

Engaging The Public

Dialogical art¹ and frameworks to collaborative environments

Markuz Wernli Saitô, May 24, 2006

<http://www.momentarium.org/research/collaboration.pdf>

*"Modern economies are based on production, not relationships. They are based on ownership, not community. And they are based on long term sacrifice [...] not response."*² Ingvil Hareide† and Ion Sorvin, N55

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Abstract

"In Britain it's almost expected that art is present in social and environmental initiatives, because art can open doors and infuse mediocre subject matter with the symbolic and tangible."³ Jane Trowell, *Platform London*

The world we live in hovers between complete anxiety and a total incapacity to predict or imagine consequences as seen in human-provoked environmental changes and aggressive power struggles. In this pretext collaboration is not only an agent for the utopian – a means for escape, for a way out – but also a desire to understand or order human potential to *not* be destructive. Collaborations gain increasingly in value because artists and the public who work closer together have the potential to transform our lives. This need to reintegrate art in real life context is confirmed particularly in

¹ Kester, Grant, 2004. *Communication Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art: The aesthetic experience (and the ideas which language contains and conveys) which is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of endless redescriptions of the world.* University of California Press.

² Hareide, Invil; Sorvin, Ion, 2003. *N55 Book, Manuals for DISCUSSION.* Pork Salad Press and N55, Copenhagen, p.126.

³ Trowell, Jane, 2006, April 28. Core member of the artist group PLATFORM London. Telephone Interview (London/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

Europe where institutionalized art groups have become vital forces in socio-cultural planning and development in the past two decades. As more artists move from a product-centered and commodified to a dialogical working mode, it is important to look closer at the quality of collaborations, the roles of participation, and our understanding for processes. With dialog being the 'media', collaboration becomes the resource to reach individuals and social groups – not a small challenge indeed. But do we really know what principles and dynamics govern meaningful collaboration?

Introduction:

Art in the service of life⁴

"We must shift our thinking away from bringing great art to the people to working with people to create art that is meaningful."⁵ Lynn Sowder

Art responding to the world is an old quest in need to be continuously actualized. Overcoming the amplified unaesthetic and numbness of everyday reality many artists attempt to get back and find the contemporary articulation of what art critic Christian Kravagna refers to "art as adventure"⁶; art with its power of illusion, its capacity of negotiating reality which often lacks soulfulness. In the words of activist critic Suzie Gablik "soul enters through life, through pleasure, conviviality, and playfulness".⁷ The desire to bring soul and beauty (or a sense thereof) back into life consequently leads to shared experiences, or a "connective aesthetics"⁸ which repositions the artist as artist practitioner *within* society, outlined by scholar Grant Kester: "In a splay of mediatory practices and exchanges the artist becomes more accessible". In the role of a visionary the artist practitioner works in cultural community practices in the role of a reliable partner who balances social compatibility with artistic self-determination. In Kester's research this is summarized as "[...] 'dismantling' the artistic personality itself to overcome the isolation of the artist."⁹

Collaborations with the public contain the uncontrollable element, resonating something of Hegel's idea of "art as adventure".¹⁰ The departure from a static and product-centered process to open-ended collaboration inherently harbor the element of experiment and emergence, which sets us free from preconceived roles in our narrow system dominated by "turbo

⁴ Suzi, Gablik, 2004. Beyond the Disciplines, Art Without Borders, Greenmuseum.org p.18. <http://moncon.greenmuseum.org/papers/gablik1.html>

⁵ Sowder, Lynn, 1995. Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, p.126. Bay Press.

⁶ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.5.

(Re)publicart.net/Eur. Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

⁷ Gablik, Suzi, 1998. Nature of Beauty in Contemporary Art, p.2. New Renaissance Magazine, Vol. 8.

⁸ Gablik, Suzi, 1995. Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art: Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism, p. 77. Bay Press.

⁹ Kester, Grant, 2005. Collaborative Practices in Environmental Art, p.1. Greenmuseum.org.

¹⁰ Hegel, G.W.F., 1975. Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art, Vol.1, p. 103. Clarendon Press, Oxford, N.Y.

consumerism"¹¹. The beauty of collaboration carries the liberating promise of escape — a moment, a gesture, a pursuit, which has escape as part of its motive. Art producer Michael Boyce suggests: "Beauty, not just as an object (or subject), but also as a horizon or as an agent [...] opens or generates the condition of escape (or even beauty as escape itself). Escape here could be understood as flight and freedom for everybody involved (i.e. condition or action): a kind of breaking out into a (alternate) state which can reside in the movement or gesture itself."¹² Enabling these rather internal and personal transformations is a mandate for artist practitioners in a time full of indoctrinated 'liberations'.

We should think of art as an experimental field to transcend disciplinary boundaries, and to bridge areas of knowledge. Grant Kester describes the mandate of today's artist as to "reveal creative insight as a shared human capacity"¹³. This can be understood as an invitation for *circular learning* between artist, public and life. Collaboration is admittedly a way to overcome one's own uncertainties with the pleasure of becoming a 'merged identity'. Cultural psychiatrist Jeanne Randolph refers to it as "a safe zone where the complications of one's own engagement with a subject (a conceptual unit) is shared or dispersed amongst a collective. The blending of values, goals and experience between the collaborators seeds "positive contamination"¹⁴. Archeologist Kurtis Leslick explains further that "the 'actualizing' role of collaboration works because one is drawn away from their primacy relationship with a subject".¹⁵ In the conscious collaboration we can recognize an egalitarian approach to creativity illustrated by curator Nadine Wassermann who declares creativity as a shared resource and encouragement for everyone: "The power of art reminds us of our humanity and our connections to another in our everyday lives like in indigenous cultures."¹⁶

'Social Sculpture' reloaded

"The contemporary artist [...] is a 'context-provider' rather than a 'contents-provider'".¹⁷ Peter Dunn, artist

¹¹ Wassermann, Nadine, 2000. A Pabulum on Art and The Everyday, p.1. Journal of Mundane Behavior, vol. 1.3.

¹² Boyce, Michael, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.5.

