

The Participator

Graduation Thesis for the Media Design: Networked media

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Thesis - Project report

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the dynamics between participants in a collaborative project working towards a collective aim. It gives particular emphasis to the process. My own work is based on temporary collaborations between small groups. Each participant has a certain degree of freedom and responsibility and the outcome is often unpredictable. I am looking at other practitioners in the field who have worked on similar projects since the 1960s. I am interested in the rules that are setup for a collaboration and how these rules influence both the process and participants; which structures and rules trigger engagement and creative freedom; how much freedom does every participant have and how does the freedom change the way the project is structured.

How can collaborative projects with a nonhierarchical structure affect the engagement and expectations of the participant(s)?

INTRODUCTION

“Artists have increasingly sought to create situations and events that invite spectators to become active participants, in dialogue both their their context and with each other.”

(Bishop, 2006, PARTICIPATION, p.210)

It fascinates me what it is that makes people motivated to become active in a collaborative art project. What triggers people to get motivated to learn, work or experience something together with other people. How are editorial decisions being made if every participant can influence the decisions that can be made. Which parameters affect the experience and outcome of a collaborative art project. The outcome of for example a drawing is more surprising when more people collaborate together on the same drawing.

How can collaborative projects with a nonhierarchical structure affect the engagement and expectations of the participant(s)?

I am focussed on collaborative projects that are related to counterculture and self-publishing. Small press without the involvement of an established third party publisher. I am looking at projects by artists that are facilitating collaborative projects with creative freedom within a preset framework for the participants. In my own projects I am experimenting with rules that structure the way people participate and collaborate. This is done by initiating a series of projects involving creating workshops, a fanzine and doing interviews with practitioners.

DEFINING TERMS

Participation is described in the dictionary as ' the act of sharing in the activities of a group. A participatory project can be defined as an initiated process with specific goals towards a particular aim. It can only exist when a minimum support is generated by active involvement from two or more people contributing in the process(collaboration). Sharing successes, challenges and the feeling of being co-owner can stimulate the involvement of the participants.

Collaboration requires a form of submission to structure the process towards the collective aim. The form of submission can be social within a decentralized group. Structure consists out of a set of rules that predefine the way people can participate. For example rules about what kind of decisions the participants can make. Predefined rules are likewise used to structure gameplay in games. In order to participate in the game, one must of course know about the game, and have a basic grasp of the rules. Within game theory there are forms of collaboration involved looking at multiple players making decisions to maximize their results.

A structure can be controlled in different levels concentrating responsibility (dictatorship) or spreading responsibility (democracy). A self-organized process is a closed circuit in terms of initiators and participants where no external authority or coordinator is imposing triggers to push the motivational process. The initiators are the participants, producers and consumers. Extracting all actions in the process, organization is achieved through dialogue within the active group. When the initiator of the project gives equal concertation to all participants about the final interpretation of the rules the power, decision making and responsibility is distributed in a horizontal matter making everyone equally owner of the outcome of the process.

The difficult part of co-authorship is the level of dedication and skills. When there is a big difference in effort between the contributors this can be a reason for frustration. The role of each co-author is sometimes shown in the end result of a project. For example with co-authorship on scientific papers the scale of contribution of each contributor is made visible in the proportion of the print size of the font. One of the good aspects of co-authorship is that this form of authorship creates a possibility to process information through dialogue (interaction) and other forms of expression.

THEORETICAL RESEARCH IDENTITY & PROFILING

Throughout history there have always been people who gathered around. The important aspect is the activity and the freedom that you have to do things without being told what to do (intrinsic motivation). Groups organize activities or make their own interventions, whatever they call it art or not. The great promise of the Internet is that information is free and people are sharing data without the commercial element and without peer-pressure. We are in the high tide of participation on networks; Facebook, MySpace and other social networks are based on profiling, commercializing and monitoring dynamics of information.

When I look at my profile it shifts from being an artist to entrepreneur and event organizer. I can think of even more labels that can tag the activities that I am doing. Because of this it is impossible to consider myself as a person who is operating under one identity. I experienced in every school and work situation that most people are trying to force you into a role. This identity or profile can be used as a communication tool to fit expectations. Identity is not a fact, it is a dynamic image caught in the moment, frozen in time.

For my personal satisfaction it is not important to have an established label or identity. But for other people that don't know me this identity is important, so that they know what they can expect from me. This label or identity can change over the years. For example I can now say I am in an art school and therefore I am a student or artist but one year later I can be or do something completely different. The identity of my work can be important if I work under my own practice. It can be less important if this identity is shared together in a network, collective or community.

