

## **In conversation with Pascale Barret, Isabel Burr Raty, Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts, François Zajéga.**

Keywords : collaboration, digitally disembodied, multi-species, responsibility, spending time together

*Just before the opening of Constant\_V window exhibition showing work, experiments and documents from the first Iterations residency, 'Trasformatorio', that took place in April 2018 in Sicily, Peter Westenberg from Constant, Association for Art and Media, talks to three artists who have been close to the Iterations projects at different moments in time: François and Pascale participated in 2016 in 'I don't know where this is going', an artists residency and exhibition in iMAL in Brussels. Pascale also worked in 2015 in the artists residency and exhibition 'The Tech Oracle' in esc medien kunst labor, in Graz. Rafaella made a report on the iMAL exhibition. Isabel was asked to join because some topics that are central to Iterations, such as collaboration, exchange of knowledge, processes and goods, are much part of her current work.*

**Location: Tina Horne's house, at the back of Constant office in Brussels.**

**Thursday 20 / 09 / 2018**

Peter Westenberg

**We are all in specific situations working with other people. Arts, schools, software development, academia have their own particularities. What can we learn from each other by sharing how working together is specific within each of our practices? What does collaboration mean for you, how is it part of your practice and what could it look like in the future?**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Co-creation and collaborative work is a big part of my work and what I do. Some months ago me and three colleagues received funding to conduct 'Action Research'. My colleagues are anthropologist and designer and I am trained as an architect, working in academia.

The idea was to try to bypass individual work and try to do things together, in a more interdisciplinary way. We were all working on citizens participation in an urban context, but from different perspectives. Although we were interested in similar topics, we found out that we didn't read the same authors and that our approach was different.

I wanted to stay in academia, but I felt it was really necessary to change the way in which I was working when I was writing my thesis. I liked organising symposium and other peripheral things that come with doctoral studies. I did my PhD at the Architecture faculty, which was new at the

ULB, before that used to be the School of Architecture. As researchers, we were writing our individual work, but next to that, we did a lot together. We were working in a kind of blurry area, trying to discover what doing research in this new context had to offer to us. I thought that working together with others and to trying to combine our knowledge was the most interesting thing of doing a PhD.

Me and my colleague, Giulietta Laki, decided to collaborate and we were later joined by Thomas Laureyssens. We received project funding and we could hire two more people to work with us. It's a work to find out who and what we are as a group, it has been quite a process and since a few weeks we have a name. So thinking about collaboration is part of my work and it is something that I have been looking for. Collaborating is a statement, it is not something that just happened and I was never forced into it.

### **How would you want to see your collaborative practice develop in the future ?**

One reason for the decision to choose a name for the group was because we hoped for a future in which the group could expand. We are now in the luxury situation to have the money that we need to do what we want, and the framework in which we operate is very open, we made that frame ourselves. We receive a regional funding called Innoviris; they put out thematic calls but the funding applicant is free to define projects and working methodologies. Once projects are accepted, the only obligation a funded organisation has is to execute the work. The subsidiser is not judging the work that is done. For me now, it is difficult to foresee what this situation and framework will mean for my desire to stay inside academia.

### **You refer to yourself as a collective. Does hierarchy play a role? Does hierarchy structure the group or undermine its aims of collectivity ?**

For the moment our group is very flat, we are very collective. It is not easy to not have someone who is leading. We are trying to install forms of heterarchy, we all have our own capacities and interests and we all take the lead on different moments.

We are trying to not have a form of democracy that is too flat and becomes ineffective because no one knows what to do, when to propose something etc. By alternating the lead we are trying a more fluid form of coordination. Now the hierarchies are completely mingled but there was an ambiguous moment when Giulietta, Thomas and me were hiring our colleagues, then the structure was not flat.

An issue is also that we were asked by the school in which we are embedded to put out a vacancy for a 'junior' researcher, in the academic sense of someone being at the beginning of a PhD research. Although none of us consider this is a differentiating factor, this potentially subordinate position might have left traces in the team.

### Isabel Bur-Raty

For me, working together means discovering together, and writing and archiving in praxis time. I have recently been setting up a project that establishes a common ground for collaboration,

called the Beauty Kit Female Farm. It is a site specific, mobile farm, and it adapts to the space it inhabits. The participants are involved in collectively producing immaterial knowledge. The project is an archive of experiences, an archive that is embodied by the participants. Working together, collaboration allows us to enter other realms for discovery, beyond the normative, beyond the established.

### **What is the relation with hierarchy ?**

The project queers what hierarchy means. I am queering the production process of a good for the better. The project uses languages and vocabularies commonly used in production and farming environments and turns them around. We are sticking to the notion of repetition which is common in production, but the character of the practice is not how it is usually done. As a participant in the project, you are invited to embody the repetitive productivity. It is through the repetition that you become involved in a process that finally transforms you.

