

Collective Creativity

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New societal and cultural developments such as the rise of new forms of communication and cultural production within the ‘e-galaxy’, the revaluation of collaboration within the academic field and the emergence of the creative industry/creative economy require interpretation. Building the examination of these phenomena upon the long lasting debate about individual and collective creativity seems a promising way to achieve this aim. The Sydney Symposium on Collective Creativity, organised by Gerhard Fischer and Florian Vaßen, therefore gathered 48 scholars from all over the world and from a wide range of disciplines. Their goals were to challenge the clear-cut opposition of individual and collective creativity nurtured by ideological dissent especially in the second half of the 20th century, and to look for „intersections or interfaces of artistic, scientific and cultural practice where the individual and the collective merge, come together or confront each other“.¹ The papers presented at the conference examined collective creativity within diverse cultural fields, media and historical contexts, and ranged from ethnographic studies and reports of personal experience to historical reconstruction and theoretical reflection.

The starting point of the conference was a keynote paper by ANN CURTHOYS (Canberra) and JOHN DOCKER (Canberra) reflecting upon the possibilities for intellectual collaboration across disciplinary borders, in particular between historians and literary/cultural critics. Drawing on insights from their jointly written book ‘Is History Fiction?’ they outlined the complex relation between literary devices and historical facts and emphasised the methodological surplus of intellectual collaboration when writing history.

THOMAS ERNST (Luxembourg) questio-

ned the claim that literature today does not have political effects. Having examined the writings of contemporary authors such as Elfriede Jelinek, Thomas Meinecke and Feridun Zaimoglu Ernst came to the conclusion that the dissolution of individual authorship as traditionally carried out by the so-called avant-gardes is no longer subversive per se. Contemporary Western culture, shaped by commerce and media, asks for a more differentiated analysis, as collective creativity can imply submissive literary practices.

In the next paper, ANDREW MCNAMARA (Brisbane) followed the critical current that aims to overcome the division between the aesthetic and the practical sphere, characteristic to the culture of modernity. Pointing at the new societal phenomena of ‘creative industries’ and ‘creative economy’, McNamara called into question approaches which aim to unify the field of creativity, proposing instead new ways of thinking about the role of art without avoiding taboo words such as ‘autonomy’.

The new societal phenomena of ‘creative industries’ and ‘creative economy’ were also the focus of DAVID ROBERTS’ (Melbourne) paper, which, due to his absence, was read by GERHARD FISCHER (Sydney). Referring to Luc Boltanski’s and Ève Chiapello’s recent book ‘The New Spirit of Capitalism’, Roberts gave a critical account of this ‘contemporary Bohemia’, whose members, through merging with the economic sphere, give up their role as social critiques and deprive art of its social power.

In the second keynote paper of the conference ROLF G. RENNER (Freiburg) stressed the tradition of thought in which the relation between collective and individual creativity is conceptualised dialectically. Stretching back to the deconstruction of individual creativity in philological analysis of collective authorship (Friedrich August Wolf’s ‘Prolegomena ad Homerum’) and its resonance in literature (reference to Ossian in Goethe’s ‘Werther’) the idea of the dialectical relation between individual and collective creativity is actualised in

¹ Gerhard Fischer / Florian Vaßen: Call for Papers: The Sydney German Studies Symposium 2009, Collective Creativity, in: <http://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/news/conferences/collective_creativity09/> (04.08.2009).

poststructuralist theories (Nietzsche, Barthes, Foucault), in painting (Hockney), television (Kluge) and the internet.

ROMAN MAREK (Paderborn) talked about the creation and distribution of user-generated content via video-sharing sites and their influence on the notion of collective creativity. Marek considered how the material enters a process of formal evolution that implies the diminishing importance of the user. Instead of being active and emancipated, the user only contributes a small part to a bigger process out of his or her control.

SUSAN RAY (New York) provided a close examination of Gottfried Benn's early narrative works as well as some of his essays. Ray first showed how Thomas Kuhn's term of 'paradigm shift' is deeply indebted to Nietzsche's philosophy, then outlined similar ideas in Benn's early writing. Not only does Benn reflect on the confrontation between the individual artist and dominant but outdated myths (Nietzsche) or paradigms (Kuhn), but, as Ray clearly showed, his writing itself represents a radical aesthetic opposition to the then-dominant modernist paradigm.

