

**Final report**  
**Documentation mission - Lab #3 - N.O.W. project**  
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*"There are things you experience, but not so that you can compose an experience. There is deviation and dispersion; there is no match between what we observe and what we think, and what we desire and what we obtain."*

John Dewey, Art as Experience (my translation)

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

## Introduction

### 1. A situated mission: from where I speak

Born in Belgium, I studied contemporary history at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve. Back in Paris after my master's degree, despite my keen interest in research, I decided to explore the world of the arts by working in the field of exhibition production, rather than to start a thesis.

It was my meeting with Bruno Latour (philosopher and anthropologist of science) nearly two years later that will finally allow me to join my two centers of interest, art and research in human and social sciences, as he proposed collaborating with him on the realization of two major international exhibitions, alongside Peter Weibel (director of the Karlsruhe Arts and Media Center, ZKM).<sup>1</sup>

These two exhibitions aimed at setting up collaborative projects between artists and researchers. After these first two very rich experiences, I decided to take the time to get better acquainted with each of these two worlds: that of the arts, being assistant and collaborator of contemporary artists; that of research, as project manager in the creation of a laboratory of digital resources for the research in human and social sciences (medialab of Sciences Po).

Through these professional experiences, seemingly heterogeneous, my goal was a more intimate knowledge of research and creation practices, to better know their frameworks, their constraints, their modes of operation and their respective methods, in order to apprehend in the same movement, their specificities and possible complementarities.

My intuition was that I had to walk this path in order to meet the conditions allowing a real experimentation in articulation between research (sciences) and creation (the arts), a mission that appeared to me every day more vital. These were the first steps in my career that enabled me to conceive and lead, with Bruno Latour, an experimentation program in arts and politics at Sciences Po, which we conducted for four years.

Our challenge was to allow the necessary renewal of creation and research practices, but also and especially of their alliances with our society. I also co-founded *Dingdingdong* with Emilie Hermant, an Institute for coproduction of knowledge on Huntington's disease (HD). By creating *Dingdingdong* and bringing together historians, philosophers, psychologists, neurologists, dancers, filmmakers, visual artists, writers, we bet on creating relevant knowledge, that is to say effective regarding HD, with and for its users, and, simultaneously, on challenging our practices.

I consider myself today as an independant researcher having made the choice of staying on the outskirts but nonetheless close to academics. In my practice, I'm interested in the question of research and art, its scope of action and dissemination and especially its necessary repositioning in a society facing a deep and troubled crisis, and how they can make alliance in order to be able to play a role in social and political transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Sciences, Religion and Arts, ZKM, 2002 ; Making Things Public. Atmospheres of democracy, ZKM, 2005.

I'm interested in these issues because I think we cannot continue to separate what we call politics from the unbelievably vast artistic and scientific productions, and whose effects on politics, and so on our daily lives, are weak.

Our fascination for cross-disciplinary issues directly impacts this urge to re-shuffle the cards. But if the need to rethink associations between arts and sciences is no longer questioned, it is yet still difficult to overcome dualisms such as true/false, objectivity/subjectivity, knowledge/sensitivities, etc. As a consequence of the division of knowledge, most of the time we still think it is sufficient to 'only' join disciplines together instead of radically rethinking each of them. Over the two last centuries, the skills, methods, and tools developed within artistic or scientific disciplines have become crucial, but they have also contributed to – as an undesirable side effect of the process of autonomy and freedom – enlarging the gap between society and how the arts/sciences understand society as their research target. It causes the sciences, even social sciences, and the arts to drift further and further away from society.

However, no matter how disastrous this statement seems, we should not proceed by provoking a 'tabula rasa.' Instead, we have to accept its inheritance as a problem we can work with. We could start to concentrate on the exploration of the 'enabling effects' of research production – as proposed by Benedikte Zitouni who speaks of the social sciences and extends that vision to the arts, i.e. the effects that research and creation could create in the narrative we need to build - because it builds us – instead of focusing on pure truth seeking. As a historian, it means for her crafting present times by mixing those pasts, presents and futures. "It means handling times with eyes riveted on present purposes and possibilities. It means letting a plural and potential 'now' take over and substitute itself to the linear and irreversible past-present-future thinking and story-telling we're used to."<sup>2</sup>

I situate myself in this context of researchers and artists who focus their work on new forms of inquiry and exploration of our realities in a perspective of transformation. The only way to experiment the conditions of transformation is to compose with different kinds of knowledge, and to see their practices as an activity to be shared with actors. Following the pragmatist tradition, it engages us to think of the effects of our practices that cannot be evaluated outside of concrete situations, and how they are shared and received.

## 2. A situated mission: the commission – Lab #3

### 2.1. From where the commissioners speak

It is important to situate my mission within the frame of Lab #3 about the commission process, which was described as following in the application to the EU:

« Commissioning is an ancient historical practice. It covers a vast range of practices from many different disciplines and brings together a number of issues linked to processes and work schedules, the context and the conditions for work and their influences on artistic content.

We believe that the performing arts should explore new commissioning frameworks, such as that launched by the Fondation de France and its "New Commissioners" program. In this initiative, the arts, conceived as *experience*, are set at the service of civil society.

This experimentation around commissioning will seek answers in terms of the role of each of the participants in the collaborative process, and calls into question the strategic role of mediation and its role in stimulating debate and managing non-consensus. »

This text is written by the N.O.W partners, producers and curators in the performing arts field, who feel the necessity to transform their practice and their roles.

For one of the partners, the challenges are the following: "How to experiment a commission as a format able to frame new forms of mediation for producers/curators and artists among themselves and towards communities and societies? How to stretch commission formats and rules so as to have a more collaborative exchange, a dialogue rather than an executive command in which responsibilities and roles are shared, in order to accompany the creative process and production? How to fill the gap(s) between artists and societies? How to regain a political value of the arts by strengthening the connections among artists and communities, not serving their issues but rephrasing and showing their contradictions or instances eventually generating conflicts? How to

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<sup>2</sup> Zitouni (B.), Pihet (V.), *Shuffling Times*, in Parse Journal, *Times*, Issue 4, pp. xx. <http://parsejournal.com/article/shuffling-times/>

mediate and evaluate the impact of artists' practices on societal change, giving legitimacy to the arts themselves in this time of financial crisis? Finally how to map and share with audiences the phases and aspects of a creative process, and not just the outcomes?"

On my end, I understood Lab#3's challenges as twofold:

How to use commissioning as a tool and lever activated in performing arts and assisting in moving the cursor in the NOW partners' practices, in response to a context that no longer offers sufficient time, space and financial means to allow performing arts to renew themselves in terms of artistic projects and professionals support practices?

How to shift the commissioning tool to a framework that could facilitate stronger collaboration between artists and producers/curators facing the complexity of thinking the political role of the arts as an actor of social transformation?

## 2.2. The commission challenge

Questioning the commission tool is also introducing a shift from the classical and historical way the commission was envisaged. As mentioned in the project, other experimentations already exist that propose to play with the commission rules and try to give back to that word its lost vitality. We will go through two experimentations running for a few years and question lab#3 challenges from these perspectives.

- New Patrons

*The program :*

"The New Patrons" is a protocol invented by a French artist in the 90's, François Hers, claiming the redistribution of the roles and responsibilities between a 'new patron' (anyone), a mediator and an artist. François Hers, as an artist, was unsatisfied as he realized how much the citizens were keeping apart from the art scene except as « spectators ». The need and desire for art were expressed, and still are, most of the time, by public or private institutions.

Here are his words (<http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/22/about>):

« Democracys' ideal would be that no one is just the spectator or reject of a story they don't feel part of any longer, and instead everyone is able to become a fully-fledged player, as a citizen. Such an ideal poses a daily fundamental question: how can one create a common world with individuals who have become free and equal, with different conceptions and convictions?

The aim of the Nouveaux Commanditaires protocol is to take on this challenge by opening a new chapter in the history of art. Over two centuries after the democratic revolutions, citizens still remain the great absentee from the art scene even though this is the terrain where they could freely exert, test and solve their fundamental cultural needs. It is also there that one creates and experiments, for their benefit, new types of relations to oneself and to others, to time and to the environment.

While artists and their artworks have taken on all their responsibilities to the extent that they have become paragons of the Modernist ambition, society has turned instead to artworks from the past by giving heritage more importance than it has ever had in history. Citizens remain absent and silent in art. They seem satisfied with anonymous relations with artists and limit artworks to having a role within a heritage that is managed by markets and institutions whose criteria and values could not stem from a political, let alone artistic project.

In order to give a voice to these great absentees and enable them to finally play a role, the actions of the Nouveaux Commanditaires take place on the art scene without walls. This can occur anywhere and is open to those who wish to take on a responsibility as an active player. In these situations, the citizen becomes an equal to the artist and acquires the authority to publicly express a need to create as well as to assess what is produced in the name of art. This mode of action has long gone beyond a mere declaration of intention it is a tangible reality with hundreds of accomplished artworks. These reflect and demonstrate the fact that both citizens and artists have the intelligence and the courage necessary to highlight contemporary cultural necessities and act in consequence.

In this new scene, the relations between each party are governed by a protocol that defines everyone's role and relies on trust to reach agreements rather than acts of authority and regulations. In order to give rise to an art of democracy, each player needs to take on their own responsibilities, and bring a communal, rather than just private, meaning to their individual commitment as well as to the artwork. »  
François Hers

The 3 roles (<http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/22/about>) :

➤ Patrons

Anyone who wishes so, alone or in association with others (and the latter is highly encouraged), can call upon an artistic mediator to help them take responsibility for the commissioning of an artwork.

It is up to them to express their wishes and reasons behind their call to an artist. They will discuss this directly with the artist and with all those involved in the initiative. The patrons also need to define the technical and administrative constraints such as the financial framework within which the artists will be working.

The patrons are responsible for the integration of the artwork within the community where it is lodged and accountable for the financial investment, which will be required from the local people for the creation of the artwork.

Finally, the patron can't be a corporation insofar as establishing a dialogue and taking on such a responsibility is necessarily attributed to individuals. When the patrons act from within an organisation, they must have the approval of those who are legally responsible. The latter can associate themselves with the patrons, and thus contribute to the mediation process.

➤ Artists

The artist and the medium are chosen according to the nature of the commission and its context. The selection is also based on the validity of the project within the artist's oeuvre and on their actual availability. Any creative field can be considered: visual arts, architecture, design, music, theatre, literature, dance, etc.

The choice of the artist is made by the mediator. One of the artists' major contributions is offering their knowledge in the field to the patrons who don't necessarily have that background. This implies that formulating a wish to commission art doesn't require any particular artistic knowledge. The choice of the artist must be endorsed by the patrons. They are entitled to question the choice in the same way that an artist is free not to accept to work on the project. In that instance, the mediator proposes another artist.

The artist is called upon to be involved early on in the debate about the patrons' objectives and the most adapted mode of intervention. Therefore there is no open call since that would not enable this type of dialogue. Indeed it is the deep-rooted thinking process concerning the *raison d'être* of a project that will allow the patrons to be entirely convinced of its key and grounded validity and therefore defend it at each stage. In addition, mediators would not be able to expect the patrons to take their responsibilities if they discharged theirs on a jury of experts who would not be aware of the details of the context.

The artist then submits a draft proposal that is debated with the patrons. The patrons trust the artist and take on the all the risks linked to the creation of an artwork and, as such, they have similar requirements. Once the project is agreed upon, a budget is established for the production and, once the funds are obtained, the artwork can enter the production phase. If, for various reasons, it cannot be realised, sometimes the work is produced by other patrons for whom it is fully suitable.

Artist fees are always distinct from the technical costs for the project's realisation. Regardless of their reputation, the artists accept to take the given financial restrictions into account. It is here that the work of art emancipates itself from the status of a commodity, to gain a value that is no longer speculative, but dependent upon its use within society. Inasmuch as this economical demand develops, it might become a principal source of income for a great number of talented artists, as it has always been throughout art history.

