COLLABORATION AND ITS (DIS)CONTENTS

ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1950

EDITED BY
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Cover Image:
Detail of *Untitled*, 2013 (from *Work*)
Courtesy of Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.

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MEREDITH A. BROWN and MICHELLE MILLAR FISHER

When we reflect upon the practice of making and writing the histories of art, architecture, and design, it becomes apparent that historically the preference has been to trace singular trajectories, thus erasing, ignoring, or glossing over moments when individuals engaged in collaborative work or collective efforts led to individual gain. Collaboration is complex, messy, time consuming, and often fraught. It is also generative, expansive, and creatively invigorating. This makes the writing of histories of collaboration equally complex. Such an endeavour requires the unravelling and disavowal of the common narrative of the solitary romantic figure burning the midnight oil or the lone genius that has dominated the Western canon for centuries. Working collaboratively also requires working at the edges of humanities disciplines that, unlike the sciences and social sciences, still privilege individual research and authorship and, even when the intention is the opposite, produce scholars geared toward working in silos. Defining the different ways in which individual and group efforts combine and overlap and placing them into relationship with established histories is a difficult, complicated task. Yet it is the project of this book.

In *The Creative Architect: Inside the Great Midcentury Personality Study*, the historian Pierluigi Serriano makes this conundrum clear. He traces a mid-twentieth-century project that convened dozens of architects, including Philip Johnson, George Nelson, Eero Saarinen, and William Wurster, to consider the conditions necessary for creativity. The study was carried out in 1958 by the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) at the University of California, Berkeley, and brought together the era's most renowned architects for three days of personality tests, interviews, and observed group interaction. The study outlined the stakes for creative collaboration at a pivotal moment of national and international cooperation. During the post-war era, more than a decade after the founding of the United Nations, the notion of teamwork was a pervasive conversation in Western culture, both locally (office, school, sports team) and at the national level (the legacy of the Allies winning the war). Yet, as Serriano explains, the IPAR study revealed that this zeitgeist was anathema to the participants in the study. These men (for there were no women in the study), 'were found to be quintessentially individualistic and recalcitrant team players'.[1] The lead investigator and IPAR founder Donald W. McKinnon, a psychology professor at UC Berkeley, concluded that although the study's findings corroborated the centrality of the individual in the creative process, the process itself encompassed more than just one person.[2] As McKinnon looked at four nodes of creativity—personality, environment, process, and product—he found that his research materials on personality by far outweighed the data collected on the other three nodes. In other words, it was much easier to delineate the traits of the creative person than the creative process. Call it what you will—environment and process for McKinnon, or interplay, cooperation, interpersonal context—but collaboration can be hard to see and even harder to pin down in research and to articulate in writing.

Collaboration and Its (Dis)Contents: Art, Architecture, and Photography Since 1950 presents one attempt to untangle the cooperative creative process. Collaboration has been a

component of art making for centuries—from ancient Greek potters and painters, to the nineteenth-century photographers Hill and Adamson, to the contemporary Raqs Media Collective—yet it remains a complex topic for art historians of all periods. This book contributes to the growing art historical debates around collaboration and collectivity and their relationship to modernism, feminism, Marxism, and contemporary practice. It questions not only what constitutes collaboration in modern and contemporary art but also explores the possibilities created by collaborative historical research and co-authored scholarly papers—a practice that remains undervalued in humanities scholarship, which continues to privilege traditional single-authored texts. Taking its cue from Sigmund Freud's landmark 1929 publication, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in which he wrestled with inherent tensions between the individual and society, *Collaboration and Its (Dis)Contents* asks what it means to produce work together as individuals and why this might matter for the creation of art and scholarship in the twenty-first century.

This project, initiated by Meredith A. Brown as the central focus of her postdoctoral fellowship at the Research Forum at The Courtauld, began as a peer-led investigation of collaborative practice across multiple media and geographies. Brown convened a group of sixteen early career scholars and advanced doctoral students to think about collaboration and its influence on the history of modern and contemporary art and architecture. Brown (in London) and Michelle Millar Fisher (in New York) led a series of research seminars that took place in person and via virtual technologies over the course of 2013. The participants committed to a year-long experimental process of open-source research, wherein they made their research material, brainstorming sessions, and gathered information—in short, the scholarly process—available to one another by digital means.

