



**CREATIVE ALLIANCES
BETWEEN ARTISTIC AND
CORPORATE PRODUCTION**



**APPLICATION
PhD Fellowship**

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Please note that this is a drastically edited version of the original application as it was accepted jointly by a Danish and a German university. Because of bad timing, I have had to withdraw my application and the project has been cancelled. However, I feel that the three main research questions set forth in this document have some value and might be of use to fellow researchers, artists, or organisational innovators out there.

I have left in my M.A. thesis abstract and evaluation to give you a sense of context.

Feel free to use and borrow to any extent you see reasonable.

/ Martin Ferro-Thomsen 12.2.2007

Picture front page

Joseph Beuys: Filzansug Nr. 92, 1970

M.A. THESIS

'Organisational Art – A Study of Art at Work in Organisations'

Available from www.ferro.dk/academic/orgart.htm. Below you will find the abstract and evaluation.

Abstract

This investigation is about Organisational Art (OA), which is a tentative title of an art form that works together with organisations (companies, institutions, communities, governments and NGOs) to produce art. This is most often done together with non-artist members of the organisation and on-site in their social context. OA is characterised as socially engaged, conceptual, discursive, site-specific and contextual. It is argued that OA seeks to advance both art and the organisation of human work/life by crossing the boundaries of the art institution – and thereby expanding it without suspending it.

The thesis takes its historical outset with 'Artist Placement Group' (formed in 1966), a British art group that developed an unprecedented framework for placing artists in organisational environments to circumvent the restraints of the art institution, ultimately to achieve influence on the decision-making bodies of society. Perhaps the most influential artist of the group is British artist John Latham, who is introduced at length as an example of how an otherwise uncompromising artistic practice was integrated in an organisational environment, where some level of compromise often is a condition for success. 'The Incidental Person' was the name of this new artist role that was able to transcend boundaries in organisations to create coherence and synergy across professions and hierarchies. This was partly possible due to the artists' detachment from the praxis of life, which s/he aimed to surmount.

The investigation continues with a large case study of the Danish art project Industries of

Vision (2001) by artist Kent Hansen (democratic innovation). It includes artist groups Superflex and N55 and manufacturing companies LK and Basta and aims to facilitate mutual learning through interdisciplinary collaboration with artists, consultants and staff. In the framing of the project a space for art making is established by the artists (called 'The Scope of Art'). Here a 'working artefact' serves as the pivotal point for joint creation of a practical utopia ('heterotopia') in the organisational context. The case study makes use of both art- and organisational theory.

The thesis concludes with an outline of a framework for OA that is derived from contemporary theory of mainly Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud), Conceptual Art (Godfrey), Site-Specific Art (Kwon) and Contextual Art (Weibel/Østergaard). It also addresses similarities with the theory of the historical avant-garde art (Bürger), where the main similarity is OA's aim to integrate art with the praxis of life in society, although OA's methods are more mundane and appreciative than those of the historical avant-garde. It is argued that this integration cannot effectively happen only via the conventional institutional spaces of art, the museum and gallery. This is the main reason for engaging in organisational contexts, as well as the achievement of an eyelevel platform for exchange with society. This exchange is seen as an important democratic factor to facilitate a higher appreciation of creativity and understanding of how to cope with ambiguity in society.

Evaluation

By Anne Ring Petersen, PhD, senior lecturer, University of Copenhagen (Institute for Art and Culture, dept. of Modern Culture) and Per Seeberg Friis, external examiner.

Date: 17 May 2005.

This thesis is a study of the later year's co-operation between artists and companies. On the one hand, Martin Ferro-Thomsen (after this MFT) understands this growing phenomenon against a background of developments within the field of art: A decrease in the public art subsidy has made more artists look towards the private sector. At the same time some of the radical artistic strategies from the 1960's has encouraged artists to develop projects that are about co-operation and exchange and centred on process; which clearly differs from conventional forms of art in the public and corporate space: sculptural or visual decoration. Today an artistic project can take the form of a cultural-aesthetic 'service', which involves organising, co-operation, negotiation, research and idea development, and where the mere concretisation of the exchange and co-operation between the artists and the involved participants in a project is secondary to the process and the cognitions and the possible change in social behaviour, which it makes possible for the directly involved participants.