¹³ Kester, Grant, 2005. Collaborative Practices in Environmental Art, p.1. Greenmuseum.org.

¹⁴ Diamond, Sara, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.10.

¹⁵ Leslick, Kurtis, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.3.

¹⁶ Wassermann, Nadine, 2000. A Pabulum on Art and The Everyday, p.3. Journal of Mundane Behavior, vol. 1.3.

¹⁷ Dunn, Peter, 2004. Communication Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art, p.1. University of California Press.

Artist practitioners recognize the growing 'social disintegration' as a clear call for action. "By creating situations in which artists and communities may work together to perceive both the differences that separate them and the similarities that connect them, these projects strive to *activate the 'space' between groups and individuals as a zone of potentiality*, in which the relationship between contemporary art and life may be renegotiated."¹⁸ The use of collaboration as art medium derives from a responsibility of artist citizens trying to re-integrate art in life context. This broad underlying notion of art in the 20th century describes Suzie Gablik as "art with socially redeeming purpose and art in the service of life"¹⁹. Remarkably even business scholar Clive Holtham and Victoria Ward acknowledge that "[...] art acts as an agent for collaboration and the artifact becomes a tool for slowing down in the digital age of speed and the formation of *communities of practice*".²⁰

Joseph Beuys 'democratization of art' never questioned the elitarian status of the artist, undermining the idea of Social Sculpture. That's why sociologist John Roberts propagates "alternatives to replace the product-driven *signature artist*".²¹ Today the artist's constructive intervention is to scrutinize commonly profit-driven processes of collaboration to address the socio-political dilemma in a world obsessed with short-sighted results. Sociologist Eva Chiapello states poignantly: "Our collaborative practice is apparently focussed on producing, on providing objects or images, yet this belies the range of interactions."²² Art critic Brian Holmes refers to collaboration as "a search to maintain the intensities of art outside the concentrated forms of object [...] with its alienation of industrial labor and passive consumption (adopted by 'museum ecology')".²³ Art in society today plays commonly a rather volatile-defensive role indicated by curator Nadine Wassermann: "Young art in the 21st century is in an optimistic cynicism as adaption to the hyper-consumerist landscape [exemplified in installations of Yumi Janairo Roth]". As reactive and defensive attitudes prevail, mainstream art remains ever increasingly on the sidelines and in the defense. In this harmful cultural lethargy Wassermann points to socio-cultural engagement of the arts: "The only way out [of this retraction] is to work right on the communities and decision-making process with the key element of collaboration."²⁴

¹⁸ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.5. (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

¹⁹ Gablik, Suzi, 1998. Nature of Beauty in Contemporary Art, p.3. New Renaissance Magazine, Vol. 8, No. 1.

²⁰ Holtham, Clive; Ward, Victoria, 2000. Slow Company - how procrastination and delay improve the quality of knowledge, collaboration and understanding, p. 16.

²¹ Robert, John, 2004. Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form, p.559. Routledge Kala Press/Black Umbrella.

²² Holmes, Brian, 2003. Diffusion: Collaborative Practice in Contemporary Art, p.1

²³ Holmes, Brian, 2003. Diffusion: Collaborative Practice in Contemporary Art, p.1

²⁴ Wassermann, Nadine, 2000. A Pabulum on Art and The Everyday, p.6. Journal of Mundane Behavior,

As we witness the steady *deterioration of civil entities* — government and welfare systems drowning in financial and social debts, steadily on the brink to bankruptcy — we reluctantly can sense the limits of monetary value exchange. At the same time we all — including most of the *art world* — put up with “corporate democracies”²⁵ where the official decision-making process alienates citizens with lobbies, parties and a shortsighted profit-driven agenda. This unsustainable social condition sets the pretext for collaborative art. Maybe this is the call for a consequent advancement of Social Sculpture, which finally can redeem its delicate promise: “[...] art with creative co-operation at its core as the new currency with which society would be transformed [...]”.²⁶ Artistic initiatives like Munich Money, WochenKlausur (details below) provide protagonist and long-needed practical models of collective action in the absence of viable alternatives to the spread of the capitalist market as the only social form and economic organization. These collaborations show how an integral sense of aesthetic returns to the life of society while propelling collective consciousness and personal responsibility. Noteworthy is the idea of an egalitarian partnership, where the artist is a *social enzyme* for communal processes. Relationships between full time and part time artists can be the offspring of small-scale models in self-determination. This expansion of the creative act challenges autonomous authorial identity and requires relational and lateral thinking. Brian Holmes points out, that “The cultural form of art is more and more expressed in the autonomy of group and issue through working process and product as well as traversing to other groups.”²⁷ Philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis defines autonomy as the attempt of the individual or social self (*autos*) to create its own laws or rules (*nomos*), which is the invitation for dialogical and collaborative art to catalyze networks of self-organization and sustainable systems of value exchange. The artist practitioner’s challenge is to spread seeds for collaborative environments.

Levels of engagement: from audience to co-producer

*“People are inclined to network, but not necessarily to collaborate.”*²⁸
Michael Boyce, producer

Communication theorist Sara Diamond creates the important relation of multipartisan collaboration and transformative dynamic — which is what

vol. 1.3.

²⁵ Welch, Michael, 2004. Corporate Democracy, Home Power Magazine #57

²⁶ Holtham, Clive; Ward, Victoria, 2000. Slow Company - how procrastination and delay improve the quality of knowledge, collaboration and understanding, p. 17.

²⁷ Holmes, Brian, 2003. Diffusion: Collaborative Practice in Contemporary Art, p.1.

