participação
e colaboração por palavras, vinhos
e lanternas que flutuam
participation and collaboration
through words, wines and
floating lanterns

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Abstract:

This article proposes a reflection on participatory and collaborative approaches based on the artistic practices of three contemporary Latin American artists and their different possibilities of relation with the public. Considering the classification suggested by Pablo Helguera in relation to models of participation in art, the proposals Donor (1999) and You give me your word? (1994-present) of the Brazilian artist Elida Tessler, Wine knowledge (2003) by the Brazilian artist José Luiz Kinceler and Floating Lanterns (2014-2016) by the Colombian artist Ricardo Moreno. It is observed how such practices articulate and enable discussions about the notions of participation, authorship, reception and collaboration based on relationships with daily life, generating strategies of action that develop subjective and specific paths, revealing the complexity of the theme.

Keywords: Participation, Collaboration, Latin American art, Contemporary

1   Introduction

Participation and collaboration are very present terms in collective construction of knowledge process in the contemporary world. In the field of arts, such terms have been studied from different perspectives, stressing the notions of authorship, revealing collective negotiations processes based on multiple interests and introducing new dynamics in artistic productions.

The use of the word participation and collaboration in the visual arts refer to the beginning of the 1930s, when artists began to involve the public in the realization of proposals that sought to break with the present passivity in the relations between artist-work-public. Theorist Boris Grois comments that, until then, the role of the public was limited to a predominantly passive audience in this producer-user relationship:

The artist produces and exhibits art, and the public views it and evaluates what is exhibited. This arrangement would seem primarily to benefit the artist, who shows himself or herself to be an active individual in opposition to a passive, anonymous mass audience. Whereas the artist has the power to popularize his or her name, the identities of the viewers remain unknown in spite of their role in providing the validation that facilitates the artist's success (Grois, 2008, p.20, our translation).

If we go back to the genealogy of the word participate, we will find its origin in the Latin word *participare* (part+cipere) and *participatio* (part+cipatio), which refers to the notion of part, to be part of, and cipere or cipatio, to grab, to take as a voluntary action that implies a decision of being part of something. However, being a part does not mean compromising in a sense of being in agreement or having common goals. One can participate in something without agreeing on what is proposed.

Often used as synonyms, participation is not the same as collaboration. This comes from the Latin co-laborare, laborare, meaning the verb 'to work' and it is associated with the collective condition given by the prefix co - together, with, and in other words, working together in the accomplishment of something. Collaborative practices can be considered those ones that are guided by objectives and processes in which those who are involved would act together, in accordance with what is being proposed.

For a long time, artists have been creating different paths by working with the notions of participation and collaboration. In European kinetic art, in the 1930s, the first moments of opening of the artwork to participation took place through proposals that sought direct interaction with the public, as in the works of artists such as Moholy-Nagy or Arden Quin. These works provided, in the most part, a responsive participation, which often consisted in triggering mechanisms to set them in motion, a gesture that the English critic Guy Brett came to call years later as "mechanized interaction" (Brett cited in Zanatta, 2013, p.40, our translation).

According to Brett, the proposals that seek activation by the public are found in several stylistic movements and are related to some questions: "The idea of participation seems always to be present when artists, later framed in one or another stylistic tendency, question the autonomous artwork as a single, completed, realized and object of possession" (Brett, 2001, p.8, our translation).

The spectator involvement with the work as a whole (in the sense of seeking a participant or collaborator that goes beyond mechanized responses) is a present concern in art production from the 1960s, when many artists questioned the radical separation between the producer and the public and began to propose structures and processes of shared authorship. Artists such as Allan Kaprow (happenings), Joseph Beuys (social sculpture) and in Brazil, Hélio Oiticica (penetrables and environments) and Lygia Clark (relational objects) developed in their poetics the search for an opening that stimulated active public participation.