➤ Mediators

In response to the demand, mediators are experts in contemporary art capable of ensuring that its requirements are respected.

They have a track record of dialogues with artists and all the technical knowledge necessary to bring such a project to fruition and manage the public and private funding they request, which will be granted to the association. Their work has to be one amongst other activities linked to art so that they keep close contact with the diversity of creation and its current forms.

Their independent role must be recognised so they can arbitrate and control the debate that needs to be organised between the artists and the patrons, as well as with other individuals or institutions that will be involved.

Their first role is to inform the social partners in the area where the project is meant to occur in the manner they deem most appropriate. They are attentive to all the players and evaluate with the patrons the feasibility and pertinence of their project bearing in mind the success of the artwork and the community in which it will be located. After establishing a relation between the artist and the patrons, they search for and pool together public and private funds required while associating the patrons to this search or to supporting it through the technical or political particularities of the project.

The mediators are chosen by peers who assess the candidacies in light of experience, since the task at hand is onerous and complex. The mediators become members of an association in which combined expertise contributes to answering the very diverse issues and contexts that arise.

The ensemble of mediators is gathered under an International Society of Nouveaux Commanditaires.

#### *What we can learn from this experience:*

A voluminous book was published two years ago about this program<sup>3</sup> and some other papers exist on this experimentation. It will be difficult to write a synthesis here, but we can see how this protocol induces the creation of arrangements depending from case to case. The strength of the protocol is to give shape to situations without reducing their multiplicity to a common standard. Even if the way in which each one plays its role is determined in the process and not in the protocol, the non mixed-upness of the roles is an interesting constraint. The artistic part of the project still belongs to the artist but its success won't be only her/his. We are never autonomous alone and the most important thing is to treat well what is building in a relation without thinking we necessary will lose something.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Questions raised for N.O.W project:*

- Even if the protocol is open to all artistic mediums, actually most of the mediators come from the field of visual arts. I think very recently the New Patrons tried to hire some mediators from other fields, but it is still quite focused if we look at the works produced.

It is obviously correlated to the fact that the protocol was proposed by a visual artist and his network but I thought it also has maybe something to do with the very different practices the performing arts engage: in terms of technical needs, space (scene), time (short-lived), human resources (as an assembly of different people from the author, to the director, to the actors, to the technical team etc), role of the public etc.

As a first answer to my wondering, one of the partners told me rightly that many artists used to being defined as performers have actually evolved their projects and practices into disappearance acts, creating patterns that can be appropriated and performed by others and even by the audience.

A second answer is that performing arts can bring different answers to the question of mediation because they focus on how to foster and develop a dialogue rather than on the creation of an object or a concrete trace. It plays with memory and the trace it leaves as an experience or the change it can introduce in a perception of an experience, while modifying it. The partners don't seem to consider performing arts as problematic in regards to the commission tool.

I still think it raises different kinds of issues that would be interesting to develop: do we really need documentation to leave a material trace? To what point are material traces crucial or necessary for commissioners to appropriate themselves the project? Is it easier to follow the effects of a commission work when it is an artwork that finds a physical anchor, for instance because the access is easier for future generations?

- It questions also the distribution of roles and responsibilities. In the N.O.W project, the idea was for the partners to consider themselves as the mediator – if we take the New Patrons program as a landmark - but that position could not be clear since they were also the commissioners and the main producer of the project. In the New Patrons protocol, the mediator has to keep an independent role. Therefore, it

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<sup>3</sup> *Faire art comme on fait société*, Paris, Presses du Réel, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Parce-que je me sentirais autorisé à cela maintenant...*, in « Faire art comme on fait société », Paris, Presses du Réel, 2013, pp. 37-53.

is difficult to shift from the roles the different actors are used to play in terms of expectations and responsibilities.

- Program of experimentation in arts and politics (SPEAP)

*The program:*

SPEAP is an experimental program I co-founded with the philosopher Bruno Latour in 2011, addressed to artist researchers, operators who want to explore the various relations we can invent between arts, sciences, society and politics.

Each year, we put together a group of no more than twenty young researchers and artists from a wide variety of backgrounds, and ask them to bring their knowledge and methods to bear on concrete issues raised by society, to put their convictions to the test of reality, to exchange questions and learn to think through the consequences of their interventions. Our program statement was based on a set of pedagogical experiments both inside and outside the class.

The collective work, inside the class, aimed to break away from any form of competition or hierarchy between the participants. The arts and the social sciences were considered first and foremost as shared places for the invention of new formats, framing, and techniques?<sup>5</sup> We tested that question through many exercises taking various questions as starting points and seeing how each participant could apply his own set of techniques towards them and how we could focus our attention on the effects possibly produced. Moreover, in order to approach the question of politics from different perspectives, the pedagogical committee and most of the invited speakers accompanied participants in the exploration of concepts such as 'public,' 'problem' and 'inquiry' all borrowed from John Dewey's work, seeking to envisage politics not as a professional sphere but as a daily occupation.

In parallel with these class sessions, the participants had to work in groups in direct contact with actors on concrete issues they encounter in their professional or non-professional activities. Addressing their work to those specific actors, the participants were encouraged to develop new forms of inquiries and restitution – without any hierarchy between artistic and scientific approaches - in order to lead the actors to other perspectives of responses than those borrowed until then often because they are stuck in daily routines. Instead of working with problems suggested by participants, artists and/or researchers, – i.e. for reasons of their own – SPEAP wanted to be an opportunity for the participants to put their skills to the test on problems brought and expressed by others than themselves.

We were strongly inspired by the New Patrons Program (see above): we wanted the problems being expressed by individuals or groups of people - anyone ready and willing to ask for help in thinking a problematic situation. But our proposal was also very different: the frame is a pedagogical program limited in time and means; the commission was not about the creation of an artwork from an artistic approach only, but was about a reformulation and representation - considered together – of the problem, coproduced together by the SPEAP participants –from scientific and artistic approaches - and the patrons. The form had to be found depending on the effects we wanted to produce on the situation.

I was the mediator and envisaged my role and my responsibility as follows:

- to find the patrons (through our networks and research) ;
- to start working with the patrons on the formulation of the commission with 3 main rules : the patron is the individual or group of individuals in their practice, not taken in their – institutional or other – functions, even if sometimes they needed the approval of their hierarchy (the patron is not the institution) ; the patron is responsible for being the interlocutor of the SPEAP group all along the process ; a financial involvement is not a pre-requisite but negotiated with the patron depending from case to case.
- To arbitrate the discussion between the patrons and the SPEAP participants, paying attention to the quality of exchanges. We had to build little by little the relation with patrons, paying attention first to the situation they are engaged in, the ins and outs, and then to assess the level of complexity of the 'problem' they shared with us. We had to be really careful and feel what were the conditions of a precautionary coproduction of knowledge. A co-production of knowledge invites all participants to open up novel potentialities and accept the experimental dimension of the project.

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<sup>5</sup> Leibovici (F.), Pihet (V.), 'Pour une école des arts politiques?', in Tracés. Revue de Sciences humaines, 'À quoi servent les sciences humaines (III)', #11, 2011, pp. 101-122.

Some examples of projects:

- With the general director of the technical services of the town hall of Epinay-sur-Seine – in the suburbs of Paris - around the question of participation of the inhabitants in the projects of the city, knowing the classical participative democracy tools failed (how to do politics with the expression of a variety of opinions and wills?);
- With two surgeons in Marseille on the quality perceived by patients in the context of orthopedic surgery (is this problem shared? how to describe the unspeakable experience of the body?);
- With the association Proses around the experimentation of a mobile home for drug users in Saint-Denis (how to make visible individuals who do not necessarily want to be seen and we do not want to see?).

*What we can learn from this experience:*

Using the word 'commission' rather than 'project' was a way to create the opportunity for commissions to be expressed through our proposal to answer it and to introduce a difference in our method of elaborating participative research. I'm still hesitating if the word 'commission' was the right one. It interestingly unsettled our disciplinary habits, but it also produced at the same time considerable chaos since this word is too full of tacit references depending the professionals's perspectives (service, institutional partnership, communication purposes – as if we were in Sciences Po, etc). At least, I think SPEAP was and is a place where one can share discomfort. The anxiety, always situated, belongs to the art of "Staying With The Trouble" - in the words of the American philosopher Donna Haraway - that is to say, not to respond to what disturbs in terms of abstraction but to give a situation, a meeting, the power to disturb our habits of thought.<sup>6</sup>

In english, we could have transformed the word into 'co-mission', introducing the hyphen for underlining the *co* that engages a collective task and the *mission* that can be seen as a task to achieve, usually restricted in time, and/or as an exploration. Like Donna Haraway, Vinciane Despret and some other contemporary thinkers who like writing with tropes or metaplasms because they create a little contrast in the form, but keep the link with both its history or heritage and its vivid or new uses; they transform the meaning force of the word, but without losing the trace of its transformation.

*Questions raised for the N.O.W project:*

- Within SPEAP framework, the question was originally to move the cursor from artists' and researchers' practices towards issues raised by actors of society, but not necessarily practices engaged by arts professionals, those who accompany artistic processes. However, we finally accepted 3 art producers and/or curators during the 4 years I was running the program, and we could see how it transformed their practices afterwards, since the three of them completely changed the orientation of their professional activities, thinking themselves as participative actors, with the artists, in the exploration of our human and social realities.

As a partner rightly noticed, these professionals practices are linked with arts and research and should work together. Practitioners also need perspective in their action and researchers need practitioners to understand the actual issues at stake and their multiplicity of forms – in order to unfold the complexity. Another partner interestingly claimed that they – producers and curators - want to change practices and hierarchies in the sector to be more reactive to the current general transformations of our times, not only to guarantee ourselves a future but rather reclaiming the transformative potential of the arts in reformulating alternative scenarios to the present and also, by doing this, recalling ourselves the importance of a critical thinking and a lucid vision. This partner is currently engaged in the thinking of what could be a co-curating process engaging also the audience and reinterpreting the festival tool.

- One of N.O.W's issues lies in the fact that the commission was expressed by themselves. I was told that at the beginning that the idea was to involve people outside of the art world in the formulation of the commission and the call but this did not happen because of time constraints (of the partners and the project). The challenge of Lab #3 was to disrupt the habits of the partners but also the habits of the artist that will be chosen in order to question the role of art in the public sphere.

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<sup>6</sup> Haraway (D), *Staying with the trouble. Making Kin in the Chtulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016.

The main problem I think was the distribution of roles in the whole process. The scenario should have been more written. I don't think the call, even though it was thought out in a more collaborative way than usual, was the right tool to introduce a relevant shift within the commission process and disrupt the habits of the partners and of the artist.

### 3. The documentation mission

At the very beginning, documentation within Lab #3 was envisaged to « render the process of the artistic project visible to the public during creation and final production ». When I was asked to be in charge of documentation, the mission was a bit reformulated, following, on the one hand, the running discussions between the partners of lab#3, and, on the other hand, the first discussions with me. It was agreed that the mission would entail both the process of the artistic projects selected in response to the call, and the process of the commission in lab#3.

I proposed testing the documentation mission from a pragmatists' perspective, a pragmatist philosophy, tradition exemplified in the United States by the work of John Dewey, William James and others – as well as by their French and Belgian followers today (Isabelle Stengers, Didier Debaise, Vinciane Despret, Bruno Latour, Antoine Hennion etc). But this thought is important to me because it engages us, especially taking into account the works of William James and John Dewey, to think and create in the perspective of the effects we want to produce on a reality or a situation of which we are in fact a stakeholder, and not according to what our practices alone would commit us to do. As a hypothesis, I proposed to envisage the documentation as an interactive process and a way to pay attention to a situation, here created by and with the lab#3 and the artistic project, and take into account the effects produced on all the actors involved – who are the first “public” – in order to transform the experience into sharable knowledge.