²⁸ Boyce, Michael, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.7.

relevant dialogical art strives for. "Collaboration [...] for some people is simply working together, creating together in a context where there is an intention to either make that relationship ongoing or create a product of that labor." In contrary, emancipating collaboration is "[...] the process which combines the knowledge, experience and previous understandings or methodologies that are *substantively different* from that which the participants or even partners entered the relationship with."²⁹ This emergent collaboration builds on *relationships of mutual learning* contrary to 'cooperative arrangements' which are usually controlled, hierarchical and therefore narrowing possibilities. It's important to look at strategic paradigms behind collaborative models. Anthropologist Kurtis Leslick notes: "The real issue becomes the tension between collaboration as a deeply embedded social process, and collaboration simply as a strategic means to an end."³⁰

Curator and critic Christian Kravagna points out that participatory practice requires reflection and cautions that is often a "fashionable approach of working with others and [a] trendy incorporation of the social in small, aesthetically easily digestible bites, so called *socio-chic*"³¹. The distinct artist practitioner chooses the level and conditions of participation consciously. Looking at the relationship between artwork and audience Kravagna differentiates the following degrees of engagement and participant's influence:

- INTERACTIVE SITUATIONS are usually addressed to an individual [...] and allow for one or more reactions, which influence the work – usually in a [...] momentary [...] manner without changing or co-determining its structure.
- COLLECTIVE PRACTICE stands for the conception, production and implementation of works or actions by multiple people with no principle differentiation among them in terms of status.
- PARTICIPATION usually takes normally place in group situations [...] is based on a [clear] differentiation between producers and recipients, is interested in the participation of the latter, and turns over a substantial portion of the work to them either at the point of conception or in the further course of the work.
- COLLABORATION makes the audience to designated co-producers and an implicit part of the piece usually over an extended period of time.

²⁹ Diamond, Sara, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.2.

³⁰ Leslick, Kurtis, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.2.

³¹ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.1. (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

Objectives and commitment determine the quality of collaboration

*"Art lets us think in uncommon ways and gives us the capacity to think critically and creatively across boundaries. Outside of the narrow thinking of the culture of specialization and outside of the hierarchies we are pressed into when we are employed in an institution, a social organization, or a political party."*³² Wolfgang Zinggl, WochenKlausur

Lasting contributions to society require working with appropriated methods. In Kravagna's analysis the purpose of collaborative art initiatives guides the process "depending on the ideological foundation, as a program or demand for change, participation can be conjoined with: *revolutionary* ("dissolution of art in the praxis of life"), *reformatory* ("democratization of art") or — with less political content — *playful and/or didactic*, perception and "consciousness altering" ambitions.³³ Art historian Grant Kester asserts that "in place of the grand recites of past political movements (which figured the collective as a universalizing abstraction) contemporary groups present pragmatic, localized strategies that provide alternative models of collective and collaborative agency based on an affinity, friendship and shared commitment."³⁴

Based on real-world samples, Kravagna identifies four methodologies for collaborations in the public reproduced here in shortened form:

1. Art for healing

"This pastoral approach was propagated by a host of social art initiatives in the 90s under the name of New Genre Public Art (NGPA). NGPA puts social practice in the place of art interpretation and works with the narrow framework of ideal-type-step-model of *diagnosis, therapy, and healing*".³⁵ The rather rhetorically connected NGPA derives its relevance for a specific community through the *dialogical structure* of its integration. Kravagna postulates his skepticism regarding the long-term implications: "in some instances the usefulness of social (artistic) action suits the calculations of a

³² Zinggl, Wolfgang, 2002. WochenKlausur methodology. Retrieved from http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/arbeitsweise_en.htm.

³³ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.2. (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

³⁴ Kester, Grant, 2005. Collaborative Practices in Environmental Art, p.1. ArtCircles.org/id56.html, ISSN 1558-5387.

³⁵ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.4-8 (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

state that can no longer afford its citizens and there exhorts them to self-help”³⁶.



**Code 33 (1998/9) Suzanne Lacy
Innecity youth and police in dialog**

‘Code 33’ by Suzanne Lacy, involved over two years (1998/99) hundreds of youth, police officers, and community residents in Oakland, California to promote changes in the way police relates to young people. The project included youth art workshops and video productions, facilitated also confrontational workshops with youth and police, press reports, community discussions, and a performance staged on a downtown garage rooftop.

2. Open experiment

“*Social convergence* conjoins political subject matter with pleasurable experiences, integrating participants in an ambivalent situation of offers (aesthetic experience, information). The events aren’t defined beforehand according to certain categories like “community” or “the others” (workers, old people, homeless, etc.) Participation in this transforming process does not mean taking part in a vague feeling of community as much as entering into a confrontation that touches the boundaries of personality and politics. The artist has usually an openly articulated self-interest in the matter”.



**LAND (1998~) in Norway and Chicago N55, Invil Hareide†, Ion Sorvin
Questioning concepts of ownership: Plots of ground donated to everybody**

³⁶ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p.6 (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig

'LAND' is an open-ended participatory project by Danish art group N55 around Invil Aarbakke† and Ion Sorvin, where small plots of land worldwide are 'acquired' and dedicated to free access and public use. Locations range from northern Norway to the Californian desert, to cities such as Chicago. Each location is designated with geographical coordinates and a steel polyedric cairn (characteristic for N55) by which the area is declared to belong to the commons: anyone may use it as long as it is acknowledged, that "LAND gives access to land."

3. Radical democracy

"This rather utopian proposition evolves around the idea of Social Sculpture³⁷ based on interaction with audience in a self-created portrait of a community. A cultural institution is played through in a model-like manner. This is a self-determined collective action where art and life praxis form a unit if the praxis is aesthetic and the art is practical. Contrary to Happenings in the 60s there is a direct transfer of *competence to act* for the participants. The artist applies her competence in finding creative solutions for long-term improvements in human coexistence, especially in areas where the official decision-making system has become self-occupied and unresponsive (dysfunctional). Experience from The Open Public Library shows that there is a correlation between the social standard of a community and its capability for democracy."



**Open Public Library (1993) Hamburg
Martin Clegg, Martin Guttmann**

'The Public Open Library' (1993) by Michael Clegg and Martin Guttmann was installed in converted outdoor utility boxes in three suburbs of Hamburg. In contrast to normal libraries this project proposed open, free-flowing forms of self-organization where the nearby population was asked to donate and use books. A sociological survey accompanied the experiment. In one suburb a citizen's initiative was founded and continued the initiative. Two libraries in more impoverished

neighborhoods were partially or fully sabotaged.