There is a facilitating team and within that team there are clear roles. I am for example the 'Patrona' of the farm. Then there is a 'Farm Fertilizer', a 'Weeding maiden', the 'Food animator operator' and each one has a caring role. We are queering what hierarchy means because the character of the practice destabilizes everything, not only the space we inhabit but each woman, each participant goes through a complete destabilization, psychological, physical, everything. And that's why it is good to have this caring team, the practice crosses the borders of ecology and healthcare, a referential point of care for each throughout the process is needed.

So I am not in the role of a dictatorship but I am rather the one thinking how to sustain these processes so we don't go into therapy but we remain in an art project which finally takes you to discovering your own contradictions of yourself and the system you contribute to, because in a way, the participant becomes the cow. The Farm Fertilizer is the one who takes care of what we call the Female abyss which are the genital organs. The Female abyss is composed of erogenous cavities and we are harvesting the fluids of these erogenous cavities. So the fertilizer is needed to guide all the harvesters in how to stimulate the erogenous cavities. So we have a facilitating hierarchy that we need to provide in this context. It would be too irresponsible not to have a caring team in this context.

We are not making abuse of anyone, everyone who comes agrees with a contract to become a harvester and to learn an Open Source technique which is called the Female Farming Technique. I found that a lot of fluids that are produced by the female body are full of nutritious properties that can be applied to beauty and that can be used to replace components of beauty products that you buy in shops. What the team does in the farm is to teach women how to harvest these fluids and of course it goes beyond the beauty product. To go there, to take care of the female abyss is a whole historical deconstruction.

### **How does this collaborative practice develop in the future ? After the women who participated go away from the project, is there still a form of collaborating in the way that they are continuing ?**

Yes there is. My next step is to transcribe thinking together which in the farm we call the

"mental" fluids. We recorded everything. We are setting up an online platform, because the women are in a continuous thinking process, on many levels. One level is the imagery of the organs. How do you envision your own body and your own organs versus the classical 2d or 3d visualization of scientific portrayal. That is something that continues. And then women decide if they want to continue their own farming or not. But already the fact that they did it, set in motion a process that is continuing. Now the idea is to continue in an open way, not only for those who have done it, but also to open up for those who are curious and use this platform for redefining a lot of things. One thing is aesthetics and the other the words; the semantics. When you start identifying the agencies that are involved you start wondering why they are named as they are, and often they shouldn't be called like this and we are engaged in finding other ways of naming. So that is where we are. We have an interconnected web of women. Those who participated have access to the archive that we created together, and we keep working on it. Then I have to solve the question how much of this can I open up to those who haven't done it yet.

### Pascale Barret

Important for me when I am working together with others, is the idea of being together in order to be oneself. I am thinking of jazz and the way a partition or a score is treated in when musicians are jamming together. In the jam, participants are free to interpret the partition and they are writing the score together. For a long time I have been engaged with dancing, and I have been working intensively on the practice of improvisation. In dance improvisation the dancer has to pay attention to what is going on in the group in order to do what is best. This requires a careful bodily listening. Listening to yourself, listening to the group that you are with. Coming together in a collective improvisation is an act of careful balancing and cohabitation of thought, places and bodies.

What I also find important is the notion of missing. Something that I also experienced when I took part in Iterations. How we need to be alone when we are together. And how missing the group is good. The first time I experienced it, it felt like a frustration. You can not take part in the group work during one or two days, you are forced to take a distance. But being away is also positive because it delivers a new fresh perspective, a new breath.

Group work is like a big ocean; when you look at the horizon, you see storm clouds, the water can be very calm, but then there are waves, there's the incoming and outgoing tide. And in the group we have to deal with all the types of weather imaginable. The emotions of people, the conditions of the bodies, the space. The frustrations and emotions of people in the group play a role, and they are important to pay attention to.

And laughing, the ridiculous, grotesque ... having fun and pleasure connected to the work is important to balance the seriousness in the group. To be over focused on serious parts of the discussion is often a part of the problem that can arise in the group. Sometimes we are too serious and we stay in the mental work.

To give an example, I am starting now a project in which me and two others connect as three women having a different age. Alex, in Guyon, she is the youngest, she works on 3D games. Then there is me in the middle, and there is Annie Abrahams in Montpellier being the most

senior of us. Annie is working on performance protocols. During the project, we will not meet in real life, the idea is to meet only through online interfaces.

We start with nothing, just meet online and take it from there. The protocol is that one of us proposes something that challenges the others. We don't know the proposal beforehand and the duration of a session is one day. The results are fed back to a web page.