On the other hand, MFT understands the phenomenon in the light of the growing competition that companies are forced into as a result of globalisation. It has made it necessary for the organisations to profile themselves via branding and innovation. Internally in the organisation it demands new thinking and the ability to attract creatively thinking employees – or to develop them by own hand. This is where a number of companies, at home and abroad, in the later years have seen possibilities in engaging

artists to do a project, rather than hiring an advisory consultant; a project which involves both ordinary employees and managers in a mutual exploration of the organisation's problems and unexploited potential. These very dissimilar projects all have in common that they bring together artistic and corporate strategies and unite players from the art world and the business life around a project, which is based on co-operation and dialogue in the organisation, and – and this must be stressed – subsequently is presented and documented in an exhibition, and thereby achieves a reflexive framing by an art institution. The thesis describes the project with the well-chosen umbrella term "Organisational Art" (after this OA), a term which also serves the function to separate the field from the more compromising and instrumental field which in Great Britain is called Arts-and-Business and which entirely services the companies with inspiration (e.g. art- and dance workshops for the employees) where projects do not reflect back into the institutions of art where they can nourish the continuous critique of the notion of art and artist.

The thesis lays the main emphasis on the newest art, but also involves the 1960's where a crucial part of the foundation for today's OA was laid out, above all John Latham from the British pioneer group within the field, Artist Placement Group. From here MFT moves on to a very well-chosen case: the Danish 'Industries of Vision (1998-2001) by the artist Kent Hansen's art organisation democratic innovation. The project brought together the artist groups Superflex and N55

and the companies LK and Basta, and was documented at Vestsjællands Kunstmuseum (En: West-Zealand Art Museum) afterwards.

Following this case MFT develops a theory of OA. In absolute compliance with the double nature of OA, he first draws upon the organisational theory and points out the remarkable similarities between Edgar H. Schein's description of the working process in the so-called process consultation and the working methods that the OA artists use. Secondly, and via contemporary art theories, he pins down the aspect of art in OA: Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics, Peter Bürger's avant-garde theory, the ideas underlying contextual art and, finally, Miwon Kwon's distinctions between various types of site-specificity and her reflections about how the artists today have changed their role and often work as mediators and project-coordinators.

The thesis must be characterised as a pioneering work which meets the scientific standards of thorough research and accuracy. As one of the first, the thesis maps a newly developed field, about which only extremely sparse literature has been available until now. The text is well set-out and characterised by both a breadth of view and a thorough level of detail knowledge of the present material. It is written in an accessible language, so the thesis also holds great qualities as a communication piece.

MFT has worked himself within the environment for several years, among other things as one of the originators of a large conference in 2004. This has enabled him to gather information from central players and obtain access to important sources and

communicate them to a larger circle of people, to whom they otherwise would be unattainable. The personal involvement marks the thesis in the form of a strong engagement, which renders the text dynamic because the involvement has stimulated the critical-discursive judgement, rather than restricting it. The methodical reflections, especially in regard to Gadamer's hermeneutics, could however have been more elaborate and it does not seem appropriate that they are placed in the end as an appendix after the conclusion.

As a foundational research project, the thesis reaches a high level. It is not a mere registration of completed projects, although it does manage to mention a large number of artists within the field. If anything, it gives the field a theoretical superstructure. On the basis of thorough and well-informed analyses, above all of Latham and Industries of Vision and supported by carefully selected elements from organisational theory and art theory, MFT reaches the articulation of an independent and original theory of which traits define OA as an artistic field or genre. He also describes with great precision and fine distinction which expectations one could have to this art form, at which points OA has taken on traits from organisational culture and at which points the phenomenon differs. Furthermore, he describes the difference between OA and related but more traditional artistic phenomena, such as contextual art which also works critical-analytical with the work's context. With this, MFT advances the understanding of the mixed phenomenon OA a great deal, and this is done in a way which equally might enlighten readers from both the art world and the corporate sector.

Translated from Danish, original version available at www.ferro.dk/academic/oevaluation.htm

PHD PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Creative alliances between artistic and corporate production

Introduction

So far, a thorough academic inquiry from within the humanities has been missing in relation to meetings between artistic and corporate culture. Although this phenomenon dates back to the 1960's, it is only now being developed as a research field with the still tentative title 'Art and Organisation' (A&O).

With the PhD project I suggest below, I hope to provide the adequate knowledge that will bridge the gaps still existing within this field; between art and corporation, humanities and praxis. As you will see, my project suggest an interdisciplinary and action-based research design, that will be able to capture this two-headed cultural form that only exists in- and on the basis of its bilateral context. The following important questions have been raised:

What happens when the artist combines his agenda with the corporate agenda; what forms can this corporation take; are roles redefined; and does it result in innovation for any part?