³⁷ Schmidt, Enno, 2000. Social Sculpture, a-r-c, issue 3, The Social Sculpture Research Unit, <http://www.social-sculpture.org/>.



Permanent Breakfast (1996~) Friedemann Derschmidt
 Movement to reclaim public spaces. Samples of Papua and Staten Island

'Permanent Breakfast' (1996~) is an art movement originating in Vienna around a group of Friedemann Derschmidt who began to hold breakfasts in public places. Following the snowball principle one person invites related and unrelated persons to the outdoor breakfasting and the guests commit themselves to organize another event within ten days. Consequently Permanent Breakfasts sprang up as a worldwide phenomenon to reclaim and penetrate unused potentials in public space. In certain instances the events triggered the formation of ongoing local initiatives.

4. Counter consciousness

"If art is imagined as a form of communication [...] it can be invested in given social spaces (e.g. commuters, mass housing) and their relationships for sociological experiences and transformations. The process renders self-determined involvement within a group of participants in an aesthetically creative and practical endeavor. The audience becomes co-producer and is already integrated in the origination of the artwork. The scope of social action beyond the art context is oriented towards the concrete life context of the people that take part in them. The resulting network of social relationships can be found so productive that participants continue or multiply similar structures themselves beyond the project."³⁸

³⁸ Kravagna, Christian, 1998. Working on the Communities, Models of Participatory Praxis, p. 9. (Re)publicart.net/European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. Translated from German by Aileen Derig



**Still Waters (1992) Platform
Re-imagining London's Rivers**

'Still Waters', Re-imagining London's Rivers (1992) by art group PLATFORM contrasted the river's active past with its buried condition today. A team of economist, psychiatrist, sculptor, environmental activists and public educators organized a series of public meetings, walks, ritualized swimmings, and performances involving a light-animated debate about the rivers. This provoked the independent foundation of a mock institution called Effra River Redevelopment Agency.



**Intervention in Drug Policy (1995)
WochenKlausur's boat trip retreats**

"Concrete intervention and dialogical exchange plays a central role in the works of the Austrian group WochenKlausur, [...] concerned with communicative interaction in non-art settings. As their name suggests ("weeks of closure") their projects are defined in terms of a set time frame and seclusion during which they first describe a specific problem and then bring together the resources necessary to facilitate its resolution through a concentrated series of actions."³⁹

For 'Intervention in Drug Policy' (1995) the artist group WochenKlausur was invited by Shedhalle gallery in Zurich to facilitate the realization of a daytime shelter for drug-addicted sex workers who were in desperate need for sleep and counseling. To gather support, daily boat trips on Lake Zurich were arranged with groups of four experts, in order to exchange information and discuss their opinions on drug policy remote from the pressures of the public arena. Sixty specialists participated in the talks, which secured political and media support for the project. Eventually a building was rented and furnished with the help of public and private funding.

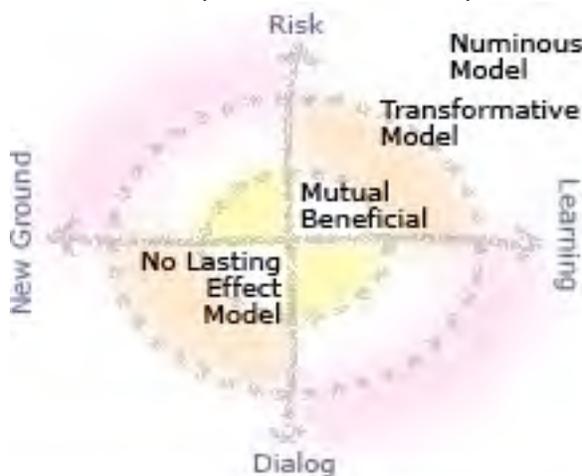
³⁹ Kester, Grant, 2004. Communication Pieces, Community and Communication in Modern Art, p.102. University of California Press.

What does meaningful collaboration need?

"When one wants to talk about art, one has [...] to talk about persons and their meaningful behavior with other persons and things in concrete situations."⁴⁰ Invil Hareide† & Ion Sorvin, N55

Scrutinizing the *quality* of dialog and collaboration is very central to the long-range implications and sustainability of socially driven art — not only for the projects presented above. Artist practitioner Lehan W. Ramsay has extensive collaborative experience in the science and community context paying careful attention to educational implications. Based on the collaborator's *level of commitment* and *perceptive mobility* she differentiates three models of cross-disciplinary collaborations:

- *The Mutual Benefit, No Lasting Effect Model (MBNLM)*, where the involved parties combine efforts and/or enticing expertise, working side by side in a more or less product-centered process. The parties are less interested in



learning from each other, than in pragmatically seeking gains from the expertise of the other. This model is prevalent, but uninteresting.

- *The Transformation Model* is where collaborators invest truly themselves in the — usually lengthy — process of trial and error where they possibly learn from each other.

- *The Numinous Model* unites collaborative partners in a project outside their field, or outside established fields, into a territory that's altogether new. The constraints of the project will force

them to step out of their usual roles and processes, to utilize their talents and skills in different ways. They want to be able to look at the world with new eyes and find new solutions.⁴¹

Good collaborations come down to the person-to-person level and demand a communication-savvy artist with specific sensibilities, as noted by art educator Eddie Shanken: "The negotiation of collaborative process is, by

⁴⁰ Hareide, Invil; Sorvin, Ion, 2003. N55 Book, Manuals for DISCUSSION. Pork Salad Press and N55, Copenhagen, p.123.

⁴¹ Ramsay, Lehan, 2006. Collaboration: Moving Up to the Future, p.1

nature, a careful one. The intimate intertwining of personal and professional identities, the superimposition of both moral and ideological standards, and the trust and vulnerability of its participants demands a great commitment of responsibility. It's about letting go of personal boundaries and embracing a consensual vision."⁴² Ichi Ikeda realizes community based water art projects in Japan, which often undergo this transition from reluctance to engagement: "Initially each party has their own soul searching to do, becomes self-absorbed and the confidence to act is gone. Here I propose the *dynamics of differences* where we pursue ideas utilizing everybody's participant's [...] background."⁴³

Based on the experience of previously quoted artist practitioners we can identify five elementary areas (vectors) crucial for transformative collaborations in socio-cultural context.