The approach between artist and spectator in the artwork production is linked to the questioning of the artistic object status as an individualized production and the traditional art spaces (galleries, museums) as institutions based on strict operating rules. In this context, theoretical contributions from different fields are developed in parallel. Umberto Eco (*Obra aberta*, 1962), Walter Benjamin (The author as a producer, 1934 and *A obra de arte na era de sua reprodutibilidade técnica*, 1955) and more recently, Tom Finkelpearl *(dialogue-based public art*), Grant Kester (dialogical art) are authors who offer important theoretical contributions to analyze and amplify the questions about the theme. Finkelpearl, for example, addresses the interaction of non-specialists with professional artists in participatory processes, emphasizing the direct implication of art in the social field (Finkelpearl, 2013). Grant Kester dwells on poetics that propose methods that emphasize conversation as an action mode, naming such processes "dialogic art" (Kester, 2005). In this field of poetics that are willing to work with the participation and collaboration, both authors underline the importance of methodologies and dialogic models, as they would be fundamental points in the constitution and development of horizontal (democratic) practices, by making it possible to consider the polyphony of voices which characterize and are the essence of participatory processes.

Throughout decades of production, the possibilities of participation and collaboration created in the poetics have been very diverse, and theorists have tried for study purposes to categorize them, listing similarities and differences in this varied universe of initiatives. The Mexican author Pablo Helguera (2011), for example, proposed to embrace such practices with a classification that suggests four different "levels" of participation, which can merge collaborative processes (Helguera, 2011, p.40, our translation). According to the author, we would have:

1) Nominal participation: the artist would offer the participant a work to be enjoyed, in a passive attitude.

2) Directed participation: the artist would indicate to the participant how to participate (this form of participation is marked by a certain activity that contrasts with the previous passivity).

3) Creative participation: the artist would allow the participant to create within the structure that is proposed.

4) Collaborative participation: the participant would be responsible for the proposition of structure and content and would work alongside with the artist.

It is important to note that theorists like Cristian Kravagna (2000), Grant Kester (2004), Anthony Schrag (2013) and Claire Bishop, (2006) often propose very different categories when dealing with the participation and collaboration subject. Anthony Schrag, for example, in his article, The Artist as a Social Worker Vs. The Artist as Social Wanker, presents divisions, which he will call "subgenres" of art that seek an active participation, listing the terms: Relational, Dialogical, Activist, Socially Engaged, Community Art and Public Art. Schrag asks, "When we choose to work with people, are we socially engaged artists? A community artist? (…) A community engaged artist? (…) A participatory artist? An activist artist? (…) Or only someone who wants to work with people?" (Schrag, 2013, p.2, our translation). These questions indicate that categorizing is not a simple task, since the different types of participation generally intersect, disregarding the classificatory boundaries. A community participation can also be a public, activist, dialogic or a directed practice form of art, for example. Paul Ardenne reminds us that any attempt to draw even subtle categories within contemporary art is a risky exercise (Ardenne, 1999, p.11, our translation). Even so, classifying may highlight important methodologies and concepts of such practices, such as authorship, dialogue, belonging, social involvement, and activism, for example.

In order to observe some of these categories, the present article will address participatory propositions of three contemporary Latin American artists: the Brazilians Elida Tessler and José Luiz Kinceler and the Colombian Ricardo Moreno, whose proposals will be focused as it follows.

2   *Doador (Donor)*[1] and *Você me dá sua palavra? (You give me your Word)*, from Elida Tessler

In some instances of her's proposed works Elida Tessler emphasizes collaborative aspects, as it is verified in: *Doador ~ Donor* (1999), presented at the 2nd Mercosul Biennial (1999), held in Porto Alegre-RS, and *Você me dá sua palavra? ~You give me your Word?* (1994-atual).

Doador (Donor) consisted of 270 daily objects donated by people acquainted to Tessler, whose names were on her phone book, exposed in a structural in a form of a corridor (Figure 1). Such objects had the peculiarity of having the suffix "dor" in it's names in the Portuguese language, for example: *rala-dor, aspira-dor, abri-dor*, as seen in Donor (*Doa-dor*). Alongside these objects, the artist arranged 270 small brass plates on which were engraved the names of the Donors and their objects. In this proposal, the collaboration took place at the moment of the installation, through a letter written by the artist directed to her's acquaintances, requesting the donation of objects that were part of their daily life and that contained in its name the suffix "DOR[1]" (Tessler, n.d., n.p.).

