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PERFORMATIVE COLLECTION

WHAT IS IT?

A *Performative Collection* is a dynamic collection or archive of information, experiences, memories or practices as well as their mediated transmission.

In the context of academic and art-based research[1], the collection as a kind of living archive is considered as a methodological tool that not only preserves or stores knowledge, but also produces knowledge. What is often called for in approaches of the humanities around critical archiving is a differentiation between archives and collections. In this context, collections are described as more open subjective compilations, while archives, on the other hand, are subject to stricter, more systematic recording under conventional classification criteria (Lorey 2014: 101). The archive is an institution of knowledge production[2] with practices of securing evidence; it stores and transfers knowledge on different media formats (see Wolfenberger 2015).

In its scientific institutionalisation in museums or libraries, the collection is above all a specific place for the selection and systematisation of information. Following Jacques Derrida, the (contemporary) critique of the archive (Derrida 1996) concentrates on the fact that it is not providing information without formatting it and without conditioning the practice of actualisation. A performative[3] approach can focus on this aspect and explore it further: In the frame of PABR projects, the process of knowledge production can be based on practices of creating and framing a *Performative Collection* with its multi-layered processes of collecting and compiling information, for instance through interviews, recordings, and (re)enactments. Who is recording what and who is in charge of deciding

CONTEXT

1 Art-based research: Participatory Art Based Research differs from other approaches and methodologies of art-based research by situating research neither exclusively within the arts – as artistic research about and for the arts (Borgdorff 2006), nor mainly in between art and science – as producing a different kind of knowledge that is disqualified by established academic research standards (Busch 2016). See also PABR - What is PABR and what is the online-resource about?

2 Knowledge production: PABR formats and designs are governed by the pursuit of a question, a desire, a need or by the attempt to find a solution for a problem. This initial framing poses a functional background for the researchers to evaluate the outcomes of the performative events and research activities, and therefore produce specific answers to the functioning of hypotheses or working solutions. For the evaluation, several moments of presenting, analysing, reflecting and discussing results are implemented within the operational steps. Results can include solutions, knowledge, theories, practices, artefacts, feelings, etcetera. Many outcomes can be verbalised or visualised, but some manifest in a way that eludes the discursive grasp. Knowledge production within PABR means that explicit and implicit forms of knowledge are valued equally. The researchers try to choose forms of presentation and analysis that make these forms recognisable. It has to be made clear that this analysis is one of many possible research narratives. Besides, there might be diverse research narratives that can be known and recognised, but also some that remain unknown to the researcher. PABR is distributed knowledge.

3 Performative practices The performativity of practice refers to the ability of ritualised and continuous actions to constitute reality. The term follows the linguistic concept by John L. Austin reformulated by Judith Butler, that understands language and movement not only as descriptive or assumptive but as having the potential to create reality. Through continuous use, acts and actions can shape bodies, perspectives, and the subjectively perceived world (Butler 1993).

CORPUS

I   Museum of Moments (2014): As an auditory collection, the media installation of the *Museum of Moments* gathered individual memory fragments of senior citizens. At the same time, filmic portraits of elderly people quietly visualising past moments were shown on twelve large-format screens in a room in the form of a rotunda. The *Museum of Moments* was a collection of memories in which senior citizens were asked about images from their lives that have shaped them, about images that will remain, their very personal inner photographs. Their silent gaze met that of the audience. In the installation, the subjective spaces of the viewer overlap with those of the narrator, the listening spaces with the perspectives chosen: what is told, what is left out, what is kept silent?
Stefanie Lorey, *Museum of Moments,* 2014, Hamburg

II   Waste of History - Studio Visit (2013): In this performance lecture Margarita Tsomou presented documents of the occupation of Syntagma Square by the aganaktismenoi (the outraged) during the protests in front of the Greek parliament in Athens in 2011. YouTube videos, sounds, quotes, posts, leftovers were framed as 'waste of history' in Walter Benjamin's sense; media and performative traces provided a double testimony, about the nature of the struggles for Real Democracy and about their own constructedness. To present the multiple perspectives of the heterogenous protesters, Tsomou set up five different performance stations on stage at Kampnagel through which she led the audience station by station.
Margarita Tsomou, *Waste of History – A Studio Visit,* 2013, Hamburg

III   How to Hear the Invisible – An Acoustic Mapping of the Post_Colonial Memory Landscape Hamburg (2016): The project maps the acoustic dimension of Hamburg's colonial traces. Sounds were collected from locations with a colonial past through different recording techniques. Voices that are seldomly heard in the debate and verbal information that marks the invisible were put in relation to each other. This collection, originally conceived as a sound installation for eight audience members, has been edited on the basis of the auditory figures as a multi-track mapping in digital space and can now be found online. Users can listen to Hamburg's urban space in its colonial dimensions.
Katharina Kellermann (Pelosi), *How to Hear the Invisible – An Acoustic Mapping of the Post_Colonial Memory Landscape,* 2016, Hamburg

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what is deemed appropriate to be stored? At the same time, the focus is on developing performative formats that enable different ways of using the collection, so that the collected material can be (re)arranged, combined, and enacted by its users. The processes of both compiling and providing data and materials are central moments of knowledge production, for the researchers[4] who collect as well as the users who combine the collected material in its reception. When the *Performative Collection* is performed by actors or performers as a carrier of meaning, the formatting character is further enhanced. Whose body is providing the information? What information is added when the collection is performed?