● **Artistic Function**

"Art can turn people off. Important is that you are clever and informed about your audiences. Especially in international context we ought to be cautious and call it creative process instead of art." Jane Trowell, Platform London

Dialogical art involves the participation of a diverse group in the realization of art. Regardless whether the artwork is 'excellent', 'inspirational' or hopefully both, there are intrinsic qualities and skills associated with artmaking that are fundamentally valuable to social art. Artist practitioners working in the socio-cultural field are keen to avoid sliding into the promotional tendencies where the activities lose veracity and the critical (as seen in fine art). The Harrison Studio therefore proposes a kind of 'informed artistic license': "Extensive research informs what ought to be accomplished but we remain non-possesive and without preconceived solutions: our fundamental 'client' is the cultural landscape."⁴⁴ Danish art practitioner and educator Rikke Luther describes the virtuous idealism behind her initiatives: "My motivation is to find ways to question how our systems are set up. Art is a distinct way of thinking, of utilizing language in order to create alternatives to the mainstream culture. I am interested in language, [...] how it relates people to their world. But much of language today is more and more closed up into a narrow spectrum of communication."⁴⁵ The courageous vision and artistic autonomy is a decisive motivation factor for Wolfgang Zingg from WochenKlausur: "We go into projects which allow us to sort out the themes

⁴² Shanken, Eddy, 2003. *The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics*. The Banff New Media Institute, p.5.

⁴³ Ikeda, Ichi, 2006, April 18. Proprietor of Art Water Projects. Email interview (Kanagawa/Kyoto) translated from Japanese by Yuka Saitô and Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁴⁴ Harrison, Helen; Harrison, Newton, 2004. *Groundworks: The Harrison Studio*, p.24. Exhibition catalogue, Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University.

⁴⁵ Luther, Rikke, 2006, April 16. Member of the artist groups N55 and Learning Site in Copenhagen. Telephone Interview (Stockholm/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

ourselves like a classic artist who has full autonomy over the subject matter. Therefore we don't consider ourselves as consultants but as artists."⁴⁶ Hand in hand with artistic vision (in the service of the greater good) goes perseverance to face public realities and obstacles, in Claudia Eipeldauer's words: "There isn't such a thing as an ideal collaboration because each cooperation is transforming. This can only be initiated with the collaborator's readiness to dedicate a certain period of time at specific conditions towards a given problem".⁴⁷ Artistic function is a creative license, which works towards transformation between the artist's interest and the community. The openness for unexpected outcomes, which alone are not to be achieved or predictable, is a fundamental prerequisite. Ultimately, the artistic process and outcome assists to mediate meaning, negotiation of perspectives, commonality and difference.

● Building Connectedness

*"We establish connections predominantly on a personal level [...]. It's vital that collaborators team up with fondness and as friends. That makes it easy to broach and eliminate issues early on as they come up. Relationships other than that don't work".*⁴⁸ Claudia Eipeldauer, WochenKlausur

Connectedness is a principle that deals with social trust and cohesion. Mutual trust is the glue that holds a society together. Art is one means by which contradictions in beliefs or values can be embraced, perhaps debated and even challenged in ways that would be difficult to achieve in other community forums. Human relations and group dynamics are not only the key resource of dialogical art. It's the connectedness which creates safe spaces to leave conventions behind and breaking open new ground as explained by Wolfgang Zingg: "It's understood that each project requires a person which guiding and thus keeping the group together. Our projects come to live and are made viable through creative ideas, risk taking, and the indispensable element of play."⁴⁹ Jane Trowell of Platform London explains what it takes to establish this fertile common ground: "The loyalty in the team comes from our strong relationships in which we constantly invest. There are conventions in place so that nobody conceals their opinions. We ensure that there is space for people to be supported in difficult times. It's important to stick to the principles and criteria of a project, which we do not compromise for such a thing like a deadline."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Zingg, Wolfgang, 2006, April 19. Founder of the artist group WochenKlausur in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto) translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁴⁷ Eipeldauer, Claudia, 2006, March 27. Email Interview Vienna/Kyoto. Translated by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁴⁸ Eipeldauer, Claudia, 2006, March 27. Email Interview Vienna/Kyoto. Translated by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁴⁹ Zingg, Wolfgang, 2006, April 19. Founder of the artist group WochenKlausur in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto) translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵⁰ Trowell, Jane, 2006, April 28. Core member of the artist group PLATFORM London. Telephone Interview (London/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

Connectedness comes in different structures and permanence. Platform London unites its employed staff based on a common cause and culture of diversity and cross-fertilization: "It's very uncommon to see organizations like Platform London which comprises people of so varied backgrounds as environmental campaigners, art activists, sculptor, writer, and former members of the oil industry... The unified diversity of Platform is a microcosm of what an integrated society could look like."

In Japan with much less artistic and activist structures in place, Ichi Ikeda builds connectedness rooted in daily habits and locations: "Not only do we place artwork onto places, but we move around them and tie them into our routines. As a facilitator I ought to be right in the middle of the action, because true collaboration evolves when we move beyond our thoughts."⁵¹ Rikke Luther from the Danish artist collective Learning Site points out the importance of immersion in her worldwide practice as art educator: "A crucial part is being invited into a community and participate in its life. In Monterrey, Mexico, we realized family habitats with collected materials on occupied land. It was eye opening to have this open dialog with persons of so varied backgrounds and look at life from different angles."⁵²

It's a given that this *art of the social* has also implications on shared authorship as indicated by Joel Slayton: "A literal displacement of the individual into an environment of associative relationships establishes an authorship in which there is no singularity of ownership. Through central authorship information becomes shared property".⁵³ Reality shows that problems of authorship can arise when art initiatives become established and disparate interests clash as seen in *Permanent Breakfast* upon receiving European Union grant money: "The gap opened between artists and activists. The first group strives to establish through art a career and livelihood, whereas the other is looking to test-drive alternative ways of living."⁵⁴