It is important to understand the pragmatist approach of the word “experience” since the partners in the Lab #3 description also used the word. According to John Dewey, an experience cannot be reduced to the mere fact of being affected by it or of feeling something. An experience is something that we do, not something that comes passively to us. Most of the time we think that an experience is the fact of perceiving something, to receive information through senses. For the pragmatists, this is true, but it is only the first part of the experience. On its own, this first part of the experience is outside of the field of knowledge and therefore not usable. An experience is complete only when the fact of being affected by it commits us to a resulting action—of whatever kind—such as to transform the very conditions of the experience. What Dewey calls inquiry is precisely what can add to the experience to be fulfilled. For Dewey, inquiry is the key to an active process, rather than a simple analysis or study, in order to find our way through the many controversies we are engaged in. Furthermore, his understanding of inquiry is a creation or discovery that transforms the subject studying as well as the object studied in the process.

The inquiry is the process of transformation itself. Sociologist Antoine Hennion, specifies the pragmatist approach: there is no methodolog, every object requires its method. It is not only about the researcher's commitment and his capacity of observation, nor about the multidisciplinary issue since this vocabulary retains the traditional meaning of the discipline and reinforces the researcher in the position he has taken, from the viewfinder to the target world. The more radical questioning, already stated by John Dewey, considers that the inquiry is primarily that of the persons concerned and, in Jamesian terms, that our own inquiry, as researcher, is itself an experience which adds to the experience in progress and prolongs it in other possible ways. In other words, to establish in practice an "additive" conception of the work of the researcher, is to try with his own techniques (including concepts and theories) to help bring out, to better understand, to make realize a particular experience, in a non-exhaustive way, alongside the actors. Not to substitute them, but to cooperate with them and, in this process of cooperation, perhaps bring new perspectives. It is the experience that is a given, and the disciplines and the concepts must "do with it" to account for it, to be able to "value" it and thereby increase (or decrease) its degree of existence. Hence the importance of the feedback to be made to actors, but never in a pedagogical perspective, so that they understand better the situation, nor inversely in an evaluation perspective, so that they endorse or note the research work, but so that they bounce on it, take it back, do something else



and possibly that they can better "realize their own work."<sup>7</sup>

The pragmatist concepts are very useful for thought, but if they don't necessarily give us the tools, they encourage us to experiment.

The key for me - and that's why I think it is interesting and important to renew the way we envisage the documentation - is the concept of experience.

An experience is what forces us to think. We must here understand experience in the very broad sense of a situation that poses a problem and forces itself upon us. There is always a starting point, a problematic situation, an event: something happens. An experience becomes a problem when something comes to disrupt its development. In our daily lives, a lot of experiences unfold well, without even having to take particular notice of them. But some experiences are disrupted and therefore request investigation to transform the situation thus allowing the experience to be fulfilled. But to transform, one must know what one transforms.

And that is the first difficulty... most of the time, we lose the traces, the paths, of what we are doing because usually a situation engages a series of actors and it becomes quickly impossible to perceive all the ins and outs of the situation. Without the effort of reconstructing the paths taken there is no possibility of learning from a situation. Re-integration is essential to the transformation of a situation. We could call that task "research" or "analysis", but the pragmatists engage the "researchers" to be part of the inquiry with the other actors, because alone the researcher can assist, but cannot embrace all perspectives of the experience, nor participate in the transformation.

I took Lab #3 as an experience, as a situation that poses a problem - of partners who can't continue their practices without rethinking them because of the transformation of our world. I wanted to challenge the documentation as a test to place research activity in a more alive process, and during the process, attempt to follow the effects of Lab #3 activity and, maybe even, influence it. Usually research activity is a long-term process. Many researchers now render public the different stages of their research through blogs, "carnets de recherche" etc, but it is not necessarily thought of as being part of the experience itself. I choose to not extract myself from the process and to not be an observer, but an actor.

We will see how this mission was ambitious as I proposed it. This report is an attempt to follow the questions and paths along the project/process with the positive outcomes and also its failures. At the least, describing a situation also densifies the time of one's action; it makes it present in order to seize it better and carry our attention to the effects it produces.

I will follow the chronology of the actions - before, during, after the festival - for the report because it is easier to read and because what I will call the « Isolotto experience » - the moment of the project in situ - was so strong that there is a « before » and an « after »; however, it is quite clear that when we write a report, the chronology is no longer strictly relevant because it is already a reprise.

## I/Before the festival

### I/1. Selection process

In terms of "interactive documentation", the first difficulty I encountered is that I arrived on the project at the end of the conception of the call/selection process. I could have offered input (see black boxes below) before but it was a bit late to re-open the conception step. I was probably too careful and should have been more intrusive in the first N.O.W meetings I attended (in Anvers and Lille), dealing with "where and when to place the interaction".

I had the feeling it was inappropriate to be intrusive within the meetings as the partners already formed a collective, which is always fragile. Then I thought I would rather contact them outside the N.O.W meetings but it was not relevant as it requested too much time for all of them and gave them the impression they had to repeat themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> Hennion (A.), *Enquêter sur nos attachements. Comment hériter de William James ?*, *SociologieS* [En ligne], Dossiers, Pragmatisme et sciences sociales : explorations, enquêtes, expérimentations, mis en ligne le 23 février 2015, consulté le 05 mars 2017. URL : <http://sociologies.revues.org/4953>

The second difficulty for me was that I had the feeling some questions could have found answers in other N.O.W project Labs like the Lab#2 with Danae on the partners's practices, Lab#1 could only have had a quick view of. Looking back, one of the partners said it could have been more relevant to consider the documentation mission as an overall frame rather than just a focus on one lab. For this partner, what was interesting in the N.O.W project was that they had applied for a more hybrid and systemic approach, and not creating an internal flux was one of the weaknesses. This tendency of creating sectors and compartments was probably also one of the reasons why the artistic project (The Rope) was so difficult to manage in a collective way.

Feedback on the selection process, issued from documents, emails, and discussions with partners:

*Main questions raised during meetings about the process and the candidate projects*

- Is a call finally the appropriate tool to change professionals' practices and get off of the production/diffusion tracks? Because it is a commonly used tool in the art field, a call now easily leads to a "knowing" definition of the roles and it is difficult to get out of the selection position.
- Most of the projects showed a lack of methods; methods rarely developed in the presentations.
- Some proposals would have needed coaching – it could have been a choice to make? Is a commission about "coaching"? Is coaching a part of the commissioners' job before the selection?
- Some projects necessitated consequential amounts of work, like The Rope project; it expressed that it would request work and substantial support from N.O.W partners and Fabbrica Europe, especially in terms of communities to mobilize in situ.
- It would have been more interesting to get back to the 5 artists/groups pre-selected to ask them to better identify, or modify their project a little, and see if they were willing to make a move towards the issues raised by the partners or not; more dialogue is needed to enter and explore a practice of an artist.

*Main comments and questions from the meetings about The Rope's project*

- About Ief: Interesting background: philosophy, scenography, technical/scientific skills, involved locally; not really performing art but more visual art; he doesn't put himself in the center of the project
- About Rope: Rope is an object for storytelling, a producer of controversies, a tool for transformation.
- About participation: the project proposes a democratic process, everyone can participate, people can do what they want, it is open;
- About the public: it can touch everybody and potentially more people than the other projects
- About the production: the project will request lot of work and support within the rather restricted time frame
- Does Ief really need N.O.W support? He can easily find support elsewhere. For what project can N.O.W make a difference?

*Feedback from discussions/Skypes after the selection*

- Positive: organizing the first step of the selection from a one page presentation, and then proposing a fee for the project preparation to the 5 pre-selected; conducting interviews with the ones who were finally not selected; to have the artists from lab#2 on board, because they fed the conversation with different points of view and issues that made the choice multilayered in a way.
- Negative: there are regrets for not having organized interviews with the 5 artists/groups pre-selected before the final selection; there are regrets about a lack of time for discussing collectively in detail each of the 5 proposals; in comparison, too much time was spent on the definition of selection criteria; too many traditional formats and tools were used in the writing of the call and selection process, for example: in a first stage, the idea was to test the writing of the call with different target groups and people not at all issued from the arts to understand what 'contemporary' means to them. Also concerning decision making, having more exchanges outside of our own comfort zones and principal frameworks, involving people outside of the arts. This was rejected due to lack of time and being too demanding for many of the partners.

Questions raised:

- The process: the call and the selection

We can see a certain discomfort with the idea of being obliged to remain with the “selection” step, related to the writing of a “call” that does not easily allow comprehensive dialogue with artists and thus changes the relations held with them, which was the wish.

The artists seemed to appreciate the shift in the selection process as a sign of attention (pre-selection; fee for preparation; feedback). But on the one hand, there was this feeling of not having sufficiently delved the consideration of each project, and on the other hand, once selections were made, we could see with Ief Spincemaille that expectations from the partners and from him were not so easy to shift, induced by what an artist expects when he candidates for a call and what one expects as commissioners.

I wonder if the call was the right tool. It is always interesting to see what emerges from a call but the purpose was to create the conditions of a collective work of mediation, revisiting the professional habits of the actors involved. Even if each partner shared the call within their own networks and some of them knew the applicants, it was only once he was selected that it was decided that the artist will work in the frame of the Fabbrica Europa Festival and much later with Isolotto. It could have been interesting to choose the situation beforehand, and propose artists that the partners felt could answer to this situation.

- Black Boxes

We can see from these discussions that there are a lot what I call “black boxes”. By definition a black box is difficult to open.

If we follow Wikipedia, the black box system is in science, computing, and engineering, a device, system or object which can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs (or transfer characteristics), without any knowledge of its internal workings. Its implementation is “opaque” (black). Almost anything might be referred to as a black box: a transistor, an algorithm, or the human brain.

If we follow the historians and anthropologists of sciences, whose work is to observe how sciences operate, scientists also construct black boxes – the scientific facts – giving the illusion they exist as autonomous realities, having a stability, and spreading themselves in virtue of a sort of internal energy.

If we shift again towards social and human sciences and language, we can call the black boxes « textatoms » (texts-symptoms) following the philosopher Vinciane Despret (who herself follows the anthropologist Emily Martin).

A « textatom » is a conceptual landmark/point of reference having become a sort of norm/standard to describe an experience. These become language idioms that we no longer question, even if we know that each, depending on background, professional experiences and practices etc, will in fact have slightly different ideas on what the words represent. The lack of time for the building of a more common language is often accused, but I also discern a lack of interaction with researchers, because we must think together. Researchers need to publish in order to develop their thinking and share their issues with their peers. But as soon as there is a need to transform (I prefer using ‘transform’ to ‘innovate’) something, reading their publications is not sufficient, as in order to assist a situation and its actors, researchers need to confront their thinking to the very concrete problems encountered by the actors.

Because they probably worked, as « specialists », on other experiences which share common issues with the ones actors are concerned with, they can bring material and add something to the experience, but they never can say « this is the same, I know this situation, here are the answers ».

Here are some input examples regarding a number of “textatoms”:

>Public/democracy

According to John Dewey, in his book « The Public and its Problems », the public is not a sovereign people represented by its elected officials and embodied by the State, but a multiple of publics that appear and disappear depending on the problems they raise and their state of solution.

We stabilize too quickly the distinction between public and private, between the individual (“narrow-minded interests”), on one side, and the public interest (“broader and more general vision”), on the other. Politics start with the unintended consequences of our actions, says John Dewey. When we are able to follow and know the ins and outs of a problem, we should be able to solve it, without the need of a public or politics; we are then in the private sector. When the consequences of our actions go beyond us and start to be blurred, the politics come into play because of the need to explore these uncertainties.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dewey (J), *Le public et ses problèmes*, trad. et introd. J. Zask, Pau : Farrago / Léo Scheer, Paris, 2003.