PRACTICAL RESEARCH ASPECTS OF IDENTITY

EDIBLE FANZINE - PROJECT

The project initiated by me creating a fanzine related to consuming and producing. Participants experienced a process of production during a workshop, excluding all forms of pre-defined identity. Every participant chooses a color to draw with, creating a new identity for the endurance of the workshop. The color is used to identify the work of each individual participant. During the production process the participants worked together by editing each others work. It is important that contributors are not working alone, they are editing each others work. Each participant will therefore not be fully responsible for the final outcome. Claiming authorship towards a created product is thereby destroyed.



Picture (1) Participants write and draw with their own chosen color (identity)

Participants are restricted by a preset limited amount of time to work on the drawings. When the time is over the contributors have to select the drawings by themselves. The work is directly chosen after the drawings are finished. Participants have to make editorial decisions about what they want to publish. The final chosen work is printed on edible paper and folded into a fanzine. When the outcome is published the participant can choose out of different options on how they want to consume their own work by keeping, or enjoying it (eating it).



Picture (2) Visitor of the Mockshow at Piet Zwart Institute eating a page of the edible fanzine.

THEORETICAL RESEARCH STRUCTURES

“Without the strength of mass-communications there would not be any sub-cultures, which, depending of the circumstances, occasionally participate or else oppose themselves with resignation or aggression to the power of mass-media.”

(Fischer, 1974, Art et communication marginale, p.19)

Creating a standard in modern society engages a reaction that society can be organized in a different way. Counterculture is the form of reaction against a structure of a mainstream standard. Counterculture is a platform that does not want to conform (resisting) to ruling standards. Excluding all aspects of structure they disagree with from their structure. Proving the majority wrong what is accepted as right becomes a project, by applying the alternative rules upon themselves.

Having a closer look at these groups, they all have certain aspects in common. Individuals have a common way of living or idea that does not match the mainstream idea finding themselves amongst likeminded. Once part of the group personal identity gets entangled with group-image and peer-pressure. When that happens, intrinsic motivation gets entangled by external input. Thinking out of the box becomes standardized. An alternative standard is being shaped for every member (tradition) being the substitute for the mainstream culture they could not conform to.

“The integrating power of these sub-groups must be pointed out, even when they form in reaction to the mass. One certainly cannot speak of a disintegration of society, but rather a process of diversification and reaction, which are inevitable and desirable in a dominant phenomenon of massification.”

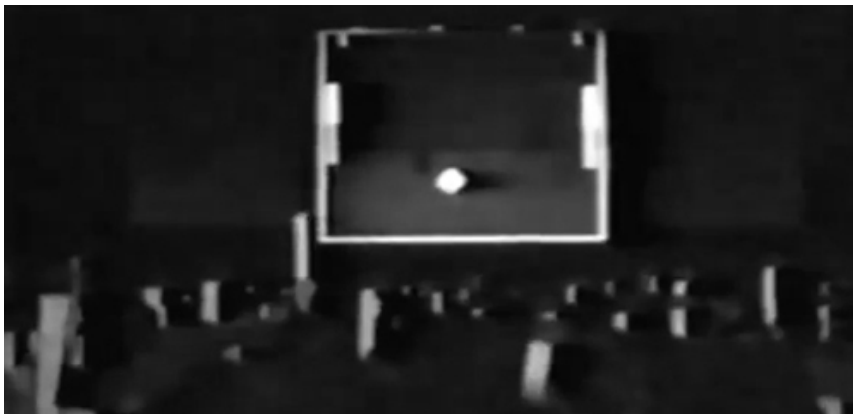
(Fischer, 1974, Art et communication marginale, p.30)

The existence of alternative structures creates awareness amongst all individuals that we are living in unavoidable structures. In which structure you want to participate is optional: anticipating to the dominant structure or resisting it. If the condition of interaction is excluded from the structure an individual isolates himself and collaboration is excluded.

THEORETICAL RESEARCH TRIGGERS

A trigger is a mechanism/katalysator setting a process in motion. The trigger is used as an open invitation for people to engage in a project and to provoke action. It is important to let the playground of the project speak for itself, clear triggers explain themselves instead of being explained by additional input. In a collaborative project the interpretation of the trigger is essential to engage participants. Once participants acted on the trigger and reacted on the action, the chance of failing diminishes. Example of a clear trigger in daily life are traffic lights, the colors and sound trigger people to pay attention and stop or start moving in the traffic.