● Emotional Intelligence

*"We need to trust, to be able to extend ourselves, to take risks, to be comfortable with failure. We need to welcome conflict, because creativity often comes not in spite of but through conflict and confusion."*⁵⁵

Lehan W. Ramsay, Art educator ArtHarbour

The willingness to go into a terrain for colliding sensibilities, paradigms and

⁵¹ Ikeda, Ichi, 2006, April 18. Proprietor of Art Water Projects. Email interview (Kanagawa/Kyoto) translated from Japanese by Yuka Saitô and Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵² Luther, Rikke, 2006, April 16. Member of the artist groups N55 and Learning Site in Copenhagen. Telephone Interview (Stockholm/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵³ Slayton, Joel, 2002, *Collaboration as Media*, p.1. Switch Journal issue 10, Cadre Laboratory for New Media, San Jose State University.

⁵⁴ Derschmidt, Friedemann, 2006, April 12, 2006. Founder of Permanent Breakfast and Rites Institute in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto). Translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵⁵ Ramsay, Lehan, 2006. *Collaboration: Moving Up to the Future*, p.1

theoretical conceptions underpinned with respect is a prerequisite. Art practitioners in unison emphasize their communication competence and their ability to talk to different audiences like Jane Trowell: "On the human level [...] we are working with individuals not representatives. We are looking for the right person, as opposed to a job title. For a renewable energy project we needed a hydro engineer working with us in the inner city. It was about feeling out if the person can move easily between the different challenges."⁵⁶ Friedemann Derschmidt highlights the communicative: "Being an artist and professional mediator I am fully accountable for efficient ways of communication. Especially in socially engaged projects the prolonged monitoring and guidance is elementary. [...] A few years ago we realized a sophisticated wine tasting (*Weinkost*) for the homeless in Vienna beneath a bridge with sommelier and premium wines. Besides the winemakers we had particularly strong backing from the homeless gazette and its founder [...], which gave this action dimension and meaning. The artists held a ritual of moderation with the homeless population who proved to be respectable wine connoisseurs able to keep up with experts. The action showed how the shifting context determines the handling of a drug."⁵⁷

Established methods of discussion are essential, especially if disagreements arise as Kester points out: "There is the duality between the risk of doubt and uncertainty versus the possibility of an opening out of the vulnerability of intersubjective exchange."⁵⁸ Zinggl emphasizes the common denominator in the communication practice of *WochenKlausur*: "The collaborative group – no matter how diverse its individuals – must possess a homogenous culture of communication and get along really well with each other."⁵⁹ Rikke Luther underscores the level of trust building in the projects of *Learning Site*: "Everything comes down to real dialog. I am interested in the long-term dialog. It's the working in small concentrations, away from the hermetic approach and fearful control. That's where you create openings and space for your partners to take over the project."⁶⁰ The balance between personal narrative and public outcome is a challenge to achieve, especially if the community or participants involved are particularly vulnerable. It is essential for any artist practitioner to question what might subject the participants to attack or dishonor.

⁵⁶ Trowell, Jane, 2006, April 28. Core member of the artist group PLATFORM London. Telephone Interview (London/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵⁷ Derschmidt, Friedemann, 2006, April 12, 2006. Founder of Permanent Breakfast and Rites Institute in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto). Translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁵⁸ Kester, Grant, 2005. Collaborative Practices in Environmental Art, p.1. ArtCircles.org/id56.html, ISSN 1558-5387.

⁵⁹ Zinggl, Wolfgang, 2006, April 19. Founder of the artist group *WochenKlausur* in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto) translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁶⁰ Luther, Rikke, 2006, April 16. Member of the artist groups N55 and *Learning Site* in Copenhagen. Telephone Interview (Stockholm/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

● Emergent Learning

*"Learning by interacting – not only doing – is a combined act of discovery and analysis, of understanding and meaning, and of experimenting as well as developing of routines".*⁶¹ Clive Holtham and Victoria Ward

Through exchanging knowledge and ideas people can negotiate a shared sense of values and convictions. Dialogical art has great potential for expanding intellectual activity within and outside the group and can become a lived model for innovative *value exchange*, acknowledged by business scholar Holtham: "The need for time in which to build knowledge, understanding and trust is inherent in art making. Important is to lengthen the shadow of the future over the present, that present actions take increasing account of their future implications. If knowledge is gradually absorbed it becomes perception."⁶²

The founders of N55 Ingvil Hareide† and Ion Sorvin point towards the learning freed from ideological baggage and its consequences: "You really have to believe that people are able to understand for themselves. How do we make real changes? One of the things we have to do is not to form new ideologies or re-introduce ideologies [...]. At the moment, the world is so fixated on mass communication. In this situation it is satisfactory if you can have something that makes sense for maybe ten people, or five, or two. Our experience is that if you think that what you are doing makes sense and that you are in the center of the world, the center is nowhere else, it can extend beyond that situation and mean something for others somehow, in time maybe, or by different means."⁶³

This emancipating potential is integral to WochenKlausur's method as well: "The transposition and experience are inherent for art drawn from life: each exchange and learning situation contains already an agent and propels the idea, in an ideal case it's a step towards the implementation."⁶⁴ Art educator Lehan W. Ramsay suggests ways to better facilitate this process of emergent learning: "In meaningful, seminal collaboration we need to be able to let go of our most successful techniques and processes, because they will stop us from doing something new."⁶⁵ Following principles of good teaching it makes

⁶¹ Holtham, Clive; Ward, Victoria, 2000. *Slow Company - how procrastination and delay improve the quality of knowledge, collaboration and understanding*, p. 18.

⁶² Holtham, Clive; Ward, Victoria, 2000. *Slow Company - how procrastination and delay improve the quality of knowledge, collaboration and understanding*, p. 18.

⁶³ Hareide, Invil; Sorvin, Ion, 2003. *N55 Book, Manuals for DISCUSSION*. Pork Salad Press and N55, Copenhagen, p.135.