So now we are in a fun phase. We are using a software which is called Team Viewer, it is normally used in IT to control remote computers. It is very freaky, when you first try it. You are inside someone's computer, you can send emails from this computer, start programs, print. Anything. It is as if you are really working on the other computer. We are working with two on each others machine, it is incredible.

It questions the state of control and power, what interventions we allow and accept, how we are reacting when power is at stake. For me it is related to this idea of the difference between having power 'over' for example a group, versus power coming from within a group. We don't take the power over the people, but we create power together. A thinking that is close to eco-feminisms and Starhawk. When we are using Team Viewer, we give up control, giving the other power over your computer means that we need to have confidence in each other.

#### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

It also depends on how you use it. If you are sharing a table, you could be as close to what others are doing ?

#### Pascale Barret

But you discover how super intimate a computer is. On the computer everything gives information. The names of the files in the 'Document' folder give information and the words that are used are super important. Even in the way they can create confusion. Confusion for me is also an important part of synergy in a group. And it can be in a very positive way. Being misunderstood, bad translations, they can be productive. If what you are saying is interpreted by someone in the group from an unexpected perspective, it can bring whole new points of view to your thinking.

Other things that are important in a group situation is to share food and have unproductive time. This we also experienced in Iterations, and it is especially needed when you are not in your own place, when you are in a new venue, when you have to go abroad. When you are leading such a situation, it means that you have to take care to support each participant.

I think something that is always present in a group and is difficult but important to deal with is the difference in social class. In my experience with super-self organised groups such as the group Sorcières is that even when there is just a little difference in financial conditions, it is often becoming difficult to be together.

You can talk forever about intersectionality but the last barrier is class, money. Humanly a self organised group is very intense. When no-one obtained the authority from the others to decide for others, you are constantly in the middle of the transition, the transformation of the group itself.

And for example the different investments are not easy: one can join for an hour and someone else for a whole week, without this leading to some form of hierarchy.

In the Iterations that I was part of, we were taken by the hand, in a way we were liberated of this responsibility. There's a pre-formatted structure that defines relations and expectations. If you propose a group to be together for two weeks, in a structure, or around food, or occupying a space, then certain things are de-charged, the participants are not all the whole time thinking of the organisation. And this makes a big difference for the health of the group.

### **François, how is collaboration part of your practice ?**

#### François Zajéga

Ten years ago I became interested in working as an artist. I was in the visual arts field and it seemed to me that the notion of being an artist was quite clear. The artist makes everything and is the only creator of the piece. When the work is shown, there is only one name next to it and the artist takes full responsibility for everything that is connected to the work that is presented. I tried working this way and made several exhibitions and participated to festivals.

But I felt there was something fundamentally wrong for me working in the context of the art market. I was programming software that generated art which was hard to sell as limited editions, which is demanded by the market in order to create high selling prices. But I never saw an art piece as something that is finished once and for all. Especially if you work with code this is a strange idea, because each time you slightly modify the configuration of the code, or you adapt it more to the place where it is shown, the work changes.

Another problem was that I did not feel entitled to sell a software that I did not entirely build myself. I was using a lot of frameworks and libraries to built the works and finally there was only one name on the art piece. Even when I mentioned that the work was made with the use of for example Open Framework or Processing, the work of the whole community behind those projects was completely disconnected from the piece. And vice versa it also meant that the work did not flow back to the people who inspired me in the first place. The weight of building an artwork alone was heavy. You need to do the programming, take the aesthetic decisions, do communication, distribution etc. I felt overloaded with all that and I did not want to continue working like that. So I started working together with others. First mainly on sound projects, but more and more also on projects in which two or three people invested in, for example Fragments, a big installation I did with Yacine Sertbi and Gauthier Keyaerts.<sup>1</sup>

I am very careful not to be seduced by propositions in which unequal relationships occur. I want to be really sure that I want to work with a certain person on a project. I feel that just working on a nice project is not enough, there should be a good relation between the persons who are working together in the team. And for me Intellectual Property is an important concern. It has to be clear from the beginning that the authorship is shared and I want to be certain that this is also how the others are seeing it. I am not usually inclined to fight for my rights and I give in easily if someone is jumping to the table and claims the artistic lead. I don't like to have to push for being credited correctly. But at the end of the process I sometimes felt disgusted, robbed, even

betrayed. (François smiles). Well it's a mix of these things. Once it comes to this point in the relationship, then for me, nothing good can happen anymore. People taking the lead without addressing this properly, are not conscious enough of what it means to create something together. If the relationship does not feel natural and I have to detail what I did what and I need to claim authority over it, then it is difficult to continue. The relationship is broken and any possibility of working together is finished. You can't come back from this.