An artistic example of the use of clear triggers is a project initiated by Adam Curtis (*All watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*). Once participant entered the cinema, people sat in a cinema setting looking at dots on the screen with no follow-up instructions. For every visitor there was a pedal near their chair with a red and green side. On the screen in front of the visitors there was a projection of the computer game Pong. After a while people started to notice that they could control and influence the game by moving the bats and flipping the side to green or red. In the group of people some decide to show green and some decided to show red to stop it on the right place.



Audience controlling together a game of Pong

Carpenter believed he used with this project a model of a society with no hierarchy. The screen and the bats triggered participants to link their presence. Every participant made their own decisions without guidance yet because they were linked to machines their became stability and a order. All participants can act as individuals because each one of them can decide what to do. During the project they have total freedom to decide what to do but there is a order. The order is a amoeba like effect, they search and play. It was in the nature of a experiment to find out what happens if there is no hierarchy. The participants formed a subconscious consensus triggered by the presence of the screen and bats.

PRACTICAL RESEARCH EXPERIMENTING WITH TRIGGERS

An ongoing project is the “Rotterdam=Hard” fanzine. This fanzine is an open participation medium for artwork, drawings and photographs, where every received submission is published. The trigger for participating is the guarantee of the work being published and getting a hard copy of the fanzine. New participants are introduced to the project by word of mouth. The “Rotterdam=Hard” fanzine makes each participant a co-author of the fanzine, producing the content for the fanzine together.



Picture (3) Rotterdam = Hard fanzine publication

THEORETICAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCING PROCESS

In my projects I do not want to force participation on to people. If you look for example at online networks and advertisements from companies it is visible that most of the messages contain invitations that ask you to participate. It gives the feeling that everyone wants something from someone. This economy is based on information, time and money. My economy is focused on the experience and trying to trigger other people to create something with their own ideas.

Looking at the work of Allan Kaprow and reading about his ideas influenced the way I am looking at art as events rather than objects. Kaprow described his participatory and collaborative work as 'happenings' in 1958.

“Happenings can never be overexposed, they are over every theme they happened”
(Allan Kaprow, essays on the blurring of art and life, p.62)



Allan Kaprow, Household, women licking jam off of a car.

Allan Kaprow invented as an artist the unpredictable happenings in the 60's. Kaprow was influenced by abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock. Kaprow published in 1958 a essay with the title "The legacy of Jackson Pollock", declaring that Pollock had destroyed painting. The need according to Kaprow was to move away from the current notion of painting from that time. In the same year he also attended John Cage's class in experimental music composition at the New School for Social Research in New York. John Cage's notion of music was similar to the approach of Kaprow towards his notion of art. He preferred to work outside of the gallery's boundaries. Kaprow stated that happenings should never be repeated. Interaction between participants is an important part of the work's meaning.

"Allan Kaprow took art off the walls and put it in places where anyone could encounter it"

(Antin, 1967, quoted in The Sunday Times 14 April 2006)



from left to right: Jackson Pollock gelatin silver prints, John Cage preparing piano, Allan Kaprow explaining Household

PRACTICAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCING PROCESS

Most of my projects are initiated to work together with other people. Through participating and working on collaborative projects I meet new and interesting people. The common interest during these projects is focused on the experience while making music, fanzines, paintings or organizing public events. Sharing experiences during the creational process keeps me motivated to redefine new ways of thinking and working.

The first collaboration initiated with friends is a project at Schloß Ringelberg in Germany. This project was a experiment that involved the production of four collaborative paintings. The only two preset rules for the collaboration are about the time and space. Four participants including myself were producing four paintings finished in one week. During the creation of the paintings the participants worked on all four paintings together. Every hour we changed different painting to work on. During the creation of the paintings the participants were spending the week together in the same room. There was no fixed rule about editorials decisions, every participant could add, change or modify the paintings until the end of the week. The collaboration created dialogue and conflicts and influenced the overall experience and final outcome of the paintings giving the product.

The interesting division between the four participants is that two of them were more focused an thinking about the outcome of the final paintings. The other two participants are more aware of collaboration process by challenging each other to modify and cross out drawings of others.



Picture (4) Outcome of the paintings form the collaboration in Ringelberg.

THEORETICAL RESEARCH TOOLS FOR SHARING & DISTRIBUTION

Of course, in my projects ideas and formats have been used before. The outcome and process can be the same as in the past but the environment can change the context. Different parameters makes other experience. This is evident when you look at the development of technology. Every generation experiences different challenges. The communication structures that are being used amongst people have not changed radically, only the medium spreading the message is the variable aspect. If I look at the information people share it is not really a big difference than what they shared five years ago.