Katrin Solhdju reminds us what Deleuze developed in his *Bergsonism* about the definition of a problem. A problem does not exist outside of its solutions. Problem and solution coexist while one does not absorb the other, nor reduces itself to the other. In other words, a problem existing outside its solution would be a 'false problem' or a poorly constructed problem. The task, then, becomes focusing on elaborating relevant problems rather than solving them. Following Solhdju, any difficult or unbearable situation is not yet a problem in itself, nor a question. Problems require careful and creative work giving all actors involved or concerned the capacity to act on it.<sup>9</sup>

One of the major difficulties encountered by the art world is how to mobilize or attract the public; on the other hand many artists are looking for another position within society. Maybe we could formulate a better "problem"? Could we not see how artists might participate in this delicate and creative work that is the reformulating of issues via exploration of realities and ways to give life to them?

#### >Participation

The French philosopher Joelle Zask published an interesting essay on participation, not especially focused on what we call the participative art but rather about all forms of injunctions to participate. We are living in a context where participation is sometimes reduced to a mechanism whose purpose is to make the best possible use of people for the benefit of an undertaking whose ends are beyond their responsibility. In this case, participating can only be, according to the author, an illusory attempt. It is by taking the initiative that citizens participate, provided that they can contribute to defining the form and nature of the experience they will live. Many of the participatory mechanisms developed today such as public debates, as well as the citizen juries set up by the local authorities, are referred to as an illusory participation experiment since they divest participants from any influence on their form and the rules applied to it. It would be interesting to "read" participative art from this perspective.<sup>10</sup>

#### >Methodology

The term methodology has seen a true semantic shift. From a path we follow, methodology has become the path to follow. All modernity has retained the latter meaning, of a path to be followed. Communicating to someone the experience of a path that was followed has nothing normative about it. It has to do with documentation as a way to describe the path along which it is done.

Other textatoms could be: mediation, crisis, innovation, participation, in situ, community etc. I believe that opening these black boxes of common terms used in the field is a preliminary stage for a collective process.

### 1/2. Documentation of conception and production process

Although the roles were not concretely and precisely defined, they defined themselves in the process. Within the N.O.W partners, the follow-up of the project was quickly restricted to Agnes Henry, Chiara Organtini and Maurizzia Settembri. Agnes and Chiara were the interlocutors for a lot of issues, from financial to conception; Maurizzia, as the director of the Fabbrica Europa Festival, had to ensure, with her team (Sylvia and Elisa) the good integration of the project within the festival, but also within the local context of Isolotto where the project took place. All of the stakeholders became, each in a certain fashion, mediators at different levels, between the project and other N.O.W partners, between N.O.W and Fabbrica Europa, between the artist and the local situation, between the artist and Fabbrica Europa, between the artist and N.O.W.

Between September 2016 and May 2017, a great number of discussions took place between all the actors, so many that I could not follow them all, but I tried to talk with the different stakeholders regularly.

The artist Ief Spincemaille stayed in Florence on 2 occasions. The first was in September 2016 in order for Ief to meet people and visit the city spots possibly suitable for his intervention. Maurizzia and her team, Sylvia and Elisa did research and exploration of 12 potential sites. They reduced the visit to a few locations when Ief came. Chiara and Silvia had regular Skype meetings with him during this phase, in order to help him in conceiving the intervention and make it feasible within the Florentine municipality.

For Maurizzia this stage was very interesting as she and her team had to open the perspective of the festival. Maurizzia is from Florence and she is well known in the city. She was involved in the 70's and 80's in all of the

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<sup>9</sup> Solhdju (K.), *L'épreuve du savoir. Propositions pour une écologie du diagnostic*, Editions Dingdingdong, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Zask (J.), *Participer. Essai sur les formes démocratiques de la participation*, Paris, Le Bord de l'eau, 2011.

political movements in Florence and its suburbs. Many of the selected places are related to that history of Florence. Working on the Fabbrica Europa project, she concentrated on the work with artists and on the annual festival that now has an international reputation. Thanks to Ief's project, she found an opportunity to meet people and reconnect with the history of Florence, and her own history.

The second stay took place with me in January 2017. The final decision was taken that the project will be situated in Isolotto. We visited the location and met the President of the Quartiere 4, the district to which Isolotto belongs. Isolotto was chosen because of its history (see the last part of the report) and heritage. It is home to a large number of associations of all kinds, and the President of Quartiere 4 expressed sincere interest in the project. Isolotto also has the advantage of a geographical situation near the center of Florence having remained a small village, and of its specific urbanistic history (experimentation in social housing). Ief immediately liked this location, I presume by intuition essentially, but also because it was a living area and not a place (piazza) or a building that he might find too restrained for experimenting The Rope.

Sylvia and Elisa spent a lot of time meeting actors from Isolotto to prepare Ief's Rope venue. It was not an easy task because it was very difficult for them to know how to organize the meetings with inhabitants of Isolotto, to know with which inhabitants, and also to discuss with them concerning a project in which they had no control. I can understand that Ief wanted to leave the process open, but this choice created tension for the team. We knew afterwards that the preliminary work Sylvia and Elisa did was actually necessary for the project. For several months, the discussions were difficult between Ief, Fabbrica Europa's team and Agnes and Chiara about how, when and who was supposed to prepare the venue of Rope, and at what level the communities of Isolotto should be involved/prepared in advance or not.

Ief was convinced that The Rope itself would be the activator for appropriation by people, in its' use. He wanted to leave the process open without meeting the inhabitants and associations of Isolotto beforehand. For him the purpose was not to do social work but to engage a story-telling process in situ. He was also concerned that meeting a selection of people beforehand would be less democratic or would limit the participation of other people.

On the other hand, the team was truly worried about the idea that The Rope would arrive without any preparation and would in itself engage peoples' participation during its week in Isolotto. This concern also had to do with the fact that Ief did not want to think about a pre-determined plan or work protocol. He wanted to improvise more or less in situ. He was ready, as he said, to take the risk that maybe nothing would happen, even if he was actually also worried. He was hesitating at one point with the idea of dramatizing the arrival of The Rope by moving it towards the city center and floating it on the river. This idea was discarded in favor of a localized intervention in the neighborhood. He also had the idea at one point of doing something with The Rope in the center of Florence, then thought it might be nice that the inhabitants of Isolotto carry The Rope from Isolotto to the city center, but he finally thought this was maybe neither relevant nor spontaneous.

The tension was due to different expectations. The N.O.W partners involved really wanted to question the relation of art to the public sphere – as related to the call – and expected more collaboration work with Ief and a deeper exchange. They could understand Ief's choice to leave the process open, but they wanted him to face the challenges and questions raised in Lab#3. For instance, how does he intend to leave the process open? What will he do once arrived in Isolotto, even as a work hypothesis? How will he address the people? What does he expect from participation? etc. The statement of The Rope also arrived late in the process, leaving the team in a blur for a long time.<sup>11</sup> It was communicated shortly before the festival. The frustration came from the fact

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<sup>11</sup> *"I am Rope. I am a rope. I am 65 meters long and 30 cm thick. I weigh 196 kg. It would take eleven people to carry me. I am made from 2.3 kilometers of polypropylene ribbon braided around a foam core.*

*I was born in April, 2017. A team of five hand-braided me in thirty-eight days. I think it was somewhere in Leuven, Belgium. It is a confusing experience, being braided.*

*They made me absurdly big, bigger than all the other ropes. I just don't know what to do with myself. I am traveling to reshape myself.*

*You may use me for anything. You can create a wall with me. A pavilion. A museum. A giant shadow. You can use me to upset people or to create bewilderment. You can sit and relax on me, play an XXL game of tug-of-war, or take me on the train to a distant city and back. Do something with me, but do it carefully."*

Rope started a long journey through the world. It arrives unattended in various places, such as a village in the Sahara, a remote factory in the east or a European city with an immense cultural patrimony. Because Rope is so big, Rope is always unadapted, creating very strange situations... However, it has an immense capacity to feel, sense and absorbs the reality it encounters: silent sounds, changes of atmospheres, people's dreams, tree's whispers and forgotten fears. Just like Rope has a massive impact on the context where it lands, the context has a strong influence on Rope. Rope is a living object. It absorbs and reacts. It has physical and semantic possibilities and restrictions. Interact with it, but do

the N.O.W partners wanted to be more than just producers, and be more interlocutors. The way Ief envisaged the project could not give lot of space for that.

On the other hand, Ief understood that he was working in a frame that he was not used to before then. I think it was difficult for him to confront all the questions of the network, being himself insecure with the turn he wanted his creation work to take. Above all, for him, The Rope was the tool to answer these questions that was why he created it.

An agreement was finally found to organize an aperitivo at the arrival of Ief in Isolotto and to organize a communication before the arrival. Sylvia and Elisa also prepared the field by pointing out some interesting people for Ief (and I) to meet as soon as we would arrive.

The question was how to share this process and discussions, knowing the time constraints, with the N.O.W workgroup allowing collective support to the project? I know that there were a lot of emails but also a newsletter Chiara and Agnès started at some point, trying to regularly give feedback about the development of the project. This newsletter did not provoke the expected reactions and commitment of the other partners. We could feel the gap between the ones engaged in the follow-up and the ones who were more distant. It was really problematic since it created in a way two fronts within the group of partners. The consequence was a lack of collective answers and decisions, and little by little a lack of collective curating/support from the partners of the project, which was the goal of Lab #3.

I also have my responsibility in that I could have conceived a more precise protocol in advance, but I focused too much on the process with Ief. The positive result is that I fortunately was able to be engaged with him during the festival week.

The negative result is that I didn't pay enough attention to the connections within the group. I could have proposed people who would have specifically worked on the issue of how to document a live process with digital tools. (G.U.I for instance: <http://g-u-i.net/>). As suggested by one of the partners, N.O.W was maybe also missing one person dedicated full time to the project, issuing daily reports, following all actors on a daily basis, etc.

These 2 suggestions could have helped of course, but I don't think it would have solved the commitment issue since the real challenge for the Lab#3 was how to deal with the urgent need for building « common »/« community » in order to transform the partners practices – and we could not delegate this task since were part of the transformation - while at the same time dealing with the daily routines. It was also a bold choice to not have a coordinator, but rather to share tasks and responsibilities according to roles.

We can discuss the selection process and how to improve it once a protocol is decided. Clearly, what followed the selection was not sufficiently thought through. Here the difficulty is learning from a rather blurred situation where the roles and responsibilities were not outlined. But I agree with one of the partners who thinks that they should have worked more on the creation of the participation, to enhance and strengthen the partners' interests and value regarding this, better infusing their daily work frames and settings with the project, maybe even better engaging the entire organization behind them.

But, as already mentioned, I think the situation was not the right one allowing achieving such a goal. The partners should have worked on a situation from which they could all learn from, before operating the choice of the artist and even before thinking about the process of the call and selection. The decision was made to link the commissioned project to the Fabbrica Europa Festival, which obviously implied engaging the Italian partner in a deeper way. It may have been better to find a place outside of the partners' comfort zones, so outside their habitual working places.

### 1/3. Documentation of artistic process

- **Attempts to follow the conception/manufacturing process of the artistic project**

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it carefully. Just like Rope is radically open for the context where it resides, Spincemaille is radically open for Rope. Spincemaille travels along with Rope. He is part of the history of Rope, from its beginning, as he is its genitor. Since the 100's meters of foam were delivered by a big truck until the warm contacts with the six detainees in the prison of Leuven who became experts in braiding the Rope thanks to the machine built by Spincemaille, this one hears Ropes' sounds, slight temperature changes, hidden dreams, tensions and desires. Spincemaille mediates between Rope and the context where Rope resides. He translates all the impressions Rope acquires into concrete actions, uses and interventions of Rope on and with the location.

I decided that I had to create a dialogue with Ief on a regular basis in order to follow his conception and manufacturing process.