Art has always been present in the organisation of work. Historically we've seen artistic roles ranging from craftsman, decorator, and consultant, to today's 'Organisational Art' (OA) (Ferro-Thomsen 2005)¹. In my M.A. thesis I defined OA as

¹ I use this term for the sake of consistency and because it has already been adapted in the context of contemporary art. I should however note that the art form it describes has been embraced by or associated with prominent terms such as 'socially engaged art', 'relational aesthetics', 'interventionist art', and 'new genre public art'. The art field in general has been described most notoriously as 'Art & Economy', which relates to the 1970 exhibition 'Inno70: Art & Economy' by Artist Placement Group.

“socially engaged, conceptual, discursive, site-specific and contextual”, paying due respect to theorists such as Bourriaud, Godfrey, Kwon, and Weibel, as well as Bürger, Groys, and Foucault in relation to the historical avant-garde and utopia vs. heterotopia. This approach documented relevant affinities between OA and more established art forms. In the suggested PhD project I wish to develop the theoretical framework of OA further, basing the theory on empirical data combined with further studies of relevant literature.

The OA artist uses organisational matter as subject matter. “Context is half the work” was the axiomatic rule of conduct for the Artist Placement Group (1966-1989) and this still is the case today. In Europe contemporary artist/groups include Democratic Innovation and Bosch & Fjord (DK), Henrik Schrat and Reinigungs-gesellschaft (DE), public works and Lise Autogena (UK), Orgacom (NE), Access Local (FR), and more.

OA also makes use of craftsmanship, decoration, and consultancy to varying degrees, but it differs from the three by its insistence on emergent collaborative strategies in the actual organisational setting. The meeting between a curious/explorative artistic culture and a purposeful/rational corporate culture will in most cases create dissonance and discussion, which is used as creative potential and marks a departure from status quo *inside* the organisation.

The corporate agenda is typically motivated by curiosity and a need for creative input, along with expectations of an output that is useful for internal/external

branding purposes and also complies with human resource management and ethical issues.

The artistic agenda is motivated by several factors, and differs from artist to artist. Key agendas include: Research of a social and anthropological nature, issues of value vs. economy, work space vs. free space, art time vs. corporate time, and 'culture' as a common denominator for art and corporation.

As is apparent, the artistic role and approach of OA differs radically from autonomous art and 'superior' artist roles. The artistic mainly innovation is seen in the aim to advance art's position and influence in relation to the institutions of human life. To achieve this, a breakaway from traditional art roles is simply a necessity.

On a more general level, I believe we are witnessing the birth of a new artistic domain. OA is no longer directly dependent on the (traditional) art institution as a mediating facility and it goes beyond common activist or symbolic approaches, such as 'artistic intervention' and 'institutional critique', by suggesting and attempting to implement sustainable change in actual social contexts. This raises the following important issues, which will serve as the main trajectories in my dissertation:

1. Art, institution, and the media: The challenged state of the traditional art institution

OA operates with an 'embedded' audience in a specific context, which is why many OA exhibitions appear to unbiased visitors as mainly irrelevant documentation. In a time, where the modern museum has to compete on equal terms with mainstream cultural institutions to achieve quantifiable results (visitors and media attention), one could easily argue that an OA exhibition simply lack the spectacle of, say, a Damien Hirst or the

Chapman brothers. Another obvious challenge is that OA in essence is a time-based, contextual, and site-specific process that is impossible to reproduce in a sterile museum environment.

This would not have been an issue, if OA did not find its tradition and point of departure within the traditional art institution. Nonetheless, the artist still needs to be evaluated by his institutional standing as well as his success in the corporate world. Although artists such as Per Hüttner, Bosch & Fjord, and Rirkrit Tiravanija with success (visitors and media attention) have used the exhibition space to perform various types of 'social sculptures' together with gallery visitors, it still remains to be answered how institutional acknowledgement is attributed to process-based art projects undertaken in non-art contexts. One common strategy is disseminating artistic findings and statements through the media. Although the media in some cases actually seem to appreciate the unusual or radical artistic approach (the 'story'), this shallow type of mediation is not able to account for the full complex nature of an OA project.

In short: the interdependence between art, art institution, cultural policy, and the media must be explored further to advance our understanding of this new artistic domain.

2. Economy vs. value: Is conversion possible?

One very practical reason why artists look towards new horizons, is that public art subsidy has decreased and funding is to be found elsewhere. Although the corporation is paying artists to actually make art and that there is little or no evidence of corporate censorship, it is still questionable if the financial system as such holds a genuine interest in or even benefits from art's unmediated contribution – unlike object-based art pieces that easily convert to financial value on the market.

In one case, the French art group Access Local ran a series of artistic workshops with the brewery Fischer, using an artistic and technological process called 'Simulation' (2003-4). Through this, the marketing team became aware of a flawed strategy that was immediately changed with great success and growth in the otherwise declining beverage market. So, an artistic process can in fact be measured on the bottom line in some cases.