The group discussed myriad questions during this early research phase, with several strands of conversation emerging that interrogated what might constitute collaboration: What distinguishes individual, partnership, group, and community? How do we understand and define collaborative practices in the history of art, design, and architecture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through historical examples? The small groups built on these initial discussions by investigating collaborative practice in the digital age; the politics of collaboration; the appearance of gender, appropriation, institutional subversion, and authorship; and the ways in which particular media do or do not lend themselves to collaboration. Conversation also focused upon the differences between research fields, especially the sometimes staggering difference in approach between multi-authored papers in the sciences and the humanities. The question of collaboration has lingered in the field at large as the project has neared completion. Digitally minded historians of art, architecture, and design are leading us forward, as evidenced by the College Art Association and Society of Architectural Historians' Guidelines for Digital Scholarship, published in 2016, which explicitly address collaboration and co-authored work in the context of the Digital Humanities.[3] It is clear from the guidelines' examples of work in art history—from projects such as ArtHistoryTeachingResources.org to SmartHistory.org to the Metropoli-

tan Museum of Art's standard-setting Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History—that collaborative practices (digital or otherwise) not only benefit the discipline of art history but also are increasingly the norm.

At the end of this digitally based collaborative research project, the participants formed small groups to work together to knit their overlapping research interests into single pieces of writing, resulting in the six co-authored chapters in this volume. Each essay approaches the history of collaborative art practice in a different way—modelling its subject as a means to examine how and why collaboration poses a challenge to artists, architects, performers, photographers, and historians alike. Indeed, in many cases, the authors have been working together across great distances during the writing process, using digital means to enable their collaborative work and communicating via e-mail, Skype, Google Docs, and community-sharing platforms such as Mightybell. The process was not always an easy one, for practical reasons such as distance between collaborating partners and available time, as well as the conceptual difficulty of finding overlapping research interests robust enough to form a chapter. This is attested to by the fact that two promising research partnerships did not, in the end, make it to the finish line with a completed chapter. Each participant in the project can identify numerous road blocks that do not exist in more traditional modes of research and writing, including synching writing schedules and styles and finding collegial ways to confront differences of opinion or method. Each can also point to the ways in which cooperative research and writing can open up new ways of thinking and allow for more experimentation than is generally permitted in individually authored work.

As an open access online book, *Collaboration and Its (Dis)Contents* fittingly corresponds to the values of the research group that were very much shared from the start, namely a commitment to accessible, rigorous scholarship and transparency in research. The final essays represent a cross-disciplinary conversation within and across writing partnerships that range in subject from an epistolary look at 1980s alternative art exhibitions in London and New York, to post-war photography in Latin America, to a mid twentieth-century public-private endeavour between architects, urban planners, and state agencies. The book as a whole is arranged loosely chronologically, and each chapter takes a different approach to the study of collaboration.

In chapter 1, 'Exploring Collaboration in Architecture, Planning, and Renewal in California, 1935–1965', Marci Muhlestein Clark and Michelle Millar Fisher take the single architect as a lens through which to explore much wider collaborative intentions and practices in architecture and urban development. As they argue, the fields of architecture and urban planning are inherently collaborative: it takes many individuals—including architects, developers, craftsmen, construction workers, and administrators—to realise the modern built environment. Clark and Fisher concentrate on two key cases in the career of one mid-century modern architect, Vernon DeMars. Their study branches out from DeMars to encompass the roles played by his colleagues Garrett Eckbo, Fran Violich,

T. J. Kent, the architectural collective Telesis, and others, and extends consideration of the modern movement in architecture and urban planning during the immediate pre-war and post-war periods. Through a shift in focus from the International Style in Europe to the pioneer practicality and less dense terrain of California—a space ripe for development and in need of practical infrastructural solutions for migrant workers, burgeoning populations, and governmental housing and planning policies—Clark and Fisher provide new insights into the creative planning solutions and shortcomings of these projects, the political and social issues at stake, and collaboration as a public-private endeavour.