JAMES DONALD (Sydney) offered a detailed reconstruction of the avant-garde film experiment 'Ballet mécanique', which was for many years attributed primarily to the painter Fernand Léger. Donald emphasised the contribution of the young American film-maker Dudley Murphy. Donald also considered the creative roles played by Ezra Pound and Man Ray in the production of 'Ballet mécanique' and came to the conclusion that the production process was less an efficient division of labour than a clash of egos and agendas from which something new emerged.

In his paper FLORIAN VASSEN (Hanover) stated a radicalisation of Collective Creativity in Post-Brechtian and Postdramatic Theatre, where the separation of stage and auditorium, still maintained by Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller, is transgressed. Neither the author nor the stage-manager but the spectator performs the aesthetic synthesis in a field of energy. In Postdramatic Theatre, Vassen concluded, individual creativity is embedded in collective creativity and thus both take on a new quality.

In her paper, INGE STEPHAN (Berlin) ex-

amined Elfriede Jelinek's play 'Ulrike Maria Stuart' directed by Nicolas Stemmann in Hamburg 2006. Stephan showed how the director Stemmann acted as the co-author of a play where no published text basis was provided. The fact that Stemmann integrated the author as a character into the play shows, Stephan argued, that Postdramatic Theatre still depends on the author but also uses her as material. The performative event, Stephan concluded, resists hermeneutics and can only be experienced collectively.

A very different socio-historical context was then explored by NAUSICIA MORANDI (Padua): the German religious dramatic production of the Middle Ages. Whereas the liturgical drama of the monks' community builds upon collective creativity, the plays written by well-educated abbesses and dramatists are to be considered as clear expressions of a singular authorial creativity. Morandi emphasised the great artistic and social impact exerted by the highly original works of Hroswitha of Gandersheim and Hildegard von Bingen.

In the session on Collective Visual Arts AXEL FLIETHMANN (Melbourne) reflected upon the medium of the Panorama, which first appeared in 1789. Fliethmann pointed out the surprising fact that the Panorama had been excluded from aesthetic theory, which was established as the master discourse on the arts at about the same time. According to Fliethmann, this exemplifies the difficulties aesthetic theory has always had with the concepts of collectivity, technology and economics, which all characterise the first mass medium of the Panorama.

CAROL ARCHER (Hong Kong) then gave insights into the collaborative art project 'Reciprocal Interference', involving Archer and an artist friend. Archer explained how each picture amounted to a challenge posed by one artist and an answering visual intervention by another. She emphasised the challenges the project posed both to the romantic ideal of individual authorship and the notion that collaborative work is simply a matter of harmonious co-operation.

Exploring 'The Caesura of 1800', CHRISTIANE WELLER's (Melbourne) paper looked at the different but interdependent accounts

of James Cook's second voyage by Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg. Weller focused on Georg's critical attitude toward his father's egocentric account of the voyage and presented Georg's own travel report 'Die Reise um die Welt' as a deflection of the father's gaze. In opposition to his father's travel diaries, Weller stated, Georg Forster's book aims to represent the collective dimension of the voyage.

SUSANNE LEDANFF (Canterbury) continued exploring this timeframe and reflected upon the complicated relation between individual and collective creativity during the German classical period. Ledanff focused in particular on the classical notions of 'Humanität' and 'Bildung,' which were forced to deal with both concepts of creativity in one way or the other. Examining the differences and parallels of the concepts developed respectively by Schiller, Goethe and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Ledanff traced the ambiguities of the relationship between emphatic individuality and the universal ideal of 'Humanität'.

Collective Creativity within the German Romantic Period was then illuminated by ALAN CORKHILL (Brisbane). Corkhill explored the romantic interest in collaborations as well as the belief in individual originality which characterised this period. Corkhill approached this subject via the family context and closely examined Ludwig Tieck's collaborations with both his sister Sophie Tieck and his daughter Dorothea Tieck. Corkhill emphasised the sexual politics that underlie collaborative projects within the family setting.