Picture (5) Medium for sharing audio.

Looking back in time at participatory and collaborative art throughout history mail art is an interesting phenomenon. The mail art movement started in early 1960's. Artists found a way to communicate outside the mass-media system. Using the international post-office network as a structure for a network of marginal communications. By making use of the international post-office artist could publish outside of the circuit of galleries and museums. Some artists copied stamps of certification and created a parody by modifying the attributes of the official institutions of society. Mail art is still a distribution form that is used by artists.

PRACTICAL RESEARCH SHARING & DISTRIBUTION

Jeffrey Koopman participated to an open request by Miranda Vissers that involved creating a postcard about the theme collecting and sending it by post. An interesting detail about this project is that the received submissions are exhibited in the vanabbemuseum in Eindhoven. Ironically the output of mail art from this alternative distribution network by artists ends up being integrated in the mainstream (art)platform, shown in galleries and museums.



Invitation mail art project by Miranda Vissers.

Smallpress is an often used distribution medium of publishing artwork. The limited amount of copies that will be distributed is considered as a statement of exposing and sharing. One of the places that supported small press is the gallery called Slaphanger. This gallery founded in 1994 by Xandra Severien en Pieter Zandvliet in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and existed until 2003 as an active art community for exhibitions, performances, poetry readings and small press. It provided a place to sell and promote fanzines, independent comics and music. The collection of items available are not only created by Rotterdam based authors but material is received from all over the world. This made the assortment of Slaphanger interesting because of the obscure and variety in different items. Not only the collection of Slaphanger could change every time but also the people who were working at Slaphanger. Volunteers were working at the gallery through a youth work program. This made the Slaphanger an interesting place because the volunteers had all a different perspective and engagements on the gallery. Slaphanger mainly sold items that were produced by independently and therefore not part of multinational corporations. Slaphanger was a place that motivated small press for a small market and most of the time with a margin profit and was focussed on the niches that larger book- and record stores neglect.

FEEDBACK FROM PRACTITIONERS & PARTICIPANTS

INTERVIEW WITH A PRACTITIONER

After seeing a dutch spoken documentary 'Waskracht Underground Noise' from the year 2000 I learned a lot about the small home-taping and noise culture-scene in the Netherlands. Being confronted with the work of Marc Elburg, his activities as an artist covered a wide range of disciplinary interests: from performances, theater, noise recordings to fanzines and public events. After doing some research, I discovered that his motivational drive to create has similarities with my personal drive: he collaborated with different artists during the creation of music and fanzines. The atmosphere in his paintings reflect the typical (subconscious) culture and structure of the Netherlands. To learn more about his working methods, the way he structures the collaborations, or about the use of rules I decided to approach him for an interview.

During the interview Marc Elburg is positioning social networks as an initiator of isolation of individuals due to the accessibility of data and the possibility to be part of a network without physical interference. I think it is a different approach when two or more people are working together and discuss and reflect directly. Of course people can have a different way of showing feedback on each others work when they are working in realtime together then from a distance over a postal or online network. I agree that it is often seen that there are different periods of people being active, visible with projects, in social networks and the opposite. This can also be the difference between experimenting and research and more practical public projects. I also agree with Marc that it can be satisfying to setup your own network, making it more personal and motivating to show projects and work together to people connected to this network.

As for collaborative projects Marc Elburg is driven by his vision towards the outcome, but putting the process towards in the first place in contrary of my approach focusing on experience of the process. Different drives enquire different structures. Marc describes past collaborations as nazi-like being in the optimal control of the outcome. Once vision is realized, the team falls apart.

Reflecting on the answers given on the interview I realized similarities were rather coincidental. A lot of work of Marc Elburg remains unseen by the public (including me) so an inaccurate identity is imaged. The level of interest and working methods overlap, but the motivational background to come to collaborations is different, making the comparison of different approach, but similar end-product even more interesting.

**Noise artist, drawer and performer
Interview with Marc Elburg
24th May 2011**

Are you part of a network or collective?

No, at the moment I am working quite isolated on my new material. This is something that you see often with self-publishers. There is often a movement between periods of being active and visible and the complete opposite. Sometimes I receive post from others as a response to my work in the mailbox after years. I believe that my current isolation may be a late response towards the big wave of online social networks like Myspace and Facebook. Something similar happened when Internet and Email became widely used and with the introduction of the CD-R. These technical developments were also visible to me through the temporary lower demand for publications and the mailbox being empty.