I proposed 2 methods, which both failed:

- We created a shared space online with references (books, papers, quotes) to be able to understand each other when we talk about public art, participative art etc, but he quickly told me that it was too difficult for him to read the papers and books I sent him, in terms of time but also sometimes in terms of content. He could see why I suggested some lectures but they were a bit too far from his daily work.
- I asked him to write a "non official" diary, sharing his thoughts, doubts, very concrete questions and problems, etc, during the process of the project, even if quickly jotted down. Everything that came to his mind while working on the project. He held to it for a few weeks but then expressed his great difficulty in explaining his creation process with precision.

We then decided to see each other regularly to confer, instead of reading papers, and I decided it was better to follow him in the implementation (January in Florence) instead of asking him questions. I wanted to accompany him to the Leuven prison but it was too complicated to get an authorization.

Of course, I'm not the first to attempt « capturing » a creation process and of course the easy answer is « an artist does art to not have to explain », which is perhaps true. Nonetheless, we are in a turn where the artists want to engage themselves deeper in societal issues, especially when they want to do « participative art », but that supposes to engage more responsibility in sharing their process.

This responsibility has to be shared with all the different actors. That is why I wanted to meet other people engaged with and around the project, in order to note what the project makes people do or not do, and not only be focused on Ief in a more classical approach.

- **Development of the project and changes along the process from Ief's perspective**

*Présentation of the project in the application:*

« The Rope can be used to fix, fence or hold. As a tool. To connect your home with the house of your neighbor, and his neighbor, and his neighbor.... As a tool for an artistic intervention / performance. To construct a wall or a pavilion. As an architectural instrument. To play an XXL game of tug-of-war. To carry it with thirty men on a train to Brussels. As a tool to disturb order. Or even to solve a specific problem in a particular neighborhood or district. As a social instrument. This rope is for everyone. And it's looking for users. Neighborhoods. Residents. Situations. Spirits. Hearts. Imagination. To connect itself with. In order to explore an infinite number of possible connections.

With Possibilities of Binding I want to connect myself as artist to the world. To other people and places with their own values and purposes. Anyone / anything can make suggestions on what he / she wants to do with this rope. Each community, individual, ideology or organization is a possible starting point, as long as targets are ethically correct. Possibilities of binding also seeks connections with what, from a classical artistic view, is considered to be its opposite: low-art, healthcare, economics / trade, science, profit ... To transcend the dichotomy between art and these other values. Possibilities of Binding is a radical democratic project. It will not only incorporate differences, but also build upon them.

This causes a semiotic shift, in which appearance and meaning from the space transforms. A new meaning which in turn causes new interactions and connections between yourself and the place or neighborhood, between the residents / passers by and yourself and between the residents / passers themselves.

These new connections / interactions create a new world. You're still in the same place, but yet you are elsewhere, as if you were traveling without leaving. »

I think what Ief expressed in these lines were in his mind all along the process before the festival. It is during the week in Isolotto that he realized how difficult and ambitious the project was.

Other than the above-mentioned hesitations he had about the question of how The Rope should enter Florence and arrive in Isolotto, how he should accept or not to work with local people before arriving, and the idea of the book that evolved during the festival, the project did not significantly evolve before the festival, from his perspective. As far as I could see from our discussions, he was quite faithful to his original project and to The Rope as the focal point.

Paradoxically, I think he was much more in trouble with the manufacturing of The Rope. I know that the stage of its fabrication was really important to him. He invested a great deal in finding the right technical process that he conceived himself and necessitated much technical research. It was not industrialized. He spent a lot of time on that. This is also perhaps why he was not sufficiently focused so much on the participation process. He kept me informed of the different steps but it was difficult for me to understand exactly what the difficulties were, since I am completely ignorant regarding technical issues. I just have the feeling that experience was lost in the history of the project, although I'm sure it played an important role. For me it should be part of the story The Rope carries with it. As is the fact that it was finally manufactured thanks to the work of prisoners in Leuven.

## II / During the festival

- **Documentation issue of the project in Isolotto**

In the artistic field, as in other fields, we very often think that documentation as a way to leave the traces of the output (performance, exhibition, etc); sometimes we can have a "making-of" composed of interviews, etc that are focused on the artist and the creation process; we can also have very good documentaries; and all of that can be very enlightening, but I notice that as soon as we talk about participative art, art in situ, art in the public space, etc, especially when it is ephemeral, it starts to be complicated to find the right way to tell the story. Ief showed us in Lille the video about the "Musée de l'Inconnu", a previous project, and himself recognized it was not satisfying that the "experience" was "gone".

« From my point of view, a lot of things happened during my 14 day stay in the museum. Although there wasn't a concrete visible output or materialization of this process, I had the feeling that the museum created certain energy and that the location where I stayed became a different location. Not only for me but also for the visitors and residents.

Besides the fact that a book and a movie were created to document this process, there wasn't any other product / crystallization / materialization of all the energy and things that happened during these two intensive weeks. Once the project was over, all the energy just disappeared, without leaving any visible trace or without converging into one concrete materialization. Besides memories from people who were involved in the process, nothing really remained. » Ief Spincemaille, update Rope 15/03/2017

Since the beginning, this issue is part of Ief's project and this question always alive during the process (more later). He envisaged The Rope as being the right tool to overcome this issue; it was his starting hypothesis:

« With Rope I designed an instrument, with which I hope to overcome this missing focus point where everything visible that happens during an artistic process converges into one thing/image/materialization. The Rope, and more specific the way it will be used in a certain location, wants to be the crystallization of all the energy, efforts, conversations, encounters, which will happen during its' stay in a specific location. It's in-situ in a radical way... The 'situ' is not only the physical aspect of a place, but the totality of the situation itself (encounters, history of the place, conversations, people, physical aspects of the place, energy...) during which Rope remained in a certain place. » Ief Spincemaille, update Rope 15/03/2017

It was planned since the beginning that Ief had to deliver a publication. His first idea, as presented in the application: "Each use of the Rope by others will therefore be a project in itself, that will be photographed and described by me. And with this material and the situations that unfold, a unique artistic document will be made in the form of an artistic publication. This personal documentation of what has occurred, of the new world we created, will lead me back to the artwork, after a journey into the unknown. »

Quite early in the process, he had the idea of creating a blog to facilitate the daily writing of what stories the Rope will encounter in Isolotto (texts and images) and allowing people to follow the Rope during the week. This blog will be material for the book. Since he wanted the book to be an artistic book too, he told me how he was interested in an exhibition he saw in Leuven called « Utopia », based on the chef d'œuvre of Thomas Moore and the craze "Utopia" gave rise to. There came a wave of creativity in painting, tapestry making, maps and scientific



instruments. He had the idea that the stories The Rope would collect could be a basis of inspiration for a painter, for instance.

I liked the idea and we discussed it often. He changed his mind before the festival but I did not understand why. But at that point we started to think that maybe we should also do something together since I was also doing a part of the investigation. It became obvious after the first days we spent in Isolotto. The main reason being that we had from that point a common responsibility towards the local people with whom we were engaging in the process.

When I arrived in Isolotto it was not clear to me how I would decide to handle my mission, but I was still in the idea of following the effects of The Rope on the actors in Isolotto –through discussions and interviews - and learn from them and from the situation. It happened that Ief realised that he had to engage more energy in the relational work with people to allow them to appropriate The Rope as an object, a tool, a sculpture. We had some volunteers from Fabbrica Europa to help us but the majority of the team was busy with the festival. The N.O.W partners arrived at the end of the week and were also busy with the festival and lab#2 (project Half a House).

It was clear to me that I had to get involved in the project in a deeper way than I expected. The first reason was that I think it is impossible to carry such a project alone. I agree that Ief should have better prepared beforehand, before the festival, but once on location, I realized that The Rope was as empirical as I was. Yes, it was not easy to make something happen with The Rope but it also created an interesting tension during the week between us and with Isolotto itself. We could have met the people before and prepared some “events” in advance. It would have been easier for the “public” to come. But for me it was more interesting to work with the specific public of Isolotto. I considered this experience not as a performance but as an exploration tool. The second reason is because of Isolotto itself. We were both literally taken by the “Isolotto Experience” as they called it themselves (see the text “Isolotto Experience” below).

The documentation expected from Ief became a real problem for the N.O.W partners and subject of dispute with the artist for content and financial reasons. According to one of the partners, with regards to the documentation, it is clear that Ief and the network intended the outcome and the deliverables to be produced differently – as it was presented in the application and the initial budget - which in itself is not a problem, but this showed how many choices Ief took without questioning or communicating with the network, losing many opportunities on both sides to improve the link. I think I also was not clear enough about what was going on between Ief and I, because we thought it through little by little, and there was some confusion regarding our respective documentation missions. It is also true that the experience we lived during the week in Isolotto was really difficult to share in the moment.

In my opinion, also shared by certain partners, this final dispute was the result of a broken trust. It is really difficult to analyse the story of that broken trust since I think it engaged a lot of different factors. It probably started before the festival, around the difficulty of communication regarding how the project should have been better prepared and more co-produced between the artist and the N.O.W network. But I think the most problematic was the time of the festival itself where we could feel the size of the gap that was dug between the actors, and I myself felt we were isolated in our work in Isolotto.

- **Communication with the N.O.W network**

Since Ief and I were completely focused on the project in Isolotto – it really took all of our energy - and since the partners arrived late in the week and were then fully occupied with the lab#2 project, we barely could meet the partners during the week. To me it was a mistake to organize both the projects from lab#2 and lab#3 at the same time. I don't see how the partners could truly do the experience of both projects in the same time. From our side it was obvious that Half a House requested their presence and therefore they could not spend time with us. Agnes and Chiara discussed with us but it was difficult to share with them our experience. Sylvia was present helping us with translation and contacts with the Presidente of Quartiere 4. And the volunteers helped us every day.

In terms of documentation as a way to follow the events, there were The Rope's blog (texts and images) and The Rope's Facebook, which was Ief's responsibility even if I finally participated in the blog in the sense that Ief needed our discussions to think the live process.

The discussion is about how Ief could have thought his project differently involving the “publics” beforehand in order to be able to schedule more precise events, which would have been more accessible to the partners and

maybe to a larger public. I was also convinced before the festival that he was not paying enough attention to his working protocol and he was a bit naive thinking the people will spontaneously participate without any preparation (with or without the publics, but if without, with a more precise method in using The Rope). We spent hours discussing that with Ief before and during, and he moved, but mainly during the week along with the Isolotto experiment. For us something happened in Isolotto but it was almost impossible to understand that from outside.

It is again a question of expectations. One of the partners expected experiencing a process of fictionalization or transformation of the public space (and its perception by a community) through an artistic device (an out of scale object with no function) that could enable reactions, confrontations and even conflicts among the people encountering it. For her it was about exploring the effects of tackling and facing a too big but undeniable issue engaging different relationships with it and with others and oneself through it. She added: "The use in my opinion was the focus and the relationship to be constructed and developed as a dramaturgical line, to be prepared beforehand and followed during the days in Florence as fuel for the open development of the process. I feel then everything was more oriented on a collective storytelling mood that voiced the story and the identity of the neighbourhood, which is valuable but different."

This is in a way not very different from what Ief expected. The reality was different but not less interesting. I liked the very ordinary use of The Rope, entering daily lives of inhabitants of Isolotto, like a rumor. Also, I liked the contrast with the size and weight of The Rope and the great work it was for Ief and Bout to move it everyday. I was heavy and light in the same movement.

### III/After the festival

As already mentioned, we decided with Ief to do a publication together as we felt it was the fair thing to do in response to the involvement of people from Isolotto, but also because Ief wanted The Rope to bring stories with him to pursue his journey and to meet other stories.

The editorial line is the following: at the same time the publication has to work as a way to tell the story of Isolotto (give a larger horizon of their experience = how could other people learn from Isolotto) and also be the publication The Rope will bring with him in his journey around the world.

This publication will be largely distributed in Isolotto.