⁶⁴ Eipeldauer, Claudia, 2006, March 27. Member of the art group WochenKlausur in Vienna. Email Interview (Vienna/Kyoto). Translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitō.

⁶⁵ Ramsay, Lehan, 2006. *Collaboration: Moving Up to the Future*, p.2

sense to equip collaborators with a sensibility to know how they can improve themselves or their environment: "We need to consider ourselves facilitators, supporting [participants] while they build up their own long-term systems of learning."⁶⁶

Jane Trowell works with Platform London on a more political level with engrained strategies of public learning: "It is the attempt to foster a host of techniques for communicating difficult subjects. It is our task to make seemingly irrelevant subjects grappling and of huge importance and to enable people to become involved in the process. To accomplish this we use whatever practical means from artwork and performance all the way to educational strategies. Basically it's about making a subject *dynamic*, that before was accessible only to a specific audience."⁶⁷

● Offering Possibility

*"... we hired an engineer with rather untried track record but who wanted to talk about all aspects and the wider context of the work. He [...] had the loyalty and owned the project. It is really about people owning the project. (...) Engaging specialists who understand the holistic aim is crucial."*⁶⁸

Jane Trowell, Platform London

The conjunction of possibility and imagination is as significant to artmaking as it is to opening up social options. Imagining options, making choices and taking action is a powerful aspect of practice. A specified end goal makes collaboration easier, helping to provide incentives for all participants. WochenKlausur's successful collaborations build on concrete, small-scale projects within a strictly limited time frame: "Theoretically, there is no difference between artists who do paint pictures and those who do their best to solve social problems with clearly fixed boundaries. The individually selected task, like the painter's self-defined objective, must only be precisely articulated. Interventionist art can only be effective when the problem to be solved is clearly stated. So often in the realm of art we see this *deficit of criteria*. Prerequisite for every intervention is the invitation of an art institution, which provides [...] an infrastructural framework, financial backing and cultural capital."⁶⁹ Claudia Eipeldauer specifies what the implications on a human level: "The timely implementation of ideas and proposals relies on the concentration of energies of the participating parties. It's the synergy of the participants respective experiences and backgrounds over a certain period of time which generates a specific work flow and vibe,

⁶⁶ Ramsay, Lehan, 2006. Collaboration: Moving Up to the Future, p.2

⁶⁷ Trowell, Jane, 2006, April 28. Core member of the artist group PLATFORM London. Telephone Interview (London/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁶⁸ Trowell, Jane, 2006, April 28. Core member of the artist group PLATFORM London. Telephone Interview (London/Kyoto) by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁶⁹ Zingg, Wolfgang, 2002. WochenKlausur methodology. Retrieved from http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/arbeitsweise_en.htm

helping to breach shortcuts and accelerate the process from idea to implementation.”⁷⁰

For Lehan Ramsay momentary solutions qualify not as possibility: “Although the product (end result) is of great importance in collaboration, if overemphasized without stressing the political, ecological, environmental, social, and ethical issues surrounding that product, then our capacity for meaningful improvement is weak.”⁷¹ There is also no room for preconceived solutions and one-dimensional, linear thinking in Zinggl’s opinion: “Collaboration ought to take place on all levels towards the in- and outside. Our projects emerge from the collective debate, which bring forward the issues. Decisive is always the real-world realization of ideas, which often requires cunning strategies and trickery”⁷². This requires the continuous negotiation of boundaries because there is a quest for speedy and unconventional strategies – exactly these junctions produce the opportunities and limitations. Art producer Boyce reminds us that the seemingly unproductive process has its values: “Communication becomes less precise when many heads are participating. For all its being a distortion of the original message, more interesting, inspiring, and perhaps even poetic. If nothing else, the resonant feeling of difference inspires awe”.⁷³ In the hiring

process of Platform London mentioned above exemplifies the relationship between the degree of access, control and ownership people have over cultural resources or expression and the quality/integrity of their society.

‘Social integrity’ of a well-implemented community initiative strikes a balance among the five principal vectors of Artistic Function, Building Connectedness, Emergent Learning, Emotional Intelligence, Offering Possibility. Conversely, a distorted pentagon of vectors (see illustration on the



left) might represent less effective, one-sided or compromised ethical initiatives.

⁷⁰ Eipeldauer, Claudia, 2006, March 27. Member of the art group Wochenklausur in Vienna. Email Interview (Vienna/Kyoto). Translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

⁷¹ Ramsay, Lehan, 2006. Collaboration: Moving Up to the Future, p.2

⁷² Zinggl, Wolfgang, 2002. WochenKlausur methodology. Retrieved from http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/arbeitsweise_en.htm

⁷³ Boyce, Michael, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.9.

Conclusions for the responsible artist practitioner

"Any collaboration is an opportunity to work cooperatively with others in their interest but also to betray them by working with an enemy, personal or abstract. There is a duplicitous risk from the relationship between the inviter of collaboration (seducer) and the invitee (seduced)".⁷⁴

Michael Boyce

Collaboration is not always valuable. In the most exploitive, unequal variation "the employment of the labor of others is to sustain the *artist's signature style*"⁷⁵ as John Roberts warns. The freeing experience of merged identities intersects with the reduced artist's expression on the other. Friedemann Derschmidt suggests to calibrate one's own ambitions in favor of the wider implications: "The primary issue of our work is a matter of identity, the dialectic play between me and society. In this wide field perseverance and maturity make all the difference because so often are ideas just exposed but hardly thoroughly implemented and transposed."⁷⁶ In the social transition towards *economies of ideas and relationships* an artist articulates visions (as a mediator), excites others and gets resonance (as a catalyst), and invites to the process (as a facilitator). The artistic process and outcome gives collaborations a sense of possibility — that is the space and opportunity to consider differently what life offers, and how to build alternative paths. By that it promotes the citizen's right and responsibility to be socially, personally active (animation) and cultivates a critical engagement.

Cheat sheet for the emerging artist practitioner

Concluding the statements on the previous pages, here are the most important practical implications for realizing community based and public art collaborations.