Can you explain what de Hondenkoekjesfabriek is and what it does?

De Hondenkoekjesfabriek used to be a factory close to where I live, in this factory they produced dog biscuits. It is located in the Netherlands near the city Zwolle. I used the name De Hondenkoekjesfabriek for publishing CD's, fanzines, doing performances and organizing an experimental noise theater.



Noise theater act "FCKN BSTRDS" at Sonic Circuits in 2009.

How was the organizational structure in the Hondenkoekjesfabriek, can you say it was working with a non-hierarchical structure?

No, I would not describe it as being non-hierarchical. A lot of fanzines are published in England and America about collectives that are working in different ways with a non-hierarchical structure. I don't have a lot of affinity with it. I think this is because I am working as an autonomous artist. My projects often begin from some kind of vision. This is not one of the best ways to start an organization with a non-hierarchical structure. There are enough bad examples around about visionary leaders. I think if you would want to build a non-hierarchical organization it is best to start pragmatically and as a collective from the very start.

When I work together with other people (this is incidental) the projects look more like a pop-band where there is a 'bandnazi' who

makes the decisions. These bands produce one or two CD's and do two tours and then they quit or move on towards a crises, a battle of ego's. The band members want to continue because they have created a link with the band and start to have ideas of their own. The 'bandnazi' wants to quit because his vision has been realized. Think of 'Spinal Tap', or the period that the band Metallica went into therapy as classic examples. For me a reason not to work on projects for too long. In the mockumentary about Spinal Tap you can see that after a successful period there follows up a dark or psychedelic period. When a band survives this dark period most of the times the band ends up repeating the old successes. Such a band crisis is extremely hard and takes a lot of energy. The result is often unsatisfying and this is one of the reasons that I am working at the moment again autonomously.

I played in squats that were full of posters and banners about equal rights but in the reality these places were ruled by an alpha male. I think this is because of the error that a nonhierarchical structure means the absence of rules and therefore the laws of nature take over. Hierarchy is also connected to competition. I don't like competition. A sportsman might reply that I have difficulties accepting my loss. When I am walking and someone comes by and runs faster, and that person sees an imaginary finishing-line and claims that he wins the race was I at that time a participant in a competition?



Poster wall in former squat Poortgebouw in Rotterdam.

I think that an organization with a non-hierarchical structure is a general agreement between a majority. I don't see this happen soon and then there is always the risk of regression to the mean. I've seen it work only as an incidental closed experiment. I have heard of something like a horizontal organization but this means often that the director has the same desk and works on the same floor as the coworkers. The real decisions and remunerations are done in a traditional pyramid structure. I ended up in a network for fanzines because it is really suitable for individualistic people with a do-it-yourself approach. The financial part of de Hondenkoekjesfabriek was basically a patronage. No project could have existed without financial support from my partner Wilja, we have done it all on a non-profit basis.

Is your work and your interests part of counterculture?

I find a reactionary approach often disappointing, it only confirms the existing order. I try my best to work from the creative process itself with trying to find creative solutions. Finding out how a good idea is constructed.

What is more important in your work the process or the final outcome?

The process. With the stage in de Hondenkoekjesfabriek it was also about getting the audience involved during performances through microphones, sound sources and cameras that were setup in the space. This turned the performances into a common shared creative process.

Which artists or art movements have influenced your work?

There are a lot that influenced me, here is a wild mix;
Gary Panter, Pakito Bolino en le Dernier Cri, Mark Smeets, Caroliner Rainbow, GX Jupitter Larssen, Fluxus, John Tudor, Dieter Roth, Instant Composers Pool, Francis Picabia, Fort Thunder, Philip Guston, Cy Twombly, Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, Jean Louis Costes, Wim T Schippers, Johnny van Doorn and Herenleed, Pierre Alechinsky, DADA, provisional art, process art and everything on Ubuweb.com.

What was your motivation behind creating and publishing fanzines?

My motivation comes from the fact that I lived on the countryside before there was the Internet access and I had absolute no affinity with the local culture. I started to publish my drawings in a fanzine and

I mailed the fanzines to every address that I could find and that had any relation to the image that I had in my mind. By doing this I came in contact with people like Yves Albrechts in Antwerpen, Pieter Zandvliet and gallery Slaphanger in Rotterdam, Wilfried hou-je-bek in Utrecht en with Staalplaat in Amsterdam.

What are your choice of tools and material that you work with?

My base is drawing, I use paper and posca markers.