#### The Rope journal Isolotto experience

##### Content :

- Interview with The Rope by Ief
- Rope's diary in Isolotto (extracts from the blog)
- «Visual report» (images)
- Flyer/poster used during the week
- Isolotto Experience (Valérie Pihet)

Here is the text I wrote based on my work with Ief and the interviews I made with inhabitants of Isolotto:

##### ISOLOTTO EXPERIENCE

Most of the time, when we visit beautiful historic cities, we do not bother to go for a walk in their outlying areas. Florence is no exception, and yet a few tram stops from the center, we enter the Isolotto, a neighborhood born from scratch in the early 50s along the Arno, facing the park of the Cascine. Getting out of the tram, we can see some buildings that do not really disorient us from the many peri-urban landscapes that we usually meet in Europe. But as soon as you leave the main shopping avenue and take a small perpendicular street on the side, you arrive in a few minutes in the heart of this neighborhood that has kept pace with a real village. When we arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, we had already heard about the "Isolotto Experience" by the President of the district - Quartiere 4 - which we had met a few months before. We were far from thinking at that time that we were going to be struck by this experience ourselves.

"We" are a group of three people, Ief Spincemaille, artist, Bout De Beul, his assistant, and Valérie Pihet, historian working in the field of research and the arts. We were there to accompany a strange creature, The Rope - which

you can discover in this journal – who was invited by the festival Fabbrica Europa and by the European consortium N.O.W (New Open Working process for the performing arts) to come and explore the Isolotto neighborhood. The Rope is a creation of Ief, but to a certain extent it has acquired its own existence. The Isolotto was the first step of a long journey undertaken by Ief and The Rope. They want to explore the world as if it is still to be discovered, going to meet and collect stories and experiences that are always both singular, but also tell us something of our world. Bout is the companion of Ief and Rope. I followed them in this first adventure as an independent researcher interested in questions of documentation and sharing of experiences. We could not have found a better place than Isolotto.

Since our first meetings and discussions with the inhabitants of the place, we were very quickly agreeably disconcerted: there is something going on here that is rather unique, but is it really? Had we taken the care that we took to meet with Isolotto, to meet other territories, would we not have felt the same? The answer would probably be positive, but it would not teach us anything. Faced with a feeling that is today very strongly shared in the world of a form of helplessness confronting the multiple crises that we are going through, be they political, economic, social or environmental, the most urgent thing to do is undoubtedly to find a way to reclaim our own power of action. How, then, can we relate the little history, the one we build every day but in which we often lose meaning, crushed by the larger story, the “big picture”, to the latter precisely? Isolotto surely encounters problems that are common to many neighborhoods in Europe and around the world - problems of drugs, pollution, education, poverty etc - but it turns out that Isolotto has its own way to answer it. Can the Isolotto, which seems to inherit a recent but intense history, having been the center of religious, political and urban experimentations at the time of its creation, teach us something? An experience is fragile by definition. By making it public, do not we take the risk of damaging it? This is what Don Mazzi, the priest of Isolotto who aroused so much passion in the 50s and 60s by his revolutionary conception of Christianity, thought of the said "Isolotto experience". He was probably right at this time, but is there not an urgency now to share our “know-how” to learn from each other in order to be able to build with what is happening to us, and resist the incredible force of the "business as usual", or even worse the "there is nothing we can do"? Still, what does it mean to "learn from" or "inherit from"? This may be where Isolotto can help us think.

The President of Quartiere 4 told us at our second meeting - it must be said that we were very excited by what we were discovering - "you must not idealize Isolotto" because things are changing and we have now to deal with new generations. But at the end of the week he also told us, "you must not idealize Isolotto, but yes, there is something here". I read in Jacques Servien's book, "The Christian experience of Isolotto", written in 1969, that "The observer can be deceived because it is difficult to enter the world of Isolotto. But to see them live is amazing." Although this book refers to the very particular religious experience that Isolotto knew very soon after its creation in the 50s, I find these few words still very accurate. This experience of Isolotto is intrinsically linked to the history of its church and its priests, but it is inseparable from the history of its creation, which was in itself also a political and urban experimentation.

It is perhaps why Isolotto is unique, in the alchemy produced at a given moment between multiple factors - religious, economic, political, architectural, urbanistic, geographical etc - and which allowed a real experience to see the day, in the sense of an experience that transforms all those who participate in it, and that some of its inhabitants have been able to preserve and continue to live until today, despite their great fear of seeing it disappear. When Jacques Servien goes on to mention that Isolotto does not really develop a precise and coherent program of action or conduct but lives in constant improvisation, I think he continues to be right. This is finally the greatest strength of Isolotto: resisting the very great temptation to find ready-made recipes to answer problems. It is because Isolotto takes care of its experience, without precisely erecting it as a model, that it can remain open to what happens to it without pre-determining in advance what it must or should do.

## **Isolotto Experience 1**

Once we were in Isolotto, we were soon introduced to the people who take care of the archives of what they call the "Community of Isolotto", the one initiated by the priest Don Mazzi in the years 50/60's, and who continue to try to make this community live. Today it brings together both people who have lived the so called "Isolotto experience" and people who arrived later, seduced by this very particular way of making community differently, outside the church building as a symbolic and institutional place, but within the church as being the place for faith. Although the "Isolotto experience" became famous in the 1960s, today it remains little known beyond the borders of the neighborhood itself. It is part of the wider history of a country qualified by Jacques Servien as the country of irreconcilables, where tradition rubs shoulders with the revolution, where social and political history, particularly of communism, rubs shoulders closely with religious history. Theology was very little developed in Italy and often imported from France and elsewhere. There were nothing like the French university parish for

example. The people, however, were far from being dechristianized, but rather than follow currents of opinion, they followed very often singular men who encouraged the experimentation of different forms of catechism based on their experiences in the field.

Don Mazzi was one of the priests to claim, first and foremost, the experience the way it is lived within a community – no matter if it is not composed only by believers - as being the one that has to dialogue with the church institution and not that has simply to obey it; for who being catholic is also in this life forging a responsible conscience; for who religion is not relegated beyond the passage on earth; who was wary of a "mystico-individualist" vision of faith, the only way to consider at the time the absence of real communion, but who decided to dedicate his existence to meeting with the poor.

By his strong personality and his convinced acts, and because he lived among the inhabitants of Isolotto - not in the church - he created a new way of being catholic. He gave birth to what is known as the "catechism of Isolotto", which spread accross Italy and even abroad until today. Though they were not alone, Don Mazzi and the community of Isolotto, by their pugnacity and their enthusiasm, however, played the role of a real bomb in the debate that went through the catholic and political world of the time, to the point of being recognized as the famous "Isolotto Experience".

This catholic way of life is still alive in Isolotto, despite the fact that only very few young people are directly involved in the life of the community. Every Sunday, members of the community still gather in the same place where the archives of the community of Isolotto and, for some time, those of the different communities of the region, are kept. They decide together which topics they will deal with. These can be very ordinary problems encountered on a daily basis, as well as broader topics such as education and transmission to the youngest. From an external point of view, this "Mass", as they continue to call it since Don Mazzi proposed to do it outside the church, is very surprising because it does not look like a usual religious office. But as far as this community is concerned, it is however a question of religion.

The story of this "Isolotto experience" is very rich and carefully preserved by the community. This is their story, but at the same time it coincides with the history of Isolotto. Although this community has today greatly reduced, it gathered at the time a large number of inhabitants of Isolotto, believers or not, and they lived precisely this community like the place of discussion of their problems. It was this community that fought for a school, roads, a church, a dispensary, shops, meeting rooms, because there was nothing in Isolotto. All that is called today the "public services" have been set up only very gradually. Despite the care taken to keep these archives and stories alive, whether at school with children or at commemorative celebrations, the members are quite convinced that their "community" will soon disappear, along with its experience. They debated collectively for a long time before deciding that they would not encourage their children and grandchildren to continue their work because they place a great deal of importance on freedom of choice.

This is a courageous decision and it is perhaps this door that they open that will allow the youngest to pursue the experience, but otherwise. This may even be the case already, because if there is a difficult task nowadays, it is to follow the traces and especially the effects of an experience, to discover how it has made things happen that we don't maybe see because these traces and effects are simply not easily identifiable as directly related to this particular experience. Inheriting is also knowing how to detect the specters of the past in the present time, in such a way as not to break the thread of an experience that can only be constantly moving. If the "Isolotto community" insists so much on its history, it is not because it is the only story of Isolotto, but because it is to maintain alive an experience that undeniably marked this neighborhood of Florence. We can't learn from an experience – meaning pursuing it in one way or another - if we completely lose sight of it.

## **Isolotto Experience 2**

The traces and effects of the first "Isolotto experience" are still palpable today, already because we were so impressed by the stories The Rope encountered during our stay moving from place to place every day, from the marketplace, to the school, to the archives, to a family's apartment, to the district council. The contrast was so huge when the last day we visited the Piagge neighborhood, only a few kilometers away from Isolotto, but yet a completely different world. In Piagge, built in the 80<sup>s</sup>, it is very difficult to find the thread of any fruitful experience.

But the most impressive thing for us was to see how much the people of Isolotto have developed an ability to take care of their own affairs, to make their voices heard, and thus to reinvent what is politics. One story that was told us is about how several associations, about 10 years ago, mobilized themselves to allow people in the need to borrow money without any interests. Another story is about how some inhabitants were against the idea of the city of Florence who wanted to cut down, for security reasons, all the trees after a storm that had made serious damage. Because they were concerned and attached to their trees, they made their own inquiry

and requested the help of some specialists to determine what trees were really dangerous and which one they could keep. There is also the way they refused the proposal from the city of Florence for the renovation of the old library, because they found it too expensive and sophisticated. Finally, they spent the time they needed to agree about the renovation project of the market place. They hold a lot of meetings with the people directly concerned by the project (bars, shops, parents, etc) and inhabitants of Isolotto. They arrived to a collective agreement.

There is a real practice of doing politics going on here that is not very common. It is hard to believe that these ways of doing things are not the result of a long history and a particular care given to the forms of collectives and to the relationships to be maintained with bureaucratic institutions. We are much more used to the way we delegate our problems to the public authorities. It is close to what the American philosopher John Dewey wrote in his book *The Public and its Problems* in 1927. He called on us to fundamentally re-think what it means to be political. He proposed reviewing the place and role of the political through a new reading of "public" in its double meaning where, for him, there is no omnipotent public supposed to have an enlightened opinion on everything on the one hand, and on the other, where the category public/private does not correspond anymore to the usual distinction of public good versus individual good.

For him politics is not only a sphere, a profession, an occupation, it is above all a certain type of concern about "causes" or "problems", each of which requires a particular form of public. The public in the singular does not exist, in the sense of a sovereign people represented by its elected officials, and embodied by the State. On the contrary, a public must be made to emerge for each "cause" or "problem". So therefore there is not one single, but multiple, publics concerned by specific problems and transformed by them, appearing and disappearing, depending on their state of resolution. The publics must be made and unmade, reinvented each time. If indeed there is a "crisis of the Public" then it is in Dewey's sense, the spontaneous emergence of publics taking care of their always situated interests. For Dewey a "problem" is something to be constructed, as a problem existing outside its solution would be a 'false problem' or a problem badly constructed. The task is to focus on elaborating on good problems rather than solving them. Any difficult or unbearable situation is not yet a problem in itself, nor a question. Problems require careful and creative work giving all actors involved or concerned the capacity to act on it.

As we discussed with members of the Council of Quartiere 4 the question of building a mosque in Florence and the possibility that it might be built in Isolotto, several voices exclaimed "it may be necessary to think that the construction of this mosque is an opportunity and stop talking about it as a problem". All of them did not agree of course, but they could think of Isolotto as a good place because precisely there is this political culture of dealing with engagement, improvisation, common sense, practice of collective decision processes and above all a certain experience of welcoming the other. Of course, they did not use the word "problem" in the sense of John Dewey but talking about opportunities rather than only problems/difficulties is a political agenda in itself that makes you think.