### Pascale Barret

In the mind of many people in the art world, making software is technical work and it is not the same as creating the artwork. In the old academic traditional view one separates inspiration, creativity and content from techniques. Whereas nowadays, the inspiration can come from the code. Maybe the persons you refer to are still in the old school tradition, considering the techniques as something done by the painter assistant, who reproduces exactly what the artist wants.

### François Zajéga

I am focused on procedural, algorithmic artworks; for example the Sisyphus project that I am workin on at the moment with Simone Niquille. 2

We work with two, it is a clear collaboration that feels naturally. I do something, she looks at the process, I explain, and she gives input, maybe we should go this way or that way. Sometimes she has a better overview over the project, which can distract from the programming work, but it is also good because it reflects on where the whole project is developing to. Does it still make sense ? I like working like this. I have full confidence in the sharing of the intellectual property, because that is happening already during the process. There has never been tension about that while working.

### Peter Westenberg

To me it seems that there is a friction between this 'natural' feeling you mention and the way one should deal with arranging shared authorship before you even start working. The preparations for a shared authored work, making contracts, licenses, dividing tasks, making sure that conflicts will not arise, is doing everything it can to 'denaturalise' the working relationship.

### Pascale Barret

I don't think nature or natural are the right words to use; I think it is a fault in French, always using 'naturellement'? The question of credits is a cultural question.

### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Maybe it is more a question of atonement, syntony.

### Isabel Burr Raty

It is also interesting if you insist on the natural I think, it can become very savage.

**Rafaella and Isabel, you both use the term participation. What is the particular expectation that you have towards someone when you invite a ‘participation’?**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Participation is a heavy term. If you understand it in the sense of Joëlle Zask it is not only about taking part, but also having a part and receiving a part, in the economic meaning. It is heavy and demanding to really participate.

Isabel Burr Raty

In the participation there is a performance process going on. You agree to perform. At least that is what I discovered in the set up of the farm. Participation is a being, not even a becoming. Something that I try to write about little by little is the notion of de-squaring, I learned that I had to let go of all the time wanting to create structure. I remember that it was a conscious decision that at one moment I put aside the schedule of activities. We had to make decisions based on feelings all the time. Go beyond what we had previously thought and to go with what was collectively needed. The collaborative surrounding that we built together has its own rhythms and processes. And I think that came from the agreement of participating. It made this long duration performance possible. Without an audience. You are the thing you are doing. That is what you are asked to. You are not imagining it, you are not interpreting it, you do it because you agreed to do it. The contract specified that everyone was free to leave whenever they wanted. So participating is a constant re-agreeing of being there.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

There is a difference between the performer and the participant; the performer has to agree to play the role, so there is something previous, a recipe and in the participation there is no previous agreement, you don't jump into something that is already outlined. It is funny that you mix the both and the result is that of real participation because it is not something that you can expect, there is no recipe. You need to discover its own means by stepping into the process of doing it.

**Can you speak about the digital environments that support your collective work ?**

François Zajéga

If a project depends too much on any digital means for the communication, VOIP, video conferences, reports via email, git repositories, online meetings etc. the work can start to feel disembodied.

I really prefer to have regular meetings from person to person even when they are sometimes difficult to set up. With the project with Simone, a part of our budget is set aside for me to travel to Amsterdam and for her to come to Brussels so that we can have days to work together during the process.

For programming and pure technical stuff everything can happen online, without much of a problem. It's the easy way because there are many tools that are made for exactly this. Issue



trackers and versioning tools. To share code while programming it is really efficient. That's working very well.

But if you try to do an artistic project with these kind of tools, you miss a lot. Some decisions can not be clearly written out. In my experience, some decisions require silence and a bit of co-presence for a few hours, just to tune the brains and the energies. You have to be with the other person for an amount of time for good solutions to appear. Laugh a bit, go for a walk, have a coffee spending some time together. These are good tools to align the connection and then relevant artistic decisions appear.

Doing everything in the digital sphere forces you to talk continuously. Not talking, spending a bit of time by the window is not possible. Usually when I have an important meeting, I prefer to have video on, voice alone is not enough, but even then it is kind of creepy because there is too much distance. For this I don't see how to deal with it with digital platforms or environments. What Pascale talked about, to work with two on the same computer, might be interesting, it could bring something, I never tried that.

Pascale Barret

With the difference that we don't need a result. The situation in which we use Team Viewer does not require a specific outcome, while we are playing, we explore the computer. But with Simone you work on a project that desires a concrete output.