In chapter 2, Andrianna Campbell and Ileana Selejan focus their attention on photography as, in their words, 'a means of collective witnessing' in 'Margin of Life: Post-war Concerned Photography in Mexico and Guatemala, 1947–1960'. In the West, in the wake of the post-war devastation and atrocities, photography served multiple purposes, one of which was to relay and interpret the horrors of war and the struggles of reconstruction and nascent peacetime. This chapter charts the ways in which photographers instigated new modes of production and formatting layouts and examines the emergence of organisations such as Magnum Photos that supported socially engaged independent photographers. The photographer Cornell Capa, whose 1973 audio-visual presentation and book *Toward the Margin of Life: From Primitive Man to Population Crisis for the Center for Inter-American Relations* provides the title of this chapter, coined the term 'concerned photography' to indicate this focus on purportedly honest, truthful, and human-centred work in the medium. As the authors point out, concerned photography moved away from a focus on those on the social peripheries of the United States (the subjects of Jacob Riis, Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange) to populations in rural settings in Central and South America, seeking out success stories of people of colour who had expatriated to these areas. Campbell and Selejan's essay interrogates American photography of this vein, exploring the utopian aims of the foreign photographic gaze in Latin America and the ways in which the resulting images were instrumentalised in popular magazines such as *Life, Color,* and *Ebony*. The 'concerned photography' project was, they argue, an investigation of the post-war yearning for human kinship, manifested in magazine spreads and museum exhibitions, that blurs what might be traditionally considered the 'social margins' and explicates the projection of racial identity in the United States, Mexico, and South America at a period critical to their post-war synthesis of national identities.

Latin America is also considered in Sofia Gotti and Marko Ilić's comparison of mid-century alternative art institutions in Argentina and grassroots organisations in the former Yugoslavia. In chapter 3, 'Points of Origin: From a History of Alternative Art to a History of Alternative Institutions', Gotti and Ilić map the relationships between artists and alternative art institutions, situating them within both their nations' domestic policies and the histories of contemporary art in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Using Buenos Aires's Instituto Torcuato di Tella and Zagreb's Galerija Studentsog Centra as key examples, they identify the artistic activity that emerged in such art organisations and

delineate how artists' practices were (or were not) influenced by the programmes of these centres. This chapter traces the similar ways in which artists in these different cultural and political climates engaged with international artistic developments while simultaneously resisting the dominant cultural centres of North America and Western Europe. In both countries, alternative art flourished under a system of controlled funding, which, Gotti and Ilić argue, resulted in a political neutralisation of such spaces. At the same time, however, these loci of artistic experimentation enabled artists to participate in the wider globalising art world through the lens of their own cultural contexts.

In 'Deschooling, Manual Labour, and Emancipation: The Architecture and Design of Global Tools, 1973-1975', Sara Catenacci and Jacopo Galimberti look at Global Tools, an experimental collective of more than thirty Italian architects, designers, artists, and critics. These practitioners—among them Alessandro Mendini and Gaetano Pesce and the groups Archizoom Associati, Group 9999, and Superstudio—created and managed a system of experimental laboratories in Florence and Milan as a platform for creative expression through craft and manual labour. Their project was intended as an antidote to the perceived failures of modern design in the post-war landscape. They criticised what they interpreted as the blind trust in new technologies, which, they argued, had served only to expand the production of consumable goods and speculative building, rather than to enshrine the place of carefully crafted, thoughtfully consumed design where designer, architect, and society were meaningfully connected and in reciprocal dialogue with one another. Founded in 1973, less than a year after the Museum of Modern Art mounted the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, Global Tools lasted three years before it disbanded. Catenacci and Galimberti consider the genesis, actions, and demise of Global Tools, and, in doing so, elucidate one flashpoint in the recurrent reconsideration of the moral, political, and epistemological underpinning of manual labour and crafts in design and architecture.

In chapter 5, 'Making Art with Your Kids: Generation, Cooperation, and Desire in Parent–Child Artwork of the 1970s', Meredith A. Brown, Oriana Fox, and Frances Jacobus-Parker discuss various implications of art made by artists with their young children. As they relay it, the rapid social, political, and economic changes of the 1960s and 1970s were reflected in avant-garde aesthetic movements where many artists turned to ephemeral and 'de-skilled' forms of artmaking to explore everyday life as art. This was the same moment that feminist discourse entered the art world and some artists began to explore labour and identity through the lens of parenthood. In their roundtable discussion, the co-authors reflect on case studies in this genre: Mary Kelly's conceptual installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973–78), Zofia Kulik and Przemyslaw Kwiek's extensive photographic documentation *Działania z Dobromierzem* (*Actions with Dobromierz*) (1972–74), Dennis Oppenheim's filmed and photographed series of Biological Extensions performances (1970–75), Ulrike Rosenbach's videotaped *Einwicklung mit Julia* (*Wrapping Julia*) (1972), and Martha Rosler's complex videos about everyday life as a mother–artist in the 1970s. These works

make evident the porous boundary between art and life as the artists worked with their own children to engage with concepts such as maternal and paternal identity, infantile dependency, parent-child relationality, temporality, and mortality. The authors use these artworks, among others, to discuss questions of creativity, creation, agency, and desire, and point to the dependency of all artists on others in order to create. Parent-child artistic collaborations, they argue, span the boundaries between art and life, highlighting the necessity of cooperation for both artistic and biological survival.