Are you doing research for your work and did you change your working method compared to when you started self-publishing fanzines and music?

I do research on different materials and I use different media like sound, video and live performance. I don't do research in a scientific sense of "hypotheses- experiment-publication and conclusion. I don't believe this works with Art. However I do research in the sense of analyzing and arranging, for example I am analyzing a drawing that I intuitively made and I try to separate different elements and with this knowledge I try to create new work.

Which responses do you like to see on your work from a audience?

I don't care about nice or ugly but it can be interesting when someone understands what I am doing. I used to think that it would be nice if other people started to imitate your work but now I believe that this can be a threat to your identity. I would not want to be a famous person.

Do you involve other people in the process when you are creating work?

I did a lot of collaborations with other artists by sending each other drawings through the postal network. The drawings are modified by the participants and then published as a final outcome in a fanzine. I did this with artists like Andy Nukes, Marcel Herms, Koh Kasehara, Pieter Zandvliet, Matt Brinkman, Zeke Clough and Crippa Almqvist.

I find these collaborations really instructive, you learn a lot about how the other draughtsmen think, which tricks they use and how you can trigger or challenge the other participant. You can find out how the other interprets a image and how to get them angry or confused. How protective is someone towards his or her own work, and can you erase or modify everything or do you need to handle the work carefully. It is really a good way of working and thinking and it leads myself to creative ideas and dimensions that I could never reach alone.

When you are collaborating or organizing a public event are there many rules that have been setup before hand?

It depends on how a project starts, assuming that I start with a vision then this specific vision in fact stipulates the rules. In this way I would not want to work together with other people anymore. In the case of drawing together there are also rules but these rules are discovered together during the process, these rules are not binding, they are simply there. They are more like personal borders, thresholds which you discover during the process. Hypersensitivity is most of the time contra-productive.

Do you like to stimulate other people to produce and publish their own work?

Yes, I like to stimulate other people to produce and publish work when I have the chance. It can be frustrating to promote your work to galleries and stores. When you are publishing your own work and setting up a network this can be a big stimulating factor for the creative process and you receive better feedback.

Do you organize public events and do you work together with others on these events?

I have worked together with other people with De Hondenkoekjesfabriek, moreover I also worked some years with Planetart in Enschede. For Planetart we created public programs and other things like building up a show. The question is to what extent do you have to formalize the process or can you give everyone freedom? Letting things go can be exciting, but it can also lead to a complete chaos with no structure and end up as a self destructive or hedonistic event.

Do you trade your own work with others and what are the reasons if you trade something?

I traded a lot of stuff, when I started trading I traded everything with almost anyone. I have a big collection of fanzines and CD's. With the introduction of the CD-R I received a large amount of CD-R's in a short period, because of this overload I started to be more selective. For me, feedback is important and the feeling that comes with the fact that your work is somewhere out there and contributes to a sort of 'subcultural potential'.

Are you collecting fanzines, tapes and other small press publications?

I am not a collector, collecting has a kind of dimension of its own and can become a goal in itself. I did visit comic fairs, there you see collectors who are sealing first pressings of a comic and store them away without ever reading the comic. I am interested in the combination of expression and content, just self-published is not enough for me. I like to see that it is created with love and attention. I am not really interested if it is just serious and intellectual, I also like to see the creative and playful side.

Is it important or necessary that you publish everything by yourself?

For me it is important that I publish my work by myself but it is not necessary. I would not mind to see something published by a publisher but I don't have high expectations of it. Most of the books that are being pressed in a amount of two thousand or five thousand copies stay in the storage room. I don't expect with my work to get any money out of a book sale. Performances are more effective, with this you can reach a lot of people. The negative aspects of this is that it can easily turn into a cheap entertainment.

There are many good artists, draughtsmen, writers in the world and everyday there are more good artists. If you can create your own niche than this is already a great achievement. I don't have a clear idea concerning art policy, every regulation comes with restrictions, absolute freedom is not a good option. Messing around a little bit and ambivalence is not bad at all for the creativity.

Do you have tips or some advice for people who like to publish material themselves?

Search for a fanzine that contains reviews about other fanzines like for example 'zineworld'. Collect addresses from the ones you find interesting and write to them or create a small flyer with your contact information and send this with it. What helps is writing your own reviews about other peoples work. You can also organize a exhibition, there are a lot of creative loners in search for exposure. Avoid the Internet.

