LaPublika, a pluriannual project directed and coordinated by the art producer consonni, is defined as a laboratory of artistic research on the concept of the public sphere. We understand the public sphere in an expanded sense: as a sphere operating on spaces normally considered to be public (the street, the square, the city) but also on the mediascape (presided over by Internet and the mass media) and, in general terms, on the set of mechanisms by which we participate in managing what is held in common (language, rites, norms, the aesthetics of collective processes). Following what the art theoretician Rosalyn Deutsche sets out in her text Agoraphobia,1 we understand the public sphere to be a potentiality, an opportunity for diversity and dissension.

LaPublika is a project developed from 2014 to 2016 in which diverse disciplines converge, such as urban planning, political philosophy, criticism and history of art, gender studies and pedagogy. Constructed by means of different formats (workshops, talks, conversations, work sessions, live arts, music and performances, actions in the public space, interviews, street surveys), it has combined the physical presence of bodies with the diffusion of audios via streaming and podcasts and the production of content for the digital setting. All of this traversed by the spirit of the radio, a

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bourgeois revolution this unity disappears since power emanates from the people and the latter lacks unity. The people is not a stable political community, nor does it possess a fixed identity; it is a progression, a process. The relation between the sovereign people and the state that represents it (the social contract) is not established once and for all, but must be renovated periodically. For Mouffe and Laclau, antagonism works to strengthen democracy, as it mediates the tension between a social body and its outside, running counter to the Habermasian (liberal and bourgeois) ideal and its goals of creating consensus and consolidating the community. For these authors, and also for Deutsche, conflict, division and dissension do not damage the public sphere, but are instead the conditions for its existence.

The question raised by LaPublika is how artistic practices are related to a public sphere understood in this way. In 1987, at one of the famous discussions at the Dia Art Foundation, Craig Owens stated: “And the question of who is to define, manipulate and profit from ‘the public’ is, I believe, the central issue of any discussion of the public function of art today”. 5 In those years, Owens, Deutsche and others redefine the concept of “the public” in relation to artistic practices with a twofold aim. On one side, to oppose the growing privatisation of the art world, shown by the growing corporate presence in the systems of funding and the emergence of an art market that begins to assume the forms of a speculative economy. On the other, to warn of the emergence of a new “public art industry”, understood as an “aesthetic arm” at the service of urban policies (these are the years of the start of gentrification, the construction of urban branding and the passage from the concept of culture as a right to culture as a resource). 6 Influenced by these ideas and similar concerns, LaPublika places itself in a continuum that in Spain has its referential antecedent in the project

medium that produces experiences of intimacy and distance at the same time, in which extracorporeal voices incarnate imagined and real bodies, constructing everyday life in common.

From a theoretical point of view, the “public sphere” derives from the idea of öffentlichkeit (public condition, publicity) of Jürgen Habermas, 2 for whom it represents the lost democratic ideal. Liberal political thought makes a strict distinction between the private space, where there is no intervention by the state and no limits are set on individual freedom, and the public space, where individuals abandon their personal interests to involve themselves in common affairs. For Habermas, this separation, the pillar of liberal democracy, is threatened in the XX century by the entrance of population groups external to the bourgeoisie and the development of mass communication and the welfare state. The Habermasian archetype is put into question by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, 3 who consider that the public sphere does not correspond to that unitary ideal but to something more fragmented and diverse, formed of the singular experiences of everyday life. But the public sphere in its liberal conception is above all rethought by the political philosophy that faces the challenge of analysing the experience of totalitarianism. In The Human Condition Hannah Arendt insists on the change brought about by modernity, by which the public and private spheres are fused into one: the sphere of the social. 4 For their part, Claude Lefort, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau focus on the concepts of antagonism and radical democracy.

For Lefort, democracy (that which is not totalitarianism) is characterised by the disappearance of all certainties about the social. While in the Ancien Régime power was embodied in the person of the king and sovereignty emanated from an absolute source, whether from God or the Cartesian ideal of reason, with the

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3 Kluge, Alexander; Negt, Oskar, Public Sphere and Experience Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.
“both the tactical knowledge of people and the operations that are executed by artists’ works”, a concept that “articulates that notion of ‘everyday life’ which, through such wide use, had ceased to be operative”.10

Ways of doing linked to tactical media connect with the guiding thread that joins the territories of art to political activism. These ways of doing, as Paloma Blanco notes in relation to the “collaborative practices” of the early 1990s, are characterised by the importance of channels of production and distribution and by the “fusion” between artists and social movements.11 As Jorge Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo observe, this type of practices are often articulated around the “sabotage of the institutions, the will to short-circuit the logics of the spectacle, the dissolution of the traditional concept of authorship, the awakening of social creativity or collaboration with different local communities”. But not necessarily. In fact, the concept of the public sphere developed in Agoraphobia considerably widens the territory of the political in the arts to include all those practices that, in one way or another, activate the constituent potential of what is public. Antagonism, dissension, diversity or conflict generate settings of debate on and experimentation with the very concept of what is public, the limits between public and private spaces and the mechanisms of institutionalisation (becoming an institution).

For Deutsche, the division between inside and outside the institution poses similar problems to those of the dichotomy between the private and the public. She holds that “art institutions” are not “secure interiors, isolated from social space”, in the same way that extra-institutional spaces are not completely independent and do not lack their own mechanisms of institutionalisation. Both the former and latter are united by relations of interdependence


can also identify. However, it is not only a question of opening up this regime of visuality to subjects excluded from it, but also of questioning the relations of domination it perpetuates.

Facing the regime of visuality, Thomas Keenan invites us to think of the public sphere using the model of language. In the presence of language, he says, we cannot keep a safe distance because language, as it is public and unstable, makes us vulnerable. And, more importantly: we become subjects precisely when we enter language. In his writings on the radio, Walter Benjamin defines the voice as a guest that is received at home and states that the radiophonic medium, which for him was inseparable from the educational task, is a riskier technique than the theatre since it “not only mobilizes knowledge in the direction of the public, but mobilizes the public in the direction of knowledge”. In LaPublika, we take the radio as both a medium – for broadcasting activities via streaming and the publication of podcasts – and as a metaphor for the public sphere. A resistant mass medium, with a low spectacular intensity: an impulse beats on the radio that bears a greater resemblance to language than to vision; an impulse, we think, that is more appropriate for confronting the task of constructing common potentialities.

Moreover, Deutsche insists that the politics of visuality, which are inseparable from art, are also a public affair. “How do the images of public space create the public identities they seem merely to depict?” she asks. “How do these images create a ‘we’, a public, and who do we imagine ourselves to be when we occupy the prescribed space?” She draws support from the exhibition Public Vision (New York, 1982) that questioned vision as the higher mode of accessing universal truths, a mode supposedly separate from the objects it observes. In the discourse of modernity, the subject who looks freely and self-sufficiently, contemplates a passive artistic object unconnected to their circumstances. For feminist critics, this regime of visuality is above all a regime of production of subjectivities, underlying which is found what Homi Bhabha calls “masculinism as a position of social authority”, an intellectual site historically occupied by white men but with which other subjects