**It's very recognisable. We could have met online, but we are here because we know something will be missing in the online contact. But how come that, related to computers, we are so used to think in terms of problem solving, and then when it comes to the issue of the social aspect of meetings we say immediately: oh, can't be solved. Can we speculate ? How to work and walk while being in different places ?**

François Zajéga

I am working with a guy in California, he's a Disney researcher; He's not allowed to make phone calls in the office. So he is calling from the parking place.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Why is that? He can not do his own stuff during working hours ?

François Zajéga

No, he's a researcher so he can do whatever he wants with his time. No, it's connected to privacy, if he's outside there is no way that I can hear or see something from the lab.

Isabel Burr Raty

Ha, Disney, they are confirming the cliché. It's like a masonic society.

François Zajéga

So all our meetings happen on the parking lot. The guy is working, and I see the sun, the trees passing by, it's really changing the mood. Instead of being in front of the computer he's walking in the street. I see him looking around and it's bringing spatial qualities to the meeting. I really have the impression to be with him, wondering through the streets. It changes a lot the dynamic of the discussion.

Peter Westenberg

We find it special that you are working that way. But it shouldn't be a surprise, we all call and see our family and friends on the phone from the supermarket or the metro. But not for work.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

It is another kind of attention, distraction is not wished, sometimes you need to be in a closed environment, without the sun and the cars and all this urban stuff that is really noisy. Some of the work needs that. You can not actually do the same things while walking under the Californian sun.

François Zajéga

We have to take notes, we need the rest of the computer to work.

Isabel Burr Raty

Certain things don't emerge through the virtual communication. Then when you meet the person; things that you can not foresee through the virtual talking appear when you meet in person.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

I was wondering ... here we are talking about the fact that we can not have the whole set of experiences which actual interactions can offer, so there is something that gets lost in the digital. But are there also things that you gain in digital interaction ? I am saying this because there is also something nice about being in your pyjamas, not having to be all dressed up, going to pee when you are having a Skype meeting, being distressed because the other person is not seeing you. Are there other things?

François Zajéga

Quite nice with digital interaction is that you can show video's and images that you have on your computer while you are talking with somebody, to link different things at once. You don't rely only on words, you can use other medias to pass information. You don't have to explain an image, you just show it. Ah, look I was thinking of this, you show it, you are able to have multiple information feeds.

**So going back to the question what digital environments can support collective work, we describe one problematic of it, being in a disembodied relationship with somebody, which is questionable because there is also plus points to it. If the alternative is being in a conference you could argue that this is a disembodying environment as well. There you are less with**

**your own body, but in between other peoples bodies, their social behavior and rules of how they interact. We all encounter this, we meet digitally, you can not do everything you could do in social life, but it also opens up new ways of doing. From the perspective of Iterations it is interesting to think about new ways of collaborating.**

Isabel Burr Raty

A big part of the farm project in Portugal was done through Skype. When we all met in person a lot of issues came up that we couldn't foresee and they were all human issues. One of the collaborators father died two weeks before. It had a lot of implications on how the project unfolded. We didn't expect it.

Maybe you can have a barometer of intimacy that could be included in a meeting. One part is how much do you know the other one, another how much is it part of the project itself ?

In this project there was a level of collaboration in the preparation, and a level of collaboration in the doing, but things escaped because the preparation was very much done digitally.

It is about emotions, it is about feelings, it is about ego, it is about power.

Pascale Barret

I had a very bad experience last fall with a project I was super enthusiastic about. Full of energy. The person who was organising it presented it as very open minded, a laboratory. Through it I met very nice people who were in the same situation as me. Together we had a worksession where we shared a practice and ideas. The organiser stayed outside, she took notes, recorded everything and she started to give us orders. She took the material that we generously gave and she transformed it as she thought good, and we became performers in a kind of ballet. OK, we go, you do this, on cue you do that, .. I was totally disappointed because it didn't correspond to the starting point of the project. I was wondering if she did not understand what collective work can be. Humanly, emotionally, also in my body I was super tired, after it was done I was empty and angry with the situation and also with myself, I had to leave. We had good energy at the start, we discussed with the others about our problems to manage the egos. If you're in you want to stay but we wondered why? Why do we feel so strongly about staying in a difficult time? We had that situation with Annie (Abrahams) in Iterations. She left the project. When I talked to her about my experience she said that even months after she still felt guilty about leaving. We talk about working, but sometimes it just doesn't work and we have to decide to quit.

**We are very much used to involve the personal in work, but when inviting friends people we know in a group it changes. There are different affinities, power relations, vagueness, expectations that don't match ... In an institutional environment professional working relations are often more rigidly defined, an attempt is to prevent this from happening, to depersonalise working relations, so that work that needs to happen in that framework does not suffer from dislikes, or relationships.**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

In my opinion the problems are almost always about these personal dis-affinities. I worked on a

big European project called Human Cities with a lot of partners from different universities involved. I worked with one girl with whom it was total bliss, but at some point you realise that all the problems you can have, not having the same theoretical background, having epistemological issues, all that is nothing compared to the emotional things. The real issues are always about the personal aspects. You don't feel respected, you feel your energy is drained, you feel that someone is bossing you around, it is almost never only about working disagreements.