ANNE PEITER (Saint Denis) then presented the completely different notion of Collective Creativity inherent in the complex system of snitchers and denunciation of the Stasi. Peiter described how through the collaboration of 'informal members' social sanctions ('degradation') towards suspicious persons were imposed. This practice, argued Peiter, was to create a silent audience for the purpose of self-correction of the suspects. Peiter then examined how this strategy is reflected in two 'late' literary texts, namely Wolfgang Hilbich's novel 'Ich' and Herta Müller's 'Der König verneigt sich und tötet'.

PETER F. N. HÖRZ (Bonn) and MARCUS RICHTER (Bamberg) adopted an ethnological

approach to outline how the people in the former GDR were forced to evolve specific strategies of self-organisation beyond the ideological and material limits of the system. They argued that these old skills and competences enable East Germans to succeed under current circumstances whilst the West German population is struggling. This fact results, according to Hörz and Richter, from a certain collective creativity that developed out of the collective experiences of the socialist past.

The paper by ANNETTE HAMILTON (Sydney) contained an examination of the paintings by Neo Rauch and the New Leipzig School. Both, Hamilton argued, represent collective experiences through the artist's own dream world. Neo Rauch and his collaborators have thus created a collective consciousness through a torrent of creative expression. Surprisingly this device seems more meaningful to those outside Germany than those within.

Discussing collective creativity always entailed questioning aesthetic theories based upon the concept of individual genius. This conference was also intended to challenge anew theories of art and culture in times of fundamental social and cultural change. Nevertheless, a critical attitude towards both the notion of the 'collective' and the notion of 'creativity' was expressed from the beginning of the conference. Participants called into question whether these worn-out concepts could meet standards of methodological accuracy. As a result of these concepts' recent amalgamation into management discourses 'critical creativity' was proposed as an alternative term. In this light the overarching concept of 'collective creativity' turned out to be the arena where the relation between the social and the aesthetic was discussed. A range of different opinions were expressed, especially regarding the internet: is the internet a way to democratise cultural production and communication (e-democracy), does it engender a self-directed process of development of cultural forms (evolution) or is it used by individuals as an opinion-generating tool?

Besides the achievement of the conference in building up a wide panorama of thoughts and viewpoints it seemed especially productive to confront theoretical and historical ap-

proaches with the concrete and personal experiences of artistic collaborators. Choosing the delicate standpoint of 'collective creativity' proved a fruitful ground for a self-reflexive and critical discussion about the status of art and culture. The publication of a conference volume is planned.

Conference overview:

Opening remarks: Klaus Krischok, Director of the Goethe Institute and James Donald, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales

Introduction: Gerhard Fischer and Florian Vaßen

Section I: Keynote Address

Chair: Gerhard Fischer

Ann Curthoys and John Docker: The Critic and the Historian: Reflections on Intellectual Collaboration

Section II: Science and Collective Creativity

Chair: Florian Vaßen

Janet Chan, Nikó Antalffy and Christina Mareel: Collective Creativity in Science – An Organisational Analysis

Danny McDonald and Gavin Lambert: Confocal: A View Within

Section III: Society and Collective Creativity

Chair: Tara Forrest

Thomas Ernst (University of Luxemburg): From Avant-garde Guerillas to Capitalistic Teamwork? Concepts of Collective Creativity between Subversion and Submission

Andrew McNamara: The Dilemma of Creativity: Then & Now

David Roberts: From the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism to the Creative Economy. Reflections on the New Spirit of Art and Capitalism

Section IV: Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Collaboration

Chair: Axel Fliethmann

Janet Chan, Roanna Gonsalves and Noreen Metcalfe: Blending the Two Cultures: The Fragility of Interdisciplinary Creative Collaboration

Ned Curthoys: The significance of intellectual collaboration and interdisciplinary conversation for German Jewish and German Émigré Intellectuals

Section V: Keynote Address

Chair: Alison Lewis

Rolf G. Renner: Subversion of Creativity and the Dialectics of the Collective

Section VI: Postmodern and Digital Creativity

Chair: Thomas Ernst

Annette Vowinckel: Is Simulation a Collective Creative Practice?