Fig. 1: Doador (Donor) (1999) presented at the 2nd Mercosul Biennial. Source: Elida Tessler, 1999 (Tessler, n.d.).

While in *Você me dá sua palavra? (You give me your Word)* (1994-present), Tessler says that its process began during a taxi drive at the city of Macapá, when the driver commented on the city's mayor imprisonment, arrested for "failing with his word", addressing the situation as a *catch*. According to Tessler, "the association between the politician imprisonment and the function of a 'clothes catcher' or clothespin, made her choose this domestic object as an element of her work" (Tessler, n.d., n,p, our translation). *Você me dá sua palavra (You give me your Word)*, which first started in 1994 and continues to this day, is based on a request that the artist makes for a most diverse people: to write a word of their choice in a wooden clothespin (Figure 2). The exposition always occurs in the same way, the pins are fixed in transversal threads, and with the "word collection" increasing in each installation she held (Tessler, n.d., n.p).

Fig. 2: *Você me dá sua palavra?* (You give me your Word?) (1994-atual). Source: Elida Tessler,1994 (Tessler, n.d.).

Regarding the classification proposed by Pablo Helguera, both *Doador* (Donor) and *Você me dá a sua palavra* (You give me your word), imply a directed participation, that is, the collaborator receives an invitation directed to an acquainted participant, in this case, by means of a letter or a request made during a daily encounter. They are called upon to collaborate in an active but directed way. In both cases, the artist indicates to the collaborators the attitude to take: donate an object whose name contains the suffix 'DOR' or write a word in the clothespin. After collecting the elements that compose the work, through the public collaboration, expositions on galleries and museums are produced. In the case of *Você me dá a sua palavra* (You give me your Word), as a work in progress, it continually receives new words written by the participants.

The collaboration in these proposals are related to an invitation based on individually determined objectives, that is, the public participates in a collaborative way in a project predetermined by Tessler, who coordinates it from its planning to the final presentation in galleries, museums and publications. When the proposals enter expository instance, generating installations, the spectator role is to enjoy the work, to contemplate, not influencing in the work at this stage. In this case, the participation occurs in the first instance of the process and all participants understand to be part of a visual art work, whose expected result will be an object or an installation to be exhibited in institutionalized spaces (galleries or museums). The participant, who uses these spaces, can recognized himself by the object donated or the word spelled on it. Even so, the artwork, in its public display stage, would follow the traditional models of presentation and, although the Donors' names are part of the installation, the artwork is authored by Tessler. Although these artworks start from a participatory bias, the proposals' authorship is not questioned at any time. The artist protagonism is evident in all project instances, from the initial planning till the way in which these proposals will be shared in exhibition spaces.

The theorist Rudolf Frieling asks if there would be an inherent conflict between the museum as an institution and practices that seek the public participation in its constitution. Although many institutional spaces foster interaction with the public and with the audience, there is, in a large part of these institutionalized exhibitions, limited spaces, financial contributions, time, property and security, directive curatorship, orders and rules that constitutes these institutions. Many propositions that involve active public participation bring precisely in their scope a critique to these institutions by the fact that the presentations obey the rules of these segments and also because they relegate the audience to a passive attitude of a contemplator, in spaces in which, for example, you cannot produce a lot of noise, or touch the artwork unless the artist allows it. The real participation, in these places, would be for Frieling, therefore, a utopian ideal (Frieling, 2008).