I teach at Saint-Luc and co-ordinate a masters course together with a colleague. We were asked to do this with the two of us, because we have different pedagogical approaches and we still get along well. But although we differ in opinion, our clashes are never about pedagogy, but always about emotions, egos, and so on. So even when the relationships are more institutionalised. the most important thing is getting along well on a personal level. Then you can use your differences productively, by thinking how they can be interesting for students. In my view, trying to depersonalise the relationships is the contrary of formulating an answer to the issue.

**Do you think the togetherness is the real work? How to be together is often hard to predict. Making the situation in which you can really be together takes a lot of investment. How does that translate to the digital platforms?**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

In our research we need to deal with massive amounts of data, mainly observations of public space. We are building this platform in which we are trying to render the wide range of types of contributions and types of participations to public space visible. The idea is that each member of the team and also people from outside can access their own version of the available information.

Imagine somebody photographed and uploaded a picture of a small toy giraffe that was left behind in public space. You don't know who put it there, you don't know why it is there, but you can interpret it, and add your view to it. Someone else might then notice something else about the giraffe, for example that it is made of a certain material, and add comments to it from that perspective. So there is always this question of the versioning of the story and how it continues. Even within our small collective making versions visible is already difficult. How they match, where they differ. How to open this to others who are not part of the collective ? Up to now, we have been talking about people who have decided to work together, but what do you do when your contributors join only for a very little amount of time ? That is something that we are trying to foresee in this platform.

François Zajéga

Something else I thought about is that when you work together with several people, you are not always aware of what someone has done. Even when everything is shared and versioned. To discover the motivations and small details that are actually very important, we need to take time to explain. But time is always limited so often we don't do it. You don't read the comments of one tiny GIT commit, but in this one line in the history there was important info that could have

brought the project elsewhere. The quality of the comments we put, is important. But even if you do annotate everything, it implies that the others will also take the time to read it. So you tend to make something concise. Something small.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

You have to scroll back in the history and it is easy to miss. You mention something else that is interesting: the overload of things. Sometimes you miss out, and you can not catch up with all of it.

**Shall we do a quick round mentioning all the tools that you use for collaboration ?**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

When we started this project, we wanted to take it as an opportunity to migrate to Open Source tools only. But that has been problematic for several reasons. When you are very much used to using a certain tool, your mind is framed to this. Some people in the group did not see the point of changing that. They were saying, ok this is not effective, because it it messes up the practice. For the moment we pass from Google docs to using Etherpads. It is not the biggest thing and we can't put pictures, but it is a beginning. We are also using Collabora3, which is related to Nextcloud and it crashes every time, so we don't use it anymore. So we use Pads, and exchange video's and pictures in other ways. The one tool we use the most and we haven't been able to find a real open source alternative is Slack.

And we use other stuff such as video conferencing, but this we have through Nextcloud.

And of course we are trying to build this tool to store, log, analyse and proto-analyse observations in various media.

Isabel Burr Raty

I was used to Skype, people I worked with in Portugal were using Messenger, so I was obliged to install that in my phone. And mail and Google docs. After this whole farm experience I installed Telegram in my phone. I am now more into using open source, because it is more coherent with what I am saying. You have a discourse, and then you're using all these horrible programs.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

It is hard to not just say it, but also do it.

Pascale Barret

I mix, it depends on the people and the projects. I changed my big computer, with the help of François, to Ubuntu. (smile) Finally. My Mac laptop is very old, not in time, but according to how Macintosh defines age. I never re-installed a new OSX on it, and the machine is more and more incompatible. I lost Skype and a lot of stuff. As this machine becomes more and more cut from the world I am grumpy at it.

I use a lot of Etherpads. Framapad. Every time I have a project in the collective garden I am part of,, I do a pad; It has become a kind of reflex. Two days ago I started a wiki. I was super happy.

But I am alone on the wiki. Me, myself and my wiki.

### François Zajéga

I am mostly using the phone. It is the most practical of all, especially because I don't have a smartphone. When it comes to the computer, I mainly use versioning systems. Git, Svn, systems that make a full history of the file modifications, so each time you change anything it logs the difference between the last version and the current version. It works mainly for text, and since programming is mainly text, it is super well fitted to the job.