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS

Evaluating a collaborative project - EDIBLE FANZINE

To evaluate experiences during the workshop edible fanzine -described before in the research- , a few participants were interviewed after the workshop. Experimenting with the parameters of collaborative projects I initiated a project to investigate the importance of clear rules, minimizing identity, and the influence of editorial decisions, creating a fanzine related to consuming and producing.

All participants were invited to be co-author of this publication and asked to draw consumption-related images with the chosen color of the marker that is the only evidence of the identity of the participating artist. One of the participants even forgot the color she draw with during the workshop, having difficulties to locate her contribution to the outcome of the project. This is exactly why this criteria was defined. Thereby the focus of participating is postponed from personal contribution to the collective outcome.

During the interview I focused on the experience of the restrictions that were predefined to structure the workshop. Time-restriction made the participant realize they had to finish a work, with something physical on paper. Perception of time and distribution between conceptual thinking and concretizing the idea in a drawing is seen a a pressuring aspect of the structure, unconsciously blurring artistic freedom. Once experienced it, the second round was approached in a different way, giving the conceptual thinking more time and less focusing on the eventual outcome of the drawing.

The most surprising outcome of the interview was the subjectiveness of the trigger to collaborate. A trigger is stated as a good feeling, where good timing and placement is essential. Also respect and interesting group-dynamic is seen as a criteria to decide to participate. They could not define an objective measurable criteria to engage participation.

**Participants in the Edible fanzine workshop
Interview with Amy Wu & Dennis de Bel
16th May 2011**

What were your expectations of the workshop before you decided to participate?

Amy: I actually expected something quite different. Perhaps it was because I misheard something you said when you presented it in class earlier that day. I had expected that we, the participants, would consume our end product immediately after it was completed. I guess I ignored the technical aspect of needing to take it to a professional printer to transfer it onto edible paper with edible ink after the workshop took place. In my mind, the poetry of eating it directly thus leaving no obvious traces of our 'production' was important. That is why, I thought we were talking about the process as the actual artwork and not the end result itself in class.

Dennis: I tried not to have any expectations and enter the workshop as openminded as possible.

Can you describe what you did during the workshop?

Amy: I sat on the edge of the table and was the closest to the cake and camera. I had expected to eat the paper that evening so I didn't really think about dinner. I believe I used the orange marker to draw with during the workshop. My drawings were done in a kind of free associative state. In the beginning I refrained from looking at people sitting beside me as I didn't want to be influenced.

Dennis: I offered a space to have the workshop in and thus did some organizing, like installing a camera, open doors, participate and opened doors for invitees.

During the workshop there were three rounds of 20 minutes each. How did this time frame influence your way of working and thinking?

Amy: After that experience, I discovered that twenty minutes is actually quite sufficient for these events. When we all started the first round, I had the feeling that everyone was rushing to finish theirs in time. But realized after ten minutes that they were in fact done. So we spent the next ten minutes refining the pieces. The second round was a little more thought out and I took the time to contemplate on the subject of 'consumption' a little more. As we swapped between each round, a new image could be re-worked and re-contextualised. In my opinion, I must say that some turned out visually strong but others were buried under too many layers.

Dennis: The timeframe was a bit short for me as I noticed after the first round. I forced myself to be faster, but maybe it was too long after all. I noticed I had too much time on my hands to create something quick, sharp and cheeky and too little time to make something beautiful and 'good'.

Do you think the rules about the time, trading and editorial decisions for the workshop were important for the collaboration?

Amy: To begin with, I believe that the rules were very limited. I guess it worked for our group because most of us already knew, or had at least met each other, previously. Out of the six people, I knew three from my immediate social circle and one who I've seen around on a few occasions. I think the rules will be treated and dealt with differently depending on the group and the dynamics of their interactivity.

Dennis: I'm not sure the given rules were optimal to 'force' collaboration. If you wanted to 'force' collaboration I think there should be more, shorter, rounds. If 'true' collaboration was the goal the timeframe etc should be longer, beyond the scope of this workshop.

Did these elements affect the outcome or the way you participated in the workshop?

Amy: Yes of course, they were the parameters of the workshop. Not to say that they determined the outcome, but they definitely played a role in helping me find my role.

Dennis: Yes, it made me possible less-collaborative.

Did you enjoy the workshop during the creation of the edible fanzine and (if so) what influenced this feeling?

Amy: Yes I enjoyed the workshop. Since I already knew most of them I was in a familiar atmosphere and could relax and take it easy. Not to say that if it was another more unfamiliar group, that it wouldn't have been so cozy, but that it definitely made the environment productive because it was easier to speak up. At the same time, I can imagine the situation being more complex and interesting if the group was more diverse with a wider age group, socio-economic background etc.