Tara Forrest: Creative Co-Productions: Alexander Kluge's Television Experiments

Roman Marek: Creativity meets circulation: Internet videos, amateurs and the process of evolution

Section VII: Collective Writing 1

Chair: Christiane Weller

Anna König: Richard, Samuel, Max and Franz: Collective authorship and its fiction

Susan Ray: Gottfried Benn's Poetics as Paradigm Shift

Stefanie Kreuzer: Intertextuality as Mandatory Collective Creativity? Textual Interconnection in Klaus Hoffer's Novel 'Bei den Bieresch'

Section VIII: Collective Writing 2

Chair: Alan Corkhill

Christopher Kelen: Poetry as Dialogic Play: on the Translation/Response continuum

Hilda Tam: Writing a coauthored novel online: Collective creativity in 'Chinese Costumes'

Walter Struve: 'We are not dealers in fables'. Kurt Offenburg's enthusiasm for 'Arbeiterdichtung' as collective creativity

Section IX: The 1920's – Collaborative Experimentation

Chair: Rolf Renner

James Donald: Ballet Mécanique

Gabriele Fois-Kaschel: Synergetic art production in the context of global communication

Eileen Chanin and Daniela Kaleva: The French Lyrebird and Collective Creativity

Section X: Collective Theatre Work

Chair: Meg Mumford

Günther Heeg: Transcultural Gestures. Collective Engagement in Theatre, Practice of separation and Intermedial Crystallizations

Florian Vaßen: Collective Creativity as a theatrical play of artists and spectators

Gerd Koch: To remember and to activate: Collective creative processes in the theatre. Two case studies from Berlin

Section XI: Brecht and Collectivity

Chair: Ulrike Garde

Andrew Hurley: Jazz, Collective Creativity and the beginning of the Young German Cinema

Andreas Aurin: Towards the Brechtian Lehrstück as a Tool of Collective Creativity

Section XII: Postdramatic Collectivity

Chair: Florian Vaßen

Inge Stephan: Collective Creativity in Postdramatic Theatre: Elfriede Jelinek's 'Ulrike Maria Stuart' directed by Nicolas Stemmann in Hamburg (2006)

Ulrike Garde: Spotlight to the audience: Collective Creativity in recent Documentary and Reality Theatre from Australia and Germany

Meg Mumford: Sharing the Power of Creation: Interactions Involving Nomadic Artists and Socially Diverse Protagonists in Recent Documentary Performance

Section XIII: Performer and Collectivity

Chair: Gerd Koch

Ralf Rauker: Creativity and the Collective Body in Performance

Kyriaki Frantzi: Directing as collaborative playwriting: Intersections of improvisation and orality

Section XIV: Collective and Visual Arts

Chair: Annette Hamilton

Nausica Morandi: Borders overcome? Coexistence of collective and individual creativity in

a so called Dark Age

Axel Fliethmann: Vision around 1800 – the Panorama as Collective Artwork

Carol Archer: 'Reciprocal Interference': theorising a collaborative art project

Section XV: The Caesura of 1800: Collective and Individuality

Chair: Inge Stephan

Christiane Weller: Travelling companions – the writing of Cook's second voyage by Georg Forster, Johann Reinhold Forster, James Cook, Anders Sparrman, John Elliott and Richard Pickersgill

Susanne Ledanff: After the Storm and Stress (Sturm und Drang): Collective explorations of subjectivity and individuality in the German Classical Period

Alan Corkhill: Interrogating the symbolic relationship of individual and collective artistic and intellectual practices within the German Romantic Movement

Section XVI: The GDR and the idea of the Collective

Chair: Gerhard Fischer

Alison Lewis: „My dear Erwin has been writing short stories of late; we are infectious“: the romancing of collective creativity in the 'Bitterfelder Weg' and in Brigitte Reimann's letters and diaries

Anne Peiter: „Creativity Requires [...] the Methodical and Purposeful Guidance of the Development of the Workers' Intellectual Abilities“. Reflections on the Stasi's Notion of Collective Creativity

Peter F. N. Hörz and Marcus Richter: Old Know-how for New Challenges. East Germans and Collective Creativity?

Annette Hamilton: Neo Rauch and the 'New Leipzig School': personal vision, collective memory

Concluding remarks: Florian Vaßen

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