In chapter 6, Fiona Anderson and Amy Tobin undertake an experimental dialogue with each other and their research. Begun as an exchange of images and research sources from their own projects, they built an accumulative dialogue, picking up on what they termed 'examples of concrete exchange and similarity across difference, or in other words correspondence and correspondences'. The resulting essay, 'Collaboration is Not An Alternative: Artists Working Together in London and New York, 1974–1981', analyses several ground-breaking artist-run spaces and collaborative exhibitions. These include the Women's Free Art Alliance and the exhibition *Hang Up, Put Down, Stand Up*, organised by the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union and Women Artist's Collective in London, and the *Times Square Show*, organised by Colab, and *Arroz con Mango (The People's Choice)*, organised by Group Material in New York. This chapter touches upon the ways in which collaboration-as-production created new spaces and modes for display in the 1970s and early 1980s. Anderson and Tobin seek to actively challenge the oft-invoked descriptor 'alternative' through their model of collaborative research and writing.

With these six chapters written by emerging voices in the field, this volume furthers the study of collaborative art practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries while promoting a still-uncommon scholarly approach to collective research and writing. Reflections by established scholars—Claire Bishop, Alexander Nemerov, and Richard Meyer—in the form of a foreword and afterword remind us that collaboration in art history is not a concern only by emerging scholars alone.

Moreover, this book contains three collaborative artists' projects that demonstrate the range of aesthetic strategies taken by contemporary artists interested in collective action. Each of the projects reflects on the collaborative nature of artistic practice as metanarrative: an approach that charts, explores, and deconstructs deeply collaborative work, be it the tensions of authorship, mass protest, or the collective formation of tropes of female psychology and its cultural stereotyping. The conversation between artists Sara Greenberger Rafferty and David Kennedy Cutler unpacks the multi-layered work of *Work*, an on-going collaborative project about labour, value, and authorship in the art market that began in 2012 as a studio assignment for art students. *In Times Like These, Only Criminals Remain Silent* by Andrea Geyer and Sharon Hayes takes the form of newspaper broadsheets pinned to the wall. These broadsheets contain a list of queries that speak to notions of public and collective identity, belief, and opinions and that connect to images of protestors holding blank placards, raising questions about who has access to and what constitutes

political speech. Contributing Editor Andrianna Campbell interviewed Simone Leigh and Liz Magic Laser about their work *BREAKDOWN* (created in collaboration with the opera singer Alicia Hall Moran). The work examines the history and recent past of female crises, both public and private, as they have been portrayed in popular culture.

There are many questions of collaboration that our volume does not exhaustively answer or even touch upon. How might recasting the role of an artist's assistant as that of collaborator change our understanding of the work of art? In what ways does collaborative practice occur? What social, political, economic, and historical conditions facilitate or preclude co-authorship? What is the goal of the historic privileging of one participant's role over the other's—the deliberate creation of a canon or accidental historical blindness? What does the sequence of or punctuation between names disclose about the interactions of pairs? To what degree do particular media lend themselves to collaboration? What are the ethical concerns of collaborative practices? Can collaboration exist among non-consenting participants? Are collectivity and collaboration distinct or synonymous practices? A systematic survey of collaboration in art and the writing of its histories has never been our aim. Rather, we hope this project will encourage historians of the visual arts to approach the monograph with a new perspective and to take on the study of collaboration where it has been historically overshadowed, overlooked, or erased. A quote attributed to Charles Darwin seems a fitting summation of the aims of this book and its contents to follow: 'It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed'. By engaging historians of art, architecture, performance, and photography alongside practicing artists in a collaborative project, this book both facilitates the study of collaboration and promotes it as a scholarly approach. We hope it will continue provoke wider discussion of how collaboration is practiced and valued in the humanities.

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1.   Pierluigi Serriano, *The Creative Architect: Inside the Great Midcentury Personality Study* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2016), p. 11. As Serriano suggests, 'teamwork was a topic at center stage in the postwar debate about creativity'.

2.   Serriano, *The Creative Architect: Inside the Great Midcentury Personality Study* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2016), p. 215.

3.   See http://www.collegeart.org/pdf/evaluating-digital-scholarship-in-art-and-architectural-history.pdf.