Is all this not one possible trace of the "Isolotto Experience"? A way to inherit from it? Without mentioning the number of stories that were told us, from the woman who decided to come and live in Isolotto finding there a way to be involved in the daily life of her family, even though she does not belong to one specific group or association; to the young lady who is happy that her parents are involved in the "Isolotto Community" even though she will probably do something else with this heritage. There are many more, individual and collective stories. Still following John Dewey, an experience becomes complete only when the fact of being effected commits us to a resulting action such as to transform the very condition the experience. That's what we found in Isolotto, one possible way to make this thinking alive. "You must not idealize Isolotto, but there is something here!"

Valérie Pihet

## Conclusion

In this report, I have tried to follow in parallel and sometimes jointly the processes at work in Lab # 3 and in the work of the chosen artist, Ief Spincemaille, to respond to the commission. The problems encountered - relays and communication between the partners and between the partners and the artist - reveal the strength of the devices - with its implicits - and the difficulty of operating shifts that could open other work perspectives. Shifts introduced in the commission process and the call for projects by the partners were not enough to be able to transform the commission situation and move practices towards each other. In these cases, one tends to want

to acknowledge the lack of time, the lack of investment of some, the attitude of others, the work overload that the collective demands, even to point out the respective individual responsibilities and that can lead to more or less profound conflict situations. The human dimension must be taken into account, it is undeniable, because it is extremely difficult to upset our habits. However, it is equally undeniable that our habits have been made as much by devices as they have been by us. The influence is reciprocal. In our case, I think that the discrepancies introduced in two existing devices, that of the commission and that of the call for projects, were made in a way that was too timid to engage actors to leave their comfort zones. The roles of the partners and the artist have not been sufficiently defined in advance as a working hypothesis. The combination of the two devices may not have been relevant. If we follow the example of the New Patrons protocol, transforming the commission necessarily means avoiding any centralized procedure, but only by defining the respective roles and responsibilities. Common sense would tend to find this way of doing things more arbitrary and less democratic than a call for projects, and yet does democracy not reside in the reappropriation by people of their power of action? Defining roles and responsibilities precisely does not prevent flexibility, but commits the various actors to find their place from their skills and desires in a collective work.

Democracy also means trusting in everyone's ability to act from their own place, to be interested, in the noble sense of the term. It is often thought that democracy is allowing as many people as possible to express themselves without looking for what interests them, what drives them, and that is precisely where the stumbling block lies because it dilutes the responsibility of each. The strength of the New Patrons system lies in the fact of announcing from the outset the responsibilities of each, which are specific but which depend on each other and thus makes the individual accusation more difficult in case of failure. These responsibilities do not say anything about how they should be upheld and realized, and this is where trust is given to the various actors since they come to seek them - the sponsor, the mediator, the artist - for their qualities that we think are relevant to the situation in question.

I think that in the case of Lab # 3 it would have been preferable to concentrate on the commissioning and the creation of a situation into which to invite an artist and where the choice was collectively negotiated.

In the case of the work of the artist, Ief Spincemaille, we encounter the same problems but posed differently. He thought it was more democratic to arrive on site with *The Rope* in Isolotto, without preparation upstream, without prior meetings with the inhabitants and without a protocol of action, to allow everyone to participate. It was naïve to think that people would spontaneously participate without understanding the project's stakes - participating in what? So it took a lot of work on site to make the project live.

I follow Joelle Zask again when she points out the danger of participation: we are living in a context where participation is sometimes reduced to a mechanism whose purpose is to make the best possible use of people for the benefit of an undertaking whose ends are beyond their responsibility. Such was not the intention of Ief Spincemaille, but yet how to ask people to participate in a work that does not belong to them, how to make them feel that they are actors of this work that Ief wants collective, but once released is difficult to control?

This tension is interesting in itself if put to work, which was completely the case. Convinced at the outset of this naivety, it must be recognized, however, that there was some form of radicality in the total absence of any device or protocol on the part of Ief, which ultimately produced things, but not at all those expected by Ief in the first place, neither by myself and even less by the partners. I do not know what the project would have been if Ief had worked otherwise, but we had to do something about the responsibility that was his and then ours when we were confronted with Isolotto and its inhabitants. We were in fact outside of our comfort zone.

To conclude I would like to get back to this question of experience as envisaged by pragmatist thinkers. I had to do with two experiments, that of Lab # 3 and that of Isolotto. Isolotto has been a limited experience in time but very dense. I was looking for the effects of the Isolotto story on the practices of the inhabitants of this neighborhood - life and politics - as a way to help them not to break or lose the thread of the very singular experience they knew in the 60s. It was not a question of memory in the classical sense but to follow the effects of this experiment in the current practices of the inhabitants (see text above). I do not know if this text will have an impact on the inhabitants, I hope so, but our presence during a week with this incongruous object, *The Rope*, left traces. Here lies all the difficulty, if one follows the pragmatist ambition, of following the effects of what we do. This ambition is very demanding but it has the merit of engaging us at least to think that what

we do produces effects and to try to reinforce our actions even though we cannot measure all the ins and outs of a situation. We add at least some degree of existence.

This text on the inhabitants is for me, in this case, the documentation of the results of my research and intractions with Isolotto. I could have done it without The Rope but it would have been different and I probably would not have discovered the same things because The Rope created singular situations of exchange and forced me to move my work habits.

Concerning Lab # 3, the result is less obvious because the experiment was diluted in space and time. I myself ran out of time, more focused on lefs' work, but also because of a lack of access to partners in the general N.O.W project. Lab # 3 was part of a larger project and it was very difficult for me to grasp this situation to make it an experience. I have no doubt that this was an experience for the partners, but I did not manage for this experience to be also mine, which did not allow me to do any relevant documentation work that can act with and for partners, to add to their experience through mine. The work of documentation, in the active sense of the word, that is to say, interacting with a situation, is an ambitious task, a crazy bet, but that I believe vital. This mission allowed me to open up hypotheses and future avenues of exploration, I hope that will be also the case for the readers of this report.

### **ANNEXE: Rope's and Valérie's diaries during the week in Isolotto**

<b>The Rope's blog</b>	<b>Ief and Valérie's diary</b>
<p data-bbox="427 904 560 931" style="text-align: center;"><u>May 4, 2017</u></p> <p data-bbox="204 974 775 1099">10:17. We arrived at the place where we would start: Via Dei Bambini. They rolled me off the trailer, took away the tarpaulin, and with the help of relatives they tried to make a pavilion.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1140 775 1361">It did not quite succeed. My lower pieces can not carry the weight, causing me to collapse. I am completely handed over to people who do things with me now. I trust that good ideas are coming, that there will be points of access, and that people will provide interesting input. With just one valuable contact or input you can create a world.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1402 775 1691">Around five o'clock many people started to come. And almost everyone stayed. Suddenly there was one of my ends with around fifteen children jumping up and down on it. On my other side, they dragged me over the grass and stuck sticks through the blue ribbons, while ten other children just walked over and over me. And while all of this was happening, my other end was pulled with a strap two floors up into an apartment!</p> <p data-bbox="204 1731 775 2016">Leaning over the edge of the balcony, with my first meter in an apartment, I started thinking. Is this where I am made for? To be a sort of playground for kids? At the same time I looked into the bedroom and in a flash other options crossed my mind. I saw the personal stuff on the bedside table. Photos of people you do not know. Objects that are meaningless for me but probably of great value and meaning to the resident. I wanted to find out more. I</p>	<p data-bbox="1034 904 1166 931" style="text-align: center;"><u>May 4, 2017</u></p>

need to dive in to the heads and hearts of the people and the place here. That's where I will find material with which I can do and become something.

Fifteen meters below, the violence continued. I felt I lost more energy than I could give. There was no plan today. They just jumped into the depths, and we completely surrendered ourselves to the energy of the moment. The three of us felt completely empty at the end of the day, but it was a great start. Tomorrow I will stay on my bobbin. Ief is going to visit residents and search for points of connection, material, stories. He is going to dive in to the worlds I saw when I leaned over the balcony.

**May 5, 2017**

When you reach an unknown place, one person can make a world of difference. Emma has made a world of difference today. She has taken Vincent, Niko and Ief around for hours and initiated them in the history of Isolotto.

Isolotto (Island) is the district I have been in for three days now. It is located next to the river Arno, on the outskirts of Florence. When it comes to urbanization, this is a utopian place. And that will be clear if you walk around here. It is as if everyone knows each other, and as if everyone lives outside in the tree-lined and car-free Viale Dei Bambini, which extends broadly between two rows of low city blocks. Besides this modernist urbanization, Isolotto has an incredibly rich history.

Take for example the story of Don Mazzi. In 1959, Pastor Mazzi gave all the buildings that were meant for the priests and himself, to a school, a place for disabled people and a factory: Fiaba Italiana de accesori. Fiaba in short, which also means fairy tale. The building of the factory was rented for a symbolic rate, on condition that it was used for people from Isolotto, ex-prisoners and people with disabilities. Fiaba produced handbags, various accessories for clothes, and ropes!

In 1959, Rome took the keys of the church from Don Mazzi and forbade Don Mazzi to continue the eucharist. For the 8 months that the church remained closed, eucharists, marriages and baptisms simply happened outside. After eight months, Don Mazzi regained his permission to use the church. All the people came together in the streets and showed their keys: Le chiavi della chiesa chiavi di tutti (The keys of the church are everyone's keys)!

**May 5, 2017**



<p>Ideas slowly begin to take shape. Everything I hear and see, I write down in a small book. Through Facebook we get more and more requests and messages. Several people in the Viale Bambini asked why the rope was rolled up. It was very hot today. All day I take in the smell of the warm plastic that protects me from the rain. Dogs find me a very interesting sniffing object. Children pull on everything that is loose. They get underneath me and call me 'house'. Tomorrow is a new day. I feel like doing something.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 6, 2017</u></b></p> <p>They took care of me all morning. After the first day, I needed some little repairs here and there. Especially as my ends were weak points.</p> <p>In the afternoon we went to the square. This was a second experiment, after the first day's roller coaster. This was different. We were alone and had full freedom to choose what we would do. In the square there was a long gallery with columns. On the right side it was empty but on the left side was a bar and terrace with some older men playing cards and drinking coffee. I wanted to meander in and out of the gallery between the columns, but I particularly wanted to go among the men's and chairs legs. What would they do when I arrived?</p> <p>We started on the right side. I was still on the bobbin. The easiest way to get me off the bobbin was to move the bobbin between the columns as I was rolled off. We came closer and closer. The men became uncomfortable. They stood up because they wanted to make way for the danger that seemed to be approaching. I spoke to them, but nobody spoke English, and he does not speak Italian. He could only show with his hands that they could stay and play. Someone walked away. They played an animated battle. I did not want them to make way, I just wanted to lie between them.</p> <p>After many gestures, they understood that they could stay. The bobbin was pushed towards the street so I completely got rolled off the bobbin, and afterwards I was further put between the pillars, through and under the tables and chairs of the coffee-drinking and card-playing men.</p> <p>What a manifestation. It was the first time we realized an intervention in a direct way using the energy of a place. I sat down on me. Bout went to get coffee. Meanwhile, five young people asked if they could play with me again. Like two days ago.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 6, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Valérie arrived and met Emma, the young woman I met the day before, who told her about her story and her life in Isolotto.</p> <p>Valérie and I met Paolina, urbanist, and engaged in an association created to take care of the Piagge area, about 10 km from Isolotto. She learnt about The Rope through Facebook and wanted to meet I because she is convinced The Rope could participate in the next event of the Piagge association on the following Sunday. In the center of the Piagge area there is a huge empty field. The rumor is that this field is polluted. The inhabitants, with the priest, think they have to do something with that field and want to transform it into a central place/piazza for the area – surrounded by buildings from 80's – as a typical suburban ghetto situation, quite opposite to Isolotto. They want to use The Rope to work on the limits of this place/piazza and create a real public space.</p> <p>I informed Valérie that they would go the following day, on Sunday, to the « mass » (we'll learn that it is a mass outside the official church – organized by the community of Isolotto) and meet some people from the « Isolotto Community » (religious community) who are also in charge of the archives of the Isolotto. We'll learn that they are also responsible for the archives of the regional church(es).</p>