1. Cyclic information flow

Projects with real social and cultural relevance offer dual-channel communication for all partners involved (individuals and organizations). Successful *feedback systems* in all phases help the project to break into *environments of resistance*, and provide the artist with better resources. Project participants find easier a way to become invested in the project (if they want to).

Measures: Hearings; inclusive conception; participant's reports;

⁷⁴ Boyce, Michael, 2003. *The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics*. The Banff New Media Institute, p.9.

⁷⁵ Robert, John, 2004. *Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form*, p.561. Routledge Kala Press/Black Umbrella.

⁷⁶ Derschmidt, Friedemann, 2006, April 12, 2006. Founder of Permanent Breakfast and Rites Institute in Vienna. Telephone Interview (Vienna/Kyoto). Translated from German by Markuz Wernli Saitô.

2. Permeable involvement

It's up to the art practitioner to ensure that there are various possibilities for involvement. Some people want to be involved in aspects of managing the project. Some just want to do their own thing. Some people want to be told what to do. Some people are happy to be there but don't want to be pressured at all. A community-based project makes space for all these types. *Measures: Multidisciplinary concept; self-determined job description.*

3. Competence for everyone

This is not to diffuse the work or responsibility. It's to ensure that every partner involved, feels that their presence is necessary. If they feel that their presence is only about numbers and not their own skills, they may not be involved.

Measures: Evaluation between shared goals and self interests

4. Visionary *not* project manager

The world is full with challenges waiting to be tackled by interdisciplinary art practitioners. In order to implement and test-drive visionary transformations across disciplines the artist needs to limit and delegate managing efforts of single projects.

Measures: Discipline of delegation; limiting timeframe; networking.

5. Sustained practice

Building relationships and transformations – especially on institutional level – is a slow and long-term process. That's why an art practitioner sees in the end of a project the beginning of the next one within a visionary strategy.

Measures: The formulation of an idea is followed by a broad forecast of its outcome.

Summary

"Collaboration is an exploration of the act of collaboration itself"⁷⁷

Eddy Shanken

The socio-political and environmental challenges demand a responsive and interventional art practice to move from product to experience and meaningful collaboration. Creating frameworks to open reciprocating thinking, safe experimentation, develop new models of exchange and opportunities to learn. Outside of educational institutions we find often the best chance for self-motivated initiatives and learning. The skills for self-organization will get increasingly important as authorities and institutions are losing the ability to face up and appropriately respond to challenges of today and the future. "In a culture of specialization and compartmentalization,

⁷⁷ Shanken, Eddie, 2003. The Beauty of Collaboration: Methods, Manners and Aesthetics. The Banff New Media Institute, p.5.

collaborative art becomes powerful device and media for social transformation by creating situations in which artists and communities may work together to perceive both the differences that separate them and the similarities that connect them. These projects strive to activate the *space* between groups and individuals as a zone of potentiality, in which the relationship between contemporary art and life may be renegotiated.”⁷⁸

In the continuous effort of renegotiating the relationship art and life, collaboration as media offers the competence of finding creative solutions for long-term improvements in human coexistence. Promoting alternative *economies of ideas* this art practitioner contributes to society and can find subsistence as advocate and consultant. In this context aspects of self-organization and de-central decision-making enable the creation of practices and methodologies for a participatory culture (to be further explored).

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Connecting research with practice



One-Coin-At-A-Time (2006), Kyoto and Melbourne, by Momentarium.org
The simple 'performance of an idea' infused by research transforms into...

From my first semester's research on audience participation in responsive art-making ("When Audience and Artist Become the Artwork") I wove these insights into the design of my current (second semester) art project in an attempt to utilize more consciously means of dialog and collaboration.

After preliminary reading in February I visited Melbourne in March where not only for in-depth studies and reading but also for first hand conversations with artist practitioners Lehan Ramsay (my mentor) and Jeff Stewart from The Artful Dodgers Studio (Richmond, Victoria). During these two weeks in Australia I scheduled five short public performances (One-Coin-At-A-Time) and increasingly struggled with my original concept which was based on a very simple, one-dimensional performative model and missed the sustainable qualities and integrative levels I was reading about in the publications on collaborative art.

With this unresolved discrepancy and full of discontent I returned to Japan and worked out a new, expanded project plan with more collaborative layers. Being situated in a very group-oriented society I turned to art institutions and schools, which I tried to win as hosts for my revamped collaborative performance. Before long I found myself stuck in an environment of institutional resistance and ignorance. I realized that most of the available literature is based in art critic which usually lacks the practicalities and methodical insights the emerging artist practitioner (like me) is looking for.

The series of interviews I conducted proved to be an indispensable device in this regard. With artist practitioners who work in a multi-cultural context like me I was able to address my urgent questions on strategy and process which helped to remodel a bolder, more adventurous and playful concept. Of tremendous value were my conversations with Rikke Luther (N55 / Learning Site) and Jane Trowell (Platform London) who opened my eyes for structures and relationships, which facilitate learning, development and cross-fertilization.

In conjunction with the indispensable advice from my mentor the insights of the interviewed artist practitioners I forged the 'Cheat sheet for emerging artist

practitioners'. This is the reminder that my work moved from being the 'performance of an idea' to a structure that leaves space for others, open-ended developments and more flexibility for change. The exchange with dialog-savvy artist practitioners confirmed my experience that the key to collaborative art is forming valuable relationships both in the community and with other artists and look for ways that are more mutually beneficial. The connection to established artist groups like WochenKlausur and Platform London encouraged me to connect and channel all my efforts better while bringing in more people and allowing for more complexity and layering to my original plan.

The study and dialog of this research will help me to map out perspectives and align my vision. Collaborative art depends inevitably on its cultural environment and public endorsement, which is vastly different between Europe, Australia and Japan. It was decisive for me to note that artists are a prerequisite in most of Britain's public development projects and how far the institutionalization of artist practitioners has come. It feels good to be part of a greater awareness and know ones own limitations.



Tactile Islands (2006), by Momentarium.org, *DOEI Taoist Movies*, and *K/Kalna ... a social documentary film bridging the gap between the blind and seeing.*