3   *Vinho Saber,* by José Luiz Kinceler

The artist and researcher José Luiz Kinceler, born in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, and who passed away in 2015, left behind important projects in participatory art that, accompanied by his theoretical reflections, help us to discuss the theme in question. We chose to bring to this discussion the *Vinho Saber* proposal (2003), developed from complex processes that alternated over the three years of its construction. It is the establishment of coexistence networks from the exchange and trade of knowledge related to wine (*vinho*) production, involving the practice of planting the vine and all the necessary care for its growth until the obtaining of the wine (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: *Vinho Saber* (Wine knowledge) (2003), proposal development stages. Source: Kinceler, 2003. (Kinceler, 2008).

Throughout the work process, the artist counted on the collaboration of different agents whose knowledge was fundamental, so that the drink in question could be obtained and packaged in small ceramic bottles (Figure 4).

Fig. 4:*Vinho Saber* (Wine knowledge) (2003), proposal development stages. Source: Kinceler, 2003. (Kinceler, 2008).

After the process that culminated in the wine production, it was time for the experience sharing phase, which was also constituted as a participatory instance, this time within an exhibition space scope. A month before the exhibition, Kinceler invited eight collaborators from different areas (university professors, artists, sommeliers, photographers, farmers and others) to contribute a testimony about the importance of the knowledge and the wine in their lives (Figure 5). These testimonies were recorded at the place where the exhibition would take place a few days later and exhibited along with the images that reported "the experience lived by the author in its unfolding experience of making wine: classes on wine culture, vine, pruning, the fermentation of must, the making of artisanal wine" (Kinceler, et al., 2007, p.1402, our translation). In addition to the videos, the installation consisted of several shelves made from wooden boards supported on colored wine bottles (Figure 5). The participants were invited to donate a book that had been important in their lives and to add some form of knowledge to them, and to register a testimony by writing on the book back cover, exchanging it for a ceramic bottle containing the wine produced by the artist. At the end of the exhibition, some of the books donated by the participants were sent to municipal public schools and others became part of small libraries located in different parts of the city of Florianópolis.

Fig. 5: *Vinho Saber* (Wine knowledge) (2003), exhibition space participation. Source: Kinceler, 2003 (Kinceler, 2008).

In the article *Vinho Saber - Uma Proposta de arte relacional em sua forma complexa* (Wine knowledge - A Relational Art Proposal in its complex form), the artist points out that making wine was not the fundamental purpose of the project, because what interested him was "that wine knowledge was a mean to lead the creative process to an encounter with the unknown. To provoke a displacement in the daily life, a discontinuity in the very reality lived by the author, which implied the time factor" (Kinceler, 2007, p.1402, our translation). In Kinceler's proposal, in the first instance, we have the participation of people whose knowledge collaborates so the artist's proposal becomes effective: to take care of a vineyard until the wine can be obtained. In a second moment, the artist elaborates objects in ceramic that, alongside with the wine, makes up a participatory installation presented in a traditional space of art. The participation aspect within the exhibition space was based on the artist's provocation to continue the exchange of knowledge that took place throughout the entire process of wine making. Each participant went to the gallery with a book containing a lesson, an apprenticeship considered important in their lives that was exchanged for the knowledge recently acquired by the artist, in participatory instances prior to the exhibition, and shared in small ceramic bottles, whose modeling was also the artist's idea. As the bottles disappeared from the shelves, a library emerged.

Unlike the process established by Tessler, the moment of sharing in the showroom is another instance of the process. Participants physically alter the space as they exchange one knowledge for another. The artist launches a provocation and institutes a certain dynamic that is only effective through the gesture of the other.

The emphasis on collaboration seems more emphatic in Kinceler's proposal, since the individual authorship points to a shift towards a more collective sense, as the emphasis on collaboration is from the beginning to the end of the proposal. Another difference is that Kinceler's process provides the exchange of skills and information from different knowledge fields, fundamental for this project to be realized in the field of the arts.