But in many other OA projects, there is an inherent critique that accuses the financial system of 'inhumanity' or questions its lacking appreciation of alternative value systems. One example is Henrik Schrat's 'Die Erscheinung der Phantasie' (2000), an installation with thousands of discarded candy wrappers in Frankfurt Stock Exchange. It introduced a contesting view in the context of strict economic logic with its obvious play on discarded value. The wrappers were collected by people from throughout Germany, which added an important social (and human) dimension. It is very likely that the project also sparked a thought or two on the part of the traders, but nevertheless it eventually became business as usual in the trading room when the installation was removed.

The obvious question remains that if art is to be appreciated for more than decoration, branding, and workshop purposes by the organisation (and more than 'just' art), should it also be able to convert to measurable economic terms? One could even argue that OA should conform to the neo-liberal market as any other enterprise today, which entails a developed business plan as well as an artistic agenda.

In short: We need to understand if a) conversion of value is possible from the art field to the financial field, especially when art is not an easily transferable commodity, and b) how critique can be embraced by the financial system – if at all.

3. Art vs. ethics: Art as the universal solution

Is art in fact the universal method that is able to help problem solving in all situations? As there is no social context per se where OA does not wish to have influence, the questions of the artistic competence and agenda arise. The influential artist John Latham (1921-2006) saw art as a 'language beyond languages' that was able to bridge the gap between fields, cultures, and mother tongues. It might be that 'a picture says more than a thousand words' (Latham was a painter and a sculptor, as well as an artistic philosopher), but the artist as a facilitator of a socially challenging and participatory process faces the same difficulties as any consultant or workshop leader: differences in language, experience, culture etc.

It seems that many OA projects succeed because they empower participants to become co-creators. Perhaps the creative act itself, especially when it is centred on a 'collaborative prototype', i.e. a joint practical project across departments or other organisational/cultural boundaries, is key to a successful process. The prototype and the surrounding process serve as an artistic medium that seems able to indicate the deep psychology of the organisation – which is not unlike the 'conversation piece' doctors present to mental patients.

Whatever strategy is devised in the course of an OA project, the artistic agenda is often concealed in the actual process. Although there is room for an emerging approach, the artist has already made important choices regarding organisation, field, casting of participants etc. that are very much related to the artistic agenda, be it conscious or not. Along with his/her facilitation and the following documentation of the project, it becomes clear that the ethical dimension regarding the artistic agenda must be addressed.

In short: a) We must explore the ethical issues surrounding the artistic agenda in this

new domain, and b) we need to tease out how exactly the OA competencies differ from adjacent practices in a non-art context.

Background

In 1976 a pioneering London agency was formed with the name 'Arts & Business'². They facilitate meetings between artists and companies to induce inspiration in the organisational practice. The artist, who can be anything from a dancer to a photographer or a visual artist, acts as a consultant, basically trading 'inspiration for cash'. To this day the agency continues its activities and has inspired a plethora of similar intermediary companies around the world. This field, which continues to be very much related to the above described managerial discourse, is today known as simply 'Arts and Business'.

Parallel with these developments ran an art-initiated movement dating back to the sixties, led by British pioneers Artist Placement Group (APG). This movement came from within the heart of art itself as an attempt to break out of straightjacket autonomy and the isolation of the art studio. Considering that several of the artists in the seventies actually were placed in British government offices, this way of making art matter directly makes the legacy of APG by far one of the most radical artistic attempts to influence the institutions of human life.

With their direct and practical approach (as opposed to for instance the historical avant-garde's excessive and symbolic approach) APG did not view themselves as avant-garde. Looking back, however, it's apparent that they suffered the same fate as many other cultural-political movements in the twentieth century that took on a task too large.

Artists today have realised the inadequacy and failed logic of grand utopian leaps and now seem open to improvements in incremental steps. In a way, the relative success of APG and their peers started a dawning democratisation of a post-autonomous art profession, and with their failure they marked a new departure for artistic engagement in and with social contexts. It is this movement OA is aiming to advance today. How and why the utopian project has proliferated in this field will be explored further in my dissertation, especially in relation to artistic agenda and ethics.

Relevance of study

I believe we are only now witnessing the first waves of a general upsurge in creative alliances between art and corporation as the interdependency between the two fields will continue to grow. I see my work as a first step to institutionalising this domain in its own right. Apart from important mapmaking activities and developing my theoretical framework further, I aim to answer the three central issues I have put forward in the introduction. My findings should bring forth timely knowledge and provide detailed directions for further collaborations.

² www.aandb.org.uk