And now I am also using it more and more for managing administrative stuff and projects. If you have to do an application and you are working with more people on it, it works very well. I think it is super interesting to not overwrite files, but keep the history, so you can go back to the previous version of the file. And obviously I use other stuff, pads, mail, also Riot4, equivalent to Skype.

I am becoming more and more cautious on privacy and I am careful to encrypt messages that I am sending to people. Riot allows end to end encryption, so the server that is broadcasting the message can not decrypt itself the message. It is a secure way. The system is decentralised with end to end encryption, so you can make sure nobody on the way is getting what you are saying. Not because we are doing anything illegal, but it is a statement.

And also I use Wiki's, Wordpress to communicate, various social networks to promote the work. For each social network you need to format your message, image and texts, but over time it becomes more and more fluid. For Mastodon this way, Facebook this way, Twitter this way, reports on the website another way. 5

### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Mastodon was a serious option for us. But when you are working with participatory projects with citizens, inhabitants, it is difficult to drag everyone into Mastodon. So in our case, we can use it for other kinds of networks, but Facebook is still the easiest way to announce an event and making sure that people are seeing it, because it is the most mainstream.

### Isabel Burr Raty

It drives me crazy, Facebook.

I worked for years on a film, the subject is touchy from a political perspective, so between the team there were clear rules on how to communicate to each other. For instance there were certain information that we could not give by telephone, and the same for Skype also. We were careful about it. So then the live encounter was part of the working process. We couldn't really complete anything only through digital means.

**Choosing the tools is part of making a group. When working with students you can explore different tools, or when you have a shared different protocol it also creates a bond between the group.**

### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

When we work with a group of inhabitants for one or two months and we are seeing each other on a regular basis, it is easy to propose to use another social network. That is different from if you want to reach people you don't know yet. Or people you know but you are not going to ask them that level of engagement, because there is a threshold. Inscribing yourself, putting the app on your phone.

**There is a question of authorship. You decide to work together. Then how do you credit the work? Are you a bunch of individuals, organisations? Do you credit the group, which can be weird because it might be only a temporary one, or its members might change. Then there is the non human factor. Funding bodies, machines, software, physical spaces with sometimes reputations, even if you do your best to credit all persons involved, many agencies involved in this 'collective' work fall out of the scope. How to make the ecology of collective work visible ? Maybe not even in the sense of who owns the work, who has property rights, but also as an example to others, to think of consequences, steps necessary to improve possibilities ..**

### Pascale Barret

Maybe it is related to the question of human relationships; in this project I mentioned we are not credited individually, and the documentation video only mentions the project as a whole. It underlines my feeling that me and all the other contributors are replaceable in this project. It is an awful feeling. I gave a lot of myself that and it could have been anyone.

But anonymity can be important as well, if it is a deliberate choice. If you look at militant work that is done in Brussels then a lot of it is done as a Collectif Anonyme in which people do not want to be known for personal protection.

And of course sometimes art and militantism merges. If I am feeling good in a group and there is respect for the personal investment, I have no problem to operate under the name of a group.

What we do in the Sorcières group is that all are credited for the collective work, but the individual contributions are not specified separately.

### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

By choosing the name Urban Species, we have tried to also credit the non-human agencies that are part of the collective, and that definitely have a part in the authorship, maybe not always intentionally, but definitively in the effect that the output of the work has. Animals, electronic species, with whom we work are included in the term.

It is a discussion, I am not sure if it is an answer, but the idea behind the name is to make room for others.

For some work, when not the collective as a whole is involved, but only one or two people are working, then we put the name of the group and specify names of the people who did the work. For example, when I write an article, we mention Urban Species and my name as the authors.

Crediting someone individually can have its importance, but at the same time we want to show that our work is in the context of this collective which is bigger than us.

### Pascale Barret

Often when you create something as a collective, people still want to know what part exactly you did. Is this part yours, or that part? I am still asked this related to my involvement in Iterations. Every time again I have to explain that it is a collective work, that we have thought of concepts together and worked on practical issues together, so you can not separate who did what exactly. The names of the artists are mentioned as part of the group, but different from for example a collective art show where the separate works that are shown have separate authors.

### Isabel Burr Raty

I am working in this issue of crediting the work in the farm on many levels. A first level is the participatory situation for which everyone who is involved is credited. I invented the Female Farming thing, so that is mine. But then I am sharing it, you are welcome to take it. There is a pending question of Open Source authorship, there are different open content licenses that we can use, but I am still thinking which license would be the most accurate to apply to this situation.

Then there is the level of authorship of the product. Part of the game is that the women who join the farm leave their fluids behind, and I am fabricating products using their fluids, and those products are then sold by me. So we have the discussion how we should label the bottles. How are the containers offering the information about the product and the woman who sourced it to someone who buys the product? There are issues of race, age, health. In the farm, each woman has a unique harvesting number. We collectively decided to use that number on the bottles. The non-human species is the fluid that is bottled, which is mixed up with other substances so it can survive for a longer period, so one can use the product. It has been a question that haunted me, how the hell do we credit this? Do I put the face of the woman?