4   *Lanternas Flutuantes (Floating Lanterns)*, by Ricardo Moreno

Between the years 2014 and 2016, the Colombian artist Ricardo Moreno developed a participatory art project of collaborative character along with a community in a state of vulnerability and social exclusion of the Pintada Island, in the Archipelago neighborhood, at the city of Porto Alegre (Figura 6).The project called Floating Lanterns involved three actions on the Jacuí River, which surrounded the island: *Noite das Lanternas Flutuantes* (Night of the Floating Lanterns) (2015), *Vagalumes no Jacuí* (Fireflies on Jacuí) (2016) and *Mboitatá no rio Jacuí* (Mboitatá on the Jacuí River) (2016).

Fig. 6: Photographs of collective authorship. Lanternas Flutuantes (Floating Lanterns), Ilha da Pintada (Pintada Island), (2014-2016). Source: Moreno, 2014.

Moreno's work with the community spanned four years, between negotiations, context knowledge of the context and the project's realization. It was after six months of approaching the island community that Moreno was able to join a group of fishermen and two local schools to jointly develop the project with the artist's local presence.

The project involved a series of activities in schools, with the participation of students, teachers and fishermen, resulting in the construction of lanterns made with recycled materials, resulting in the realization of an installation to be placed in the river on a festive night that came to be called "the Night of the Floating Lanterns" a *Noite das Lanternas Flutuantes* (Figure 7). After nearly a year of the project's development, the participants, alongside with the artist, set a date defined by the fishermen's orientation on the region's winds, to show the community the outcome of the process. According to reports given by Moreno, at that time, the climate conditions were not favorable and the lanterns did not manage to remain stable in the river (Moreno, 2018). Even so, the work was exhibited in a space in front of the Fishermen's Association, which housed inside an exhibition organized by the municipal school teachers participating in the project. Within the Fishermen's Association, an exhibition of a series of photographic records produced by both the artist and other participants during the coexistence period in the realization of the project was being held. None of the photographs brought the name of its producer, generating a set of images that composed a show of collective authorship, without the images taken by the artist having preponderance over the other participants, in this expositive instance (Figure 7).

Fig. 7: Photographs of collective authorship. Lanternas Flutuantes (Floating Lanterns), Ilha da Pintada (Pintada Island), (2014-2016). Source: Moreno, 2014.

After this show, the artist continued working in the community, strengthening social ties and seeking to encourage an active participation of the fishermen in the project. From this conviviality a new event was created: Vagalumes no Jacuí (Fireflies on Jacuí) (2016). This time the lanterns received reinforcement in their Styrofoam structures bases (caps of boxes that transport fish to the public market of Porto Alegre). The fishermen planned and executed, alongside the artist, such structures, arranging them in the river for the event (Figura 8).

Fig. 8: Photographs of collective authorship. Lanternas Flutuantes (Floating Lanterns), Ilha da Pintada (Pintada Island), (2014-2016). Source: Moreno, 2014.

Finally, relating the lanterns to the Christmas celebrations, the collaborators asked the artist to organize an end-of-the-year party. New meetings and new negotiations resulted in another moment of collective lantern production among the community, which were exhibited at the event: *Mboitatá no rio Jacuí* (Mboitatá on the Jacuí River) (2016) (Figure 9).

Fig. 9: Photographs of collective authorship. Lanternas Flutuantes (Floating Lanterns), Ilha da Pintada (Pintada Island), (2014-2016). Source: Moreno, 2014.

Moreno's work methodology involved a slow and gradual approach to the chosen social context: a periphery formed by a population in social vulnerability; a place characterized by floods and neglected by the public power. The process, developed on the island of Pintada, began by observation, accompanied by a photographic record of the community dynamics and its relationship with this very particular territory. Moreno, despite of not dominating the language (Portuguese) - besides being in a place, in which the presence of drug traffic made it difficult the entrance of any stranger in the island - longed to live in that context, assuming the risks that the place presented. Therefore, according to the artist, rather than collecting data about the place, he sought to experience it, making friendships with the fishermen, attending weekly meetings at the community center and local festivals. After some time, the artist found support to carry out the work with teachers and schools, recognizing these instances as the main articulators on the island.

