

Collaboration and the Archive

—Based on Projects by Artist Collectives

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to clarify the significance of collaboration and the role of the archive in the work of artist collectives. The hypothesis of this study is that long-term projects by artist collectives can eventually lead to the creation of new art forms. In this study the word “collaboration” is used to describe collaborative art in the field of contemporary art, and the word “artist collective” refers to artists’ group working together on collaborative projects.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the keywords “identity” and “archive”, two common defining terms for projects by artist collectives. In 2006, the artist collective *nüans* was co-founded by German artists Anna Heidenhain, Elmar Hermann and me, Maki Umehara. *nüans* achieved the project *HAYY –A Self-taught Musical* based on the novel *A Self-taught Philosopher* written by Ibn Tufayl in the 12th century. The opportunities for collaboration on such a project are discussed.

The second chapter deals with collaboration and the archive in previous studies by focusing on concepts such as “record”, “others”, “transformation” and “history and background”. Besides, I examine collaborations by artist collectives in regard to the duality of anonymity and subject, as well as certain visible projects in public and how they developed into archives.

The third chapter focuses on the concept of the project *HAYY*. Besides *HAYY*, I present the history of philosophy that has established the identity of individuality, and explores the collaborative method. While dealing with the history of personality formation, I discuss the theory and the practice of collaboration. The protagonist Hayy

embodies the possibility of dialogue between “the other in self” that everyone may secretly harbour “omniscience”. Distance between things is considered; between oneself and others, between metaphorical “islands” and “neighbours”, between an individual “island” and a cooperative “archipelago”. I examine instances of such archives that develop beyond space and time leading to alternative creations.

The fourth chapter approaches the practice of projects by artist collectives and the archive. In this, I assume that there are two different axes on the project *HAYY*; one is the vertical axis of time, which addresses the personality formation of multiple persons Hayy, and the other is the horizontal axis of space in Sicily, Istanbul, Tokyo, Düsseldorf and Berlin. The chapter shows how the archive of *HAYY* has changed throughout various projects in the following order. First, by the dialogue and montage of video language, second, by the daily life of artists, third, by visitors’ understanding of the work by Joseph Kosuth and the historical shrine at Shibuya, fourth, by archives of encounters with nature and animals other than human beings, fifth, by editing video works and artist’s books, sixth, by archiving various possible combinations, and finally by representing archives of production processes. The same characters and choreographies appear in different places while slightly changing costumes and movements.

The fifth chapter examines the structure of collaborations and the archive. In order to verify certain arguments independently of projects by *niüans*, I consider collaborations and the archive of a ritual ceremony in Bali and a publication by Vilém Flusser, who incorporated the viewpoint of philosophical thought to reassert human nature. In addition, I look at Michael H. Shamberg’s *Turtle* project, which started in Lebanon and systematically examines artist networks. I explore collaboration and the archive not only in the context of art history but also within the traditions of a society paying attention to the problem of societal newcomers in an attempt to broaden the discussion.

Returning to the possibilities of creativity mentioned at the outset of this study, the sixth chapter concludes the thesis and highlights the following three points. First the creation of art through collaboration and art works produced by compound eye thinking,

second, artist collectives as motors of artistic creativity; the creative potential that comes from cooperating on a broad range of topics, and finally the role of archives in artistic creativity, which allows the enjoyment to share time with others in the future. An archive provides a record that evokes the collaboration by documenting the relationship between an artist's individuality and an artist collective, or an artist's individuality and a group. That has given the work a new impetus as people are looking forward to sharing enjoyment with others in the future. Viewers cannot only access feelings long since transpired, but also build a new relationship with the archive by reinterpreting it. Finally, I conclude that the repetitive motion of constant perception that occurs through communication with such archives leads to the creation of new art forms, which goes beyond mere repetition.

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