Shared Authorship: Dispersal of the Artist in Electronic Fields

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Summary

Abstract: This article aims to describe the phenomenon of the sharing and dispersal of authorship in the new media as essentially belonging to the creative field. The development of authorship has cultural, historical and economic impetus, which has shaped the institution of authorship for hundreds of years. The revolt against authorship, originality, everything made with the author's own hands, is one of the features of 20th century art, perfectly realised in today's environment of the Internet and interactive art.

Keywords: authorship, originality, hybrid author, Internet and interactive art, interactive film

This article aims to describe the phenomenon of the shared authorship in the new media as essentially belonging to the creative field. At the same time, I will try to show that the development of authorship has a cultural, historical and economic impetus that has shaped the institution of authorship for hundreds of years. The topicality of the dispersal and collapse of authorship in today's creative field of the Web will hopefully become clear as well. The revolt against authorship, originality, everything made with the author's own hands is one of the features of 20th century art perfectly realised in today's environment of the Internet and interactive art.

In order to keep the scope of the discussion from becoming overly broad, this article will not examine the open movement of open software and the practice of collaborative programming. The end of the article illustrates the collective digital work of Estonian art in the 2000s, which could be called interactive film. This will hopefully offer a concrete example of the developments in Estonia that have been relegated to the margins of art discussions.

First of all, I will describe what has been said in more detail in my articles 'Multi-local and immaterial body of an artwork' and 'Creative machinery and indeterminist art practice'.[1] Distributed authorship denotes a 'repackaging' of something treated before, but my aims include presenting new material, new points of view and local emphasis.

I will then determine the authorship forms shown in previous articles. Firstly, an artist is the author of rules, principles and combinations that probably result in diverse works; secondly an artist is a link in the network of relations, and the 'work' could be a network-related and collective 'object', either software or communicative artwork.

As the number of works with distributed and dispersed authorship in today's digital art is immense, the examples are endless. The current article is limited to three fields of digital art, three blocks, which we could describe as (1) sharing authorship with the animal and plant, (2) interactive projects of participatory painting and (3) contemporary forms of participatory film.

For the sake of establishing background, I look at Lev Manovich's opinion of post-media and post-Net culture, authors and users as those involved in information shaping and information behaviour and, secondly, his

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attempt to determine the authorship models of the new media.

The two subdivisions of the article, 'Selfish memes: imitation as recycling' and 'Anthropological and psychological background of authorship' are dedicated to an evaluation-free approach to authorship in the sense that they focus on the essential significance of borrowing, recycling and imitation in human creative practice, as well as on the return of 'new' memes. I will examine Lev Manovich's argumentation on the return of the 'new' and about how the 'new avant-garde' of the 1990s differs from the 'new' of the 1920s.

Another nuance of the topic of recycling ideas is added by Richard Dawkins's concept of the meme, which is today itself a kind of infectious meme. In this context, the word 'imitation' emerges, and it is the enemy of innovation-eager art. Taking a deeper look at its meaning, the cultural existence of all of humanity could be described as imitative. One aspect of education and upbringing is imitating and fixing previous experience.

Placing the meme idea into the context of art discussions hopefully will help to get rid of the modernist complex of viewing art history as a range of innovations. Imitation is the foundation of human cultural existence. The idea of the meme is essential when changes occur. Here we refer to the Ars Electronica festival 'Memesis' in 1996, which concentrated on the Internet as the emerging distribution environment of the meme.

Art ideas as distributing memes are tackled in connection with the international art phenomena that have influenced Estonian art, as we remember them in the art of the 1960s-1980s and of the 1990s.

Viewing authorship against the background of anthropological and psychological factors, it becomes clear that primitive forms of social interaction are never totally altruistic.

Offering a gift in traditional societies is an act that takes place in the context of mutual expectations, hoping to gain status, rights or more gifts in return. The programmer who helps develop a programme for free does so primarily out of an egoistic desire to have his skills properly appreciated. In economic terms, this can be regarded as a non-altruistic interest.

I will also take a brief look at the primary manifestation of forms of artistic abilities, as they can be seen in border societies such as the army and prison. Ilmar Malin's memoirs confirm the idea that, in simple societies, hereditary special abilities place an individual in a different position from others.

Significant changes in the status and notion of the artist occurred in the 19th century with the emergence of the institution of exhibitions. Earlier 'court' artists who worked for aristocrats, who saw the artists as their private property, were replaced by 'exhibition artists'. I refer here to Oskar Bätschmann, according to whom the term 'exhibition artist' was first used in Johann Heinrich Füssli's letter to his patron William Rosco in 1790.

An author actually consists of several authors, constituting a certain synthesis. For that reason, I call the contemporary author a 'combividual' and a hybrid author, who consists of combinations of earlier author's possibilities. 'Combividual' is a playful and ironic term, but accurate in the sense that there is a lot of talk of the hybrid author and hybrid culture. I have in mind Ars Electronica in 2005, which was wholly dedicated to that topic.

The theme of participatory art unites a number of sub-topics. In post-WW II art, we can see an increase in participation in two forms. Firstly, the author's activity became a phenomenon worthy of exhibiting. Secondly, we can speak of participation through allowing the spectator to participate. The

viewer's co-authorship becomes prevalent. Good examples here are the works of Yves Klein, Nam June Paik and Valie Export. Marinetti's 'Tactilism' (1921) manifesto is mentioned, a significant ideological founder of art based on touch. Physical contact with a work of art is important in the interactive art of the 1990s.

The most radical manifestation of authorship is total rejection of authorship, as we see it in conceptual art. In Sol LeWitt's interpretation, the idea of art was a 'machine', which means abandoning freedom in the result that occurred during the process of the idea becoming art.

In order to illustrate the authorship models in the new media, I would like to mention projects where authorship is shared with the animal and plant kingdoms. The examples are Ken Rinaldo's 'Augmented Fish Reality and Encounters', Christoph Ebener, Frank Fietzek and Uli Winters's 'HAMSTER - Symbiotic Exchange of Hoarded Energy' (1999), Garnet Hertz's 'Cockroach Controlled Mobile Robot #2' (2005), Yasushi Matoba/Hiroshi Matoba's project 'Micro Friendship' (1999), Stadtwerkstatt's installation and action Bugrace 99 (1999), Eduaro Kac's transgenic project 'Genesis' (1999), Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau's interactive installations 'Interactive Plant Growing' (1993–1997) and 'A-Volve' (1994/95), and Ken Goldberg's 'TV Garden' (1995-2004).

Interactive participatory paintings, such as Toshihiro Anzai and Tamio Kihara's 'Moppet' (1997), spatial paintbrush, Young Hay, Horace Ip, Alex Tang Chi-Chung's 'Body Brush' (2002), Jackson Pollock's translating method into spatial digital painting and Golan Levin's synesthetic painting projects characterise the territory of digital art that relies on examples of previous participatory art.

The last part of the article, about the con-temporary forms of participatory film, tackles the Estonian examples of art with shared authorship. It primarily deals with interactive film, where experimentation has been going on since 2002. Examples can also be found in the activity of other Estonian digital artists in the late 1990s but, in the context of the current article, the younger generation is perhaps more interesting.

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