<p>Before I got into it, Ief had my ends turned into five circles, and five of them were squeezing down on me. I can earn my money as a professional child animator. That is already clear. And so on the one hand I was a playground for teenagers, and on the other hand ... a strange visitor. We shared the flyers, which were in four languages. Flyers as big as a poster.</p> <p>Tomorrow there is a yard sale on the square. I would like to be draped in and out of the windows of an apartment across the street. People could see us at work. We have visited one apartment building. Most doors stayed closed. Early tomorrow we'll try again. In the afternoon we want to be here in the square.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 7, 2017</u></b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 7, 2017</u></b></p> <p>In the morning, we went to the market because Ief wanted to meet people living in the apartments with view on the market thinking he could use The Rope in a flat going out the window and being visible from the Market. We couldn't find anyone ready to accept that. Silvano (Ief met him, he is the president of the school parents' association) talk about The Rope to a woman living there who was willing to do it, but she was not at home.</p> <p>In the end of the morning, we joined the mass (held outside the church every Sunday) and the « Isolotto Community » as they called themselves. They, a group of about 10 people, not really young, represent the catholic tradition founded in the 60's/70's following the path of the priest Don Mazzi who developed an alternative community outside the church but not outside the Church with capital C. (see the story later). This group is also in charge of the Archives center where they keep everything from the Isolotto Community but also from the region ; they also have documentation about the geology, geography and history of Isolotto. We converse for one hour, and it is during this conversation that they told us about the FIABA history (see The Rope's blog).</p> <p>We decided that I would meet with Marco on the following Wednesday since he is geologist, and I wished to learn about Isolotto geography and its architectural situation. We also decided that I would hold an interview with the oldest women taking care of the daily activities of the archives.</p> <p>We met Maurizio, one of the youngest men of the community, in the end of afternoon. We discussed in depth the history of Isolotto related to the religion, how their community was built, and how today they</p>

	<p>give mass, which seems to us to be more of a speaking group than a mass, but that is exactly what they claim. They decide each week which issues they want to discuss. It can be about school, politics, daily affairs of the community, etc. They meet in the same building as the archives, called « Baraque ». For the rest of the time, they allow associations to use the different spaces. It can be yoga groups, scholarly groups, but also associations taking care of migrants, etc.</p> <p>We finally discussed the subject of transmission and whether the youngest people could or could not take the reins. They decided together that they wouldn't force them to do so, but they will try to tell them to find their own way. But at the same time they are rather optimistic that they will take the reins and inherit of their experience.</p> <p>Maurizzio would like to invite the different associations (yoga class etc) on Saturday to visit The Rope as an opportunity for them to meet and exchange, as Maurizzio told us that the groups never meet together. He feels that they don't pay sufficient attention to the place they live, their history, and the will for the Baraque to become a place for building communities.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 8, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Relaxing on the banks of the Arno. We had no plan before we came here and only a few contacts in Isootto. It's not easy to create a place within the network and time schedule of the neighborhood. Ief has been able to capture various arrangements with residents, the mayor, school staff and someone from a district across the Arno. A young guest who passed by asked if I could come to him, in the center of Florence.</p> <p>When I'm deposited in public space, I immediately become a public object or a social sculpture. People halt, take place on me in order to pounce, kids try to travel my full length.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 8, 2017</u></b></p> <p>With Ief, we met the mayor, Mirko, in his office, in order to try and convince him to invite The Rope to the council which was to take place on the Thursday. He was really willing to do it but was not sure his colleagues would agree and did not want to do it without asking them. I had the feeling he was a bit afraid even if he wanted to do it. Since he does not speak english very well, I asked Sylvia from FE to call him the next day to encourage him and explain better in italian what we wanted. We finally knew it would happen the day before Thursday.</p> <p>I spent some time on The Rope on the bank of the Arno. Before that, we tried again to convince inhabitants to invite The Rope into their homes but without any success.</p> <p>We met Valentino and Emma around 4pm, when school was out, to visit the school. Silvano really wanted The Rope to come and valorize the childrens' book fair that was running for 3 days, in order to mobilize people and to encourage them to come to the fair. He wanted a drawing of The Rope with smiling face on the big wall at the entrance. Ief was not convinced, but he agreed to come and discover in situ what to do with The Rope. Ief and Valentino also had the idea that The Rope should arrive in the school with the children carrying it.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 9, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Today, we called Emma with the question of whether I could visit her. No problem said Emma. They brought me all the way in. Afterwards, Emma went to get her children from school. They came home, played and ate cake. We drank coffee and spent time in the apartment.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 9, 2017</u></b></p> <p>In the morning we met Carmen, a very old woman living in a flat in front of the market. The discussion was difficult even with Cielos' translation but we could feel the great attachment of this woman to Isolotto and its history. She has been living here almost since the creation of Isolotto. She told us she was too old to invite The Rope to her place.</p> <p>I decided to spend the rest of the day with The Rope and Ief and his assistant Bout. Ief really wanted The Rope to visit an apartment. I asked him why he did not want to ask Emma, since she was really involved since the beginning, instead of ringing at apartments with this strange request to bring a huge Rope into their places. That's what he did.</p> <p>Emma and Valentino were taking care of getting the authorization from the school for having The Rope all day on the day after. The director agreed if FE could assume the insurance issue. We were not sure it could work until the end of the day.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 10, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Every morning, a row of about 40 children walk from the beginning of the Viale De Bambini to school on the Montagnola: the pedibus (footbus). Valentino invited me to join in. That morning I was worn, for the first time in my full length, from the beginning of the Viale to the school.</p> <p>We arrived on the mountain. People applauded for each other. I was laid in a circle so that a fully enclosed space was created. And so I stayed all day on the lawn of the school.</p> <p>In 1969 the neighborhood protested against the construction of a disco on the Montagnola, an artificial (waste) mountain. Instead of a disco the neighborhood wanted a school. They placed a tent on the Montagnola, occupied the mountain, and won the battle. The paper on the tent says: This is the primary school.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 10, 2017</u></b></p> <p>I helped the parents and the children to carry The Rope from the central piazza to the school. It was quite a beautiful moment.</p> <p>Then I spent a little time in the school and let Ief and Bout find the right form to give to The Rope at the entrance of the school. We had to deal with the assistant of the school since she was not aware that FE did send the papers to the director concerning the insurance and responsibilities.</p> <p>I did the interview with 4 women, with the help of Cielo for the translation.</p> <p>We went with Ief to the Piagge area to meet Paolina and 2 people from the association. We were impressed by the huge difference between the 2 situations, one from the 50s/60's, urbanistic/social experimentation, and an 80's ghetto. The situation and landscape at the Piagge are quite violent. Ief agreed The Rope would go there on Sunday.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 11, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Today I was part of the city council. Our suggestion was to re-discuss one agenda item from a different perspective. I invited the councils' participants to discuss the project of the mosque with me outside, after the end of the city council, starting from my perspective as a strange visitor of Isolotto.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 11, 2017</u></b></p> <p>In the morning I went to walk in Isolotto with Marco who told me about the history, architecture and geology of Isolotto and also about his life, as he was born in his House in Isolotto.</p> <p>In the end of afternoon, we went with The Rope, Ief and Bout to the council. See The Rope's blog and my text in the last part of the report.</p>

<p>Ief shared posters and flyers before the start of the city council. Sylvia introduced us. At the end of the city council we welcomed the councilors at the emergency exit of the boardroom.</p> <p>Although we certainly took into account the fact that no-one might want to participate in this odd initiative, almost all members took place on me. Silvia was the moderator of the conversation.</p> <p>Kids respond to me, without a doubt. When I'm laying somewhere, it seems as if a temporary space is created. Like this. Or like a few days ago on the banks of the Arno river. But more things are happening, though I do not know exactly what. I always seem to leave a story in the places I've been.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 12, 2017</u></b></p> <p>Maurizio carried my head, and so 40 people drove me in and out of the Comunitat de Isolotto, where the archives and history of Isolotto are also kept. We walked further to the Viale dei Bambini, to the lawn below the terrace of Cosetta's house. They laid me down in a circle. Ief asked everyone to sit down and told me what I had done the last 10 days: the city council, Emma's house, the Pedibus, ... Afterwards, everyone presented themselves. It was the first time we had a conversation after an improvisation.</p> <p>They brought me to the archive so I could take one word and memory from all the history books: Fiaba. Bout, Ief and others put me in the grass so I could form this word. I can write I thought. Should I have to bring one thing from Isolotto, it was this memory and this word.</p> <p>We kept the children at a distance and took a picture of the word. Once this happened we went away. The children played and rewrote the word.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 12, 2017</u></b></p> <p>I went with The Rope, Ief and Bout to the Archives center to meet Maurizio and the groups of people he invited. SeeThe Rope's blog.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 13, 2017</u></b></p> <p>We left Isolotto after 11 days there. Anna-Lisa had heard of me through social media and invited me to do something in honor of the inauguration of a new square.</p> <p>El Piagge is a suburb of Firenze, on the other side of the Arno River. Here there is a different and much less romantic reality than in Isolotto. Around us there were about six unbelievable apartment blocks in the form of ships, a lot of sloping ground between, train tracks on one side and above our heads were</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 13, 2017</u></b></p> <p>I had to leave and it was frustrating since I really wanted to go to Piagge.</p>

planes coming in for landings, making conversation unintelligible every five minutes.

Nobody knew what they would do with me here. I was so nervous that I would rather have stayed by myself, wrapped on the bobbin. I walked around looking for possibilities and ideas. Several people walked with him. Vincent, Cielo, people from Fabrica Europa. It was a strange sight, all those unknowns investigating the place. They spoke to different people, and they walked to the middle of the lawn. I'd be laid in a spiral, people would sit on me, and I would tell what I had discovered on the other side of the Arno River, and then in the middle of the spiral a Romanian boy would sing a song.

I lay down on the grass in my full length. The sun was shining. I could have stayed here for much longer. I was picked up. I carried my head and stepped to the center of the lawn. Some 50 people carried me. He stopped in the center and encouraged people to continue walking around and around. Slowly I felt that my own outer sides were to be laid against each other, meter by meter. It was the first time I lay this way. The people sat down on me.

I told me that I had discovered across the Arno a wonderful neighborhood. He told me that I had brought a word and many memories with me. That the word and memories might not be visible anymore, but he said that they are still inside The Rope. That they passed the Arno and brought me to this square because Isolotto might be an inspiration for this neighborhood. I felt like a transmitter of a soul.

The Romanian boy stepped to the middle and sang a song. I felt his leg against me, trembling.

**May 14, 2017**

I hear the monotonous rumble of the expressway. I slowly sink myself into a universe of blue bands. Within 1400 km I will fall into a deep sleep.

Twelve days ago, I was thrown, all 65 meters of me, into the Viale Dei Bambini. There was no plan. Everything was a combination of luck and improvisation. The encounters with the people. The interventions. The school. Emma's and Cosetta's houses. The conversation after the city council. The cafés in the marketplace. The banks of the Arno and the actions in the Viale dei Bambini. Unconscious choreographies arose. Temporary meeting places in public space. Playgrounds. Disturbances.

I'm too big. I did not know what to do with myself. It was fierce to be thrown into a world like this. But this might be the best way to find meaning. Now I think my too big size is my strength. I'm too big, but just because of that I can do something. Being too big everywhere, I can get the same things seen in a new way. Like a different mirror. For the architecture of a place. For a landscape. For a community.

There is still so much I want to do. Climb into trees. Swimming. To be held between people in crowded squares. Enter and exit windows of an apartment building ... For a longer period of time, stay in one house or organization. As I see the snow, everything quiets down. Another 1200 km to go. I am aware of my entire 65 meter length. Images keep wandering in my mind. I fall slowly into a deep blue sleep.