



COLLABORATION AND ITS (DIS)CONTENTS

ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND
PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1950

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Collaboration and its (Dis)Contents: Art, Architecture, and Photography since 1950

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Designed by Matthew Cheale

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Detail of *Untitled*, 2013 (from *Work*)
Courtesy of Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.

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FOREWORD

THE SOCIAL TURN TEN YEARS ON

CLAIRE BISHOP

A decade ago I published an essay ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’ that somehow managed to detonate a minor mind-bomb in the field of social practice. Until that point, no art historian had ever really challenged the assumptions of this convivial, collective, participatory, event-based work. You were either for it or against it. The discourse around socially-engaged art was the preserve of its passionate advocates: committed activists who perceived the world as so unjust that any form of collaborative social engagement amounted to political resistance. And if you disliked it... then there was silence. Social practice was quietly ignored by the commercial art world and museums, appearing only in the occasional biennial, kunsthalle, or education program. The time was ripe for an intervention.

There was, of course, extensive pushback against my polemic. People assumed I was a rearguard traditionalist in favour of exhibitable and collectable artefacts that keep the market and museum afloat. In fact, I tried not to privilege objects *or* the social practice alternative (authentic collective experiences), but instead to understand both—and the mediation between them—as forms that carried their own aesthetic and political weight. To do this, the writing of Jacques Rancière was invaluable—not just for myself, but for a whole swath of practitioners seeking to find a critical alternative to ‘criticality’.

In retrospect, the popularity of Rancière and the surge of socially-engaged art in the 2000s are best read as a symptom of political stagnation—one that anticipated, but also significantly changed with, the eruption of utopian activity that was Occupy Wall Street. Hitherto, artistic objection to the status quo had operated in the absence of a political movement; its small-scale projects read as melancholic micropolitical gestures, quietly hoping for messianic redemption. In 2011, this malaise became a globally co-ordinated expression of resistance, to the extent that even those artists who did not directly participate in Occupy benefitted from the art world’s changed mentality towards art-activism that it occasioned.

Featured here in this volume, *Collaboration and Its (Dis)Contents*, are six essays collaboratively written by young scholars who have sought out prior moments of art activism, collaboration, and collectivism—and from countries far outside the traditional Euro-American axis—much more readily than previous generations raised to internalise a historical canon of portable objects. The relationship of art to social change is now a valid and pressing issue, whose efficacy today can only be strengthened by knowledge and examination of its myriad historical precursors. The essays and artists’ projects that follow focus on collectives, collaborations, communal artmaking, as well as works that historically we ascribe to one author, but might have several authors working towards different ends.

That it is has been a decade since my essay and books such as Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette’s *Collectivism after Modernism*, highlights how reticent the field has been to turn away from attributes that are typically ascribed to collective practice or assumptions made about single authorship. These essays, artists’ projects, and the afterword offered by Alexander Nemerov and Richard Meyer therefore allow us to revisit not only the potential of examining artistic collaborations, but also of collaborative writing and research.