Dennis: It was really fun, mostly because I got to know new people and since I was the host, being able to offer a space for the workshop.

Related to this, were there things that didn't work? If so, what could I do differently or how could I improve the workshop in the future?

Amy: All in all, I think it went well. But again, to spice up the mix a bit, perhaps a larger difference between the participants could benefit.

Dennis: Either a selected group of people, or shorter and more rounds (and possibly more people?) in public space?.

If you would do the same workshop again, in what way do you think this will influence the process and outcome?

Amy: Another group of people would obviously change the dynamic. For example, I remember after the third round, we all had to collectively choose the best six works to be printed. After picking out three or four works, most people were afraid to decide the rest. I guess for many reasons, but personally I think that some participants who already had their drawings in a lot of the works didn't want to continue selecting works with their drawings on it, as it would seem overtly bias.

Dennis: Good question, are we talking about the same group of participants? If so and the conditions (rules/score) would be same I don't think there will be a significant difference in the outcome.

When you are participating in general (other projects), what is the most important trigger for you to become an active participant?

Amy: Interesting group dynamic, mutual respect and lots of good energy.

Dennis: Most of the time, it's something 'ongrijpbaar', a feeling. And timing, if the feeling and time is right I can collaborate. Time can also be forced upon you in this sense.

If you participate in a collaborative project, what is the most important, the process, the product or both?

Amy: Ideally, both! but sometimes it doesn't always work out, but that's what gives me the drive. otherwise whats the point?

Dennis: Depends on the purpose. But in general the product is most important because the product is part of the process anyway, if the product is "good" than people will be willing to look into the process. on the other hand a process without product is a work in progress that can be an important part of or the catalyst/trigger for a new work/product or to introduce a new insight to others.

CONCLUSION

How can collaborative projects with a nonhierarchical structure affect the engagement and expectations of the participant(s)?

A collaborative project is a project where people interact and influence each other by working together during a period of time on a collective aim. A non hierarchical structure is created when all participants are involved by the initiator to define the process of the project. Structure helps predefining the process. Collaboration in a group with a non hierarchical structure requires a high level of confidence and submission to the predefined rules and possible outcome in order to a successful outcome.

In order to attract a group of individuals into a collaboration the role of the initiator is to create a clear trigger. Creating clear triggers within a collaborative project is essential, but left undefined during the research. The ideal situation is that the rules stimulate and trigger participation by making everyone feel comfortable with the structure and process. Participants can feel comfortable if there is no pressure on the level of performance. If everyone feels comfortable enough this can be a good ground for sharing opinions and vision in a collaboration. The definition of these parameters that trigger participation (comfort, no pressure, good group-dynamic) are variable within every individual. The different perspectives makes it hard to define what triggers people to collaborate. Curiosity seems the only aspect that is related to trigger participation. During the research an objective measurable criteria could not be defined to engage participation.

The initiator of a project can make the level of entry (threshold) easy accessible for participants if the trigger and setup rules are understandable and easy to follow. There are different stages of expectations and engagement that can change over time. Before a project participants can have for example expectations about the rules and aim of a project. If the same trigger attracts a group of participants with a different motivational background, it is impossible to fit the divergent expectations.

Giving participants a directive role when predefining structure, it gives the participant the option to involve his needs making the created rules a ultimate consensus within the group. Everyone is represented in the rules. The same change can happen to the engagement in a positive or negative way before, during or after a project. During the project the focus can shift towards meeting new people and interacting with them.

The level of skills and experience of each participant beforehand can influence the expectations and engagement. Without knowing each participant this can be a factor that is hard to take in account for the initiator. The quality and level of skills of each participant can be a level of frustration when the disability of one participant can destroy the expectations of another better skilled participant. If there is time to setup more rounds for collaboration the factor of repeating or change can be used as a structure to experience time, influence and production differently and to fit more expectations from more individuals.

Although it sounds utopic to give each participant equal rights, the outcome will be a qualitatively lower product than when responsibility is concentrated. Also it has no effect to the level of engagement when all participants have to be equally responsible. Democratic decisions on editorial rules is a long lasting discussion in order to let everyone agree (consensus) upon the made decision.

When there is a consensus reached and everybody involved agrees upon the structure that is chosen for the project not everybody's opinion will be fully translated within the agreed rules. Individual sacrifices have to be made for democratic group decisions. Therefore the level of involvement will not be maximum for each person engaged in the project.

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