The research on what important topic for the fishing community was to be worked out and how the the participatory process that was established, through Moreno's initiative, functioned together with the schools (teachers, parents and students that participated actively in the project). From then on, the artist had a participant's role in the process, in which, the collaborators had a deliberative voice in relation to what would be produced and how and when it would be shown. As it was possible to perceive through the process' description, in the proposals articulated by Moreno, the participants shared with the artist the responsibility for the structural development and the content propositions, from the planning to the work process to the way it would be finalized.

Another aspect to be emphasized is the establishment of learning communities during the four years of work. According to the artist's project report, the schools deepened their notions related to the island ecology, which suffers frequently from floods and also from the large amount of garbage 'sent' from the city of Porto Alegre. Also, the fishermen taught in schools about the wind's orientation and about the making of knots to tie the lantern holders (Moreno, 2018). In this sense, it seems to us that there has been learning for both sides, both for the artist and for the community itself.

It should be pointed out that, even if time and dialogue and openness are available, the proposal has not changed during its process. If we were dealing with a group of people with different interests, wouldn't we expect any deviation in the process?

5   Final considerations: Finalizing, after words, wines and lanterns

Through the proposals of three artists working in the contemporary scenario of southern Brazil, Elida Tessler, José Luiz Kinceler and Ricardo Moreno, we highlighted some aspects that involve participation and collaboration in the visual arts. We understand that the three cases reveal the complexity of participatory and collaborative process.

Helguera's classification helped us to think about the initial moment of the process, from who 'shoots' the action: the artist. In all cases, participation is "directed" and the artist manages the participants on how to participate and collaborate, whether by writing a word, bringing a book to exchange or building a floating lantern. What differentiates the processes are the ways of doing them and the interaction between the participants. In Tessler's case, the participants are acquainted to the artist. In Kinceler's case, we work with an interdisciplinary group, generating contributions from different fields of knowledge. And finally, in Moreno's case, an already established community works together during all the moments of the process and shares the results within their convivial space.

It is important to note that, in the three cases discussed here, the proposals are triggered by the artists and not by the other participants. In the cases of Tessler and Kinceler, the collaborators know how they will participate, since the artists have previously structured the projects to be performed. In Moreno's case, the projects were decided during the four years of work with the participants and are linked specifically to the place and the context where they occur. The artist here proposed to act through the role of articulator rather than the project's author. In Kinceler, there is a participative instance also in the project exhibition stage at exhibition spaces. Though, in Ricardo Moreno proposals, there is no exhibition in art institutions, and the work has its end by means of events in the community.

When researching on the proposals, we observed that it was the artists' responsibility to establish the narratives about what would happen or how the processes would occur. In this instance, the polyphony of voices is not present. Such a statement could indicate the permanence of the artist's notion of authorship and authority, even in participatory processes that seek dialogical ways as a fundamental basis. Also, no type of conflict or dissonance is reported by the artists. In Moreno's case, who worked for four years in the community, there is no evidence of any possible disagreement during the proposal negotiation.

What the proposals' analysis, related to the categories, indicates is that neither art nor thought can be reduced to the categorizable. The poetics of these three artists, to a greater or lesser degree, interpolate and shuffle categories, classifications; bringing imprecisions that make borders to become permeable in these participatory and collaborative processes.

What such poetics seem to emphasize is the pursuit of the experience of producing meaning in relation to the other. Acting through participatory paths may indicate that the artists cited here believe that not only can specialists contribute significantly, sharing knowledge and experiences from perspectives that are not only from those of the artistic field. The openness to different degrees that each of these artists provide, by allowing the encounter with others as a participatory space, generates the possibility of providing different perspectives of different points of view, with the potential to destabilize already encoded spaces and categories and, who knows, inaugurate new joint forms of creation less hierarchical and verticalized.

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1 N.T. As it concerns the suffix '-dor' in Portuguese, we should not misplace its meaning by the noun *dor (pain)* in English. The verb *doar(donate)* should be the parameter for an effective meaning: Doa-*dor (the verb plus the suffix)* A person who makes a donation.