fadiout, Senegal



The beach at Toubab Dialaw

knowledge? By changing the way we use time? Is it through shifting reciprocity? What are the potential models to articulate this network? Horizontally? Communally? Cooperatively? Are we a collective creation, a collective resistance? Is it through self-educating, self-organizing ourselves? Are we always exploring the concept of Utopia? Will this process allow us to move from the local to the global without traditional structures or boundaries? Are we also talking about a change of attitude, about a new way of relating?

On our way back from Toubab Dialaw we stopped at Théâtre de l'engouement, an area of no more than 50 square meters turned into a theater. A pale fabric with blue roses turned into a curtain hung from a beam and separated the stage from the public. Quiet and unhurried, the



Enjoying the river at Joal Fadiout



Still images from Video by Paula Piedra
link:

curtain swayed in the wind. It approached and receded, revealing the stage when retreating and covering it again when it came forward. Something in that game of the wind with that fabric hypnotized me and I watched it intensely for several minutes. There we all were, as spectators, sitting patiently, waiting for something to begin.

Freezing that moment in my mind to be able to watch us all again, in that situation that was completely real, but what was also an analogy of what we all lived during those days. That is how we spent most of our time, all on one side, patiently looking forward, anxious about what was about to begin without knowing exactly what it

was. Is that curtain the only thing that blocks our view? Sometimes it came so close that it grazed my knee, and sometimes it went so far back that I could see half of the actors who were to act in the play. Is this light veil all that prevents us from seeing clearly our future in Arts Collaboratory? Are we so close it's just a matter of running under the curtain? What is this curtain? Is it perhaps something within us?

Translation: Paula in collaboration with Marcela Hernández, Lola Malavasi and Luis Chaves.