Then, besides the number, there is also a letter that is written by the producer. Who ever buys the product, they get to read the letter that is offering an abstraction of whoever produced the fluid that is behind the product.

Then the third level is a collective web of women, for which I need to build this online platform. The platform is a place for sharing experience and for writing Sci-Fi chapters together, based on the experiences. This web is a completely collective situation. We are giving out information for everyone to have access, nobody owns it.

### Pascale Barret

The act of numbering the humans is a funny thing to do. For the non-human agencies you wouldn't do the same, you don't put a name, number or an individual identifier of a fish or a pig on a container of food.

### Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

But that touches the meta level of the project, the level of critique, how these things are



'normally' done.

**We are talking about biological parties, humans and non-humans. How do you credit the tools, the people and teams that created those ? A typical F/LOSS thing to do is to mention the projects to make sure that people realise that the tools are also collective projects. Crediting a F/LOSS project is giving something back for the fact that you can benefit from using that tool. You co-wrote that article in partnership with a software.**

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

When you are not ok with the software then you don't do it. This was written using the Adobe suite.

Peter Westenberg

But Adobe does that for you, it's in the metadata of your document.

Isabel Burr Raty

I guess you would only credit some special artisanal tool. Something special, a few centuries old, or donated by someone ...

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

The question is where to stop. That's the game with the name Urban Species. You can put a lot under it.

Peter Westenberg

But why would you stop ? Maybe you can design systems that allow you to trace and credit every part. Suppose you have a money making scheme, in which the participation, in the sense of part taking, means that the money would be distributed to all parties involved in the production. That would be a reason not to stop but mention every agency involved. Imagine you consider nature an important input to your work, you might want to dedicate an equal part of the revenue to an organisation for natural protection. A referencing method could then be a division system.

Isabel Burr Raty

On Easter Island there is this discussion in local communities to have the territory, the ground to be credited, that it is not only used as a visual background in films for just any purpose, but that the heritage and territory are also credited. It is a bit like branding, but also the recognition that people who arrive there were given the permission to arrive and do their job.

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts

Recognition and crediting is important. In Art Worlds, Howard Becker shows how a piece of art is always made by a whole world which is around it. The one who is credited, receives credits because s/he is taking the responsibility of the success or the failure of the piece of art. You don't expect the same from a movie director and the technical person who did the lights; the order of

credits relates to the amount of responsibility that each has.

One of the things at stake in crediting more people is also to enlarge the responsibility, if they want it. It is interesting to think that the rock, or the tool, maybe does not want this responsibility. I think it opens up something democratic: to feel the concern about something, to take care of something because you are responsible, so giving credits to everyone is also this shared responsibility of the thing to look after. I am working on this in my PHD.

### Pascale Barret

Movie actors are sometimes credited in order of appearance. That is another hierarchy.

I wanted to add to the notion of non-humans. Next to hard- and software the notion of wetware appeared late eighties. We have left the binary machine human opposition behind and we are now more in symbioses with living things around us. It's no longer a question of mastering control and the recurring fear of the machine taking control over the human.

If we consider the non-human in a much larger sense and machines are part of that, then we are not anymore talking about a quality of the living around us and of being alive, staying alive versus the non-living. So wet ware is a way to look at, to sense, biology in the way that we have been thinking up hardware, software. I think in computation they cross, we cross them, in quantum science, we are going further then the duality that has long dominated the discourse.

I also made a note about the notion of aliens, alien, there are people who fantasise about non earthian life, many of those questions return in spirituality, visibility, sensing, vision, which nowadays are reconsidered and for me, they are part of the 'non-human'. Questions of how to make the spiritual visible is central in my work since years. I am not sure if I achieve that. It is also gaining presence in the digital arts at large. A curator I know had always separated her work as a therapist / caretaker and the work as a curator in the digital arts. She is impressed and happy that the two meet more and more and she feels she doesn't have to hide her work either way.

How do you make visible in your work that it is co-created, made or influenced by different agencies? Human, living, biological or not. For me for the moment that happens a lot through mediation, talk to people about it, explain. Maybe I am not there yet to fully communicate that through the work itself. Last spring during the manifestations and strikes in the Sorbonne, there was an anonymous collective which made public declarations. They always had a dog with them, which wore the same facial disguise as the humans. That was genius: it is funny and at the same time they position themselves as inclusive species. I thought it was politically very strong to put a dog on stage. This is a way to make mixed species involvement visible.