The *Performative Collection* is not a static container, but a living structure. It might employ diverse forms of performative presentations such as media installations, as in Stefanie Lorey's *Museum of Moments* (2014)[I], or Margarita Tsomou's *Waste of History – A Studio Visit* (2013)[II]. It can also be in action in (virtual or real) public space as in Katharina Kellerman's *How to Hear the Invisible (2016)*[III] or *Call to Listen (2017)*[IV].

WHAT IS RESEARCHED?
With this approach to art-based research, the performativity of archives and collections is

4   Researchers/co-researchers/participants: Researchers within PABR are those who are involved in the whole research process from beginning to end and are responsible for the shape and progression of the process.
Co-researchers are invited to collaborate and join the research process for shorter or longer periods of time.
Participants are invited to join the research only at certain points, for instance during its public presentation, and are involved in different ways. In order to organise participation on equal terms, it is crucial to recognise and acknowledge the different questions, interests, responsibilities, capacities and availabilities of the different co-researchers and participants and to define their role within the process.

highlighted. Accordingly, the practice of the *Performative Collection* is employed primarily in dance, theatre and performance art. *Performative Collections* focus on the collection of materials that are based on embodied experiences and are therefore difficult to store. Strategies of collecting need to be researched that are specific to these kinds of experiences. The mediation and transfer of such experiences into diverse media installations or performance formats constitute further research aspects of this format (Lorey 2014).

An example of such a bodily experience in a *Performative Collection* can be found in *Winks of Time*[V], where Lorey investigated the relationship between individual experiences, the perception of one's body, and biological age. The project was initially concerned with the collection of knowledge, experiences or even conceptual ideas of age and life experiences in the form of language, collected as conversations or interviews. However, Lorey's focus changed in the processes of selecting and organising statements towards a juxtaposition between sound and image in a chance operation for *Winks of Time*, a preliminary output of her research project. The new connections between the individual elements established new links within the *Performative Collection*. In Lorey's final version, *Museum of Moments* (2014), the dynamic processes of combining the voices with oversized portraits are handed over to the audience through the development of a technological organising structure, which is based on an algorithm that allows the audience's eye movements to rearrange the interviews and link them with an image. To design collection and combination processes as performative acts is a main goal of the *Performative Collection* as a research format[5].

IV Call to Listen – a Post_Colonial Resonance Space (2017): *Call to Listen* is a multi-part invitation to deal with the politics of sounding, listening and being heard in post_colonial Hamburg. A mixture of historical and contemporary material, field recordings, archive material, and samples served as a material pool for a series of listening sessions. In these listening sessions, the sound material was commented on by various experts in the form of interviews and expanded with additional footage. From the collection of sounds as well as sections of the interviews, a 30-minute soundtrack was created that can be heard on site at the Landungsbrücken. This way Landungsbrücken, the site of Hamburg's colonial past, is activated through listening as a temporary resonance space of remembering in the urban present.
Katharina Kellermann (Pelosi), *Call to Listen – a Post_Colonial Resonance Space,* 2017, Hamburg

V Winks of Time (2013): Which moment would one choose to tell from one's life, if only one moment could be told? In this preparatory work for the *Museum of Moments* (2014), she combined spontaneous stories from senior citizens and filmed portraits as two different forms of collections on the subject of memorable moments, which she related to each other. However, there was only a limited technical structure available for this presentation: four adjacent 42-inch LCD flat screens showed passing portraits in front of a row of four benches for audiences with six fixed headphones for listening. Both collections were acoustically connected via the body and breathing sounds that were the only synchronised element. They could be witnessed in the images and were also reproduced via the headphones.
Stefanie Lorey, *Winks of Time,* 2013, Hamburg

5 Research formats: A single research format is realised in a specific context to configurate the collaborative research of different experts in a physical way. It can structure one complete research project or become a smaller element within another format. The process starts with a desire, need, or question that brings together the participants as co-researchers, creating a collective agenda and interest in the research process. This collective interest has to be established before the participating researchers are able to perform, test materials, act, or assemble collaboratively. The co-researchers should be able to arrange, rehearse and plan details and activities for performative events. The activities and events then need to be evaluated or compared in relation to the underlying needs, questions and desires. Only after this evaluation can it be decided whether the same process should be repeated, whether the rules and conditions should be adjusted or

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ARTISTIC MEANS

Collecting and arranging are, hence, understood as artistic practices. A first step is the choice of topic: The collection in artistic and art-based research processes usually engages with subjective, everyday or political issues that are not dealt with in conventional collections.

A main element of the *Performative Collection* is its set-up and its framing: What is archived or collected by whom and how? What are the methods of searching material, of recording, arranging, and actualising? How can the archive be searched? How can it be used?

The basis of many *Performative Collection*s are interviews, which are recorded in qualitative research processes, following a specific research design[6] of the project. However, the material is not arranged according to scientific taxonomies, but rather in relation to subjective and/or collectively developed categories. The invention of rules or classifications plays a central role in these processes. It is precisely by shifting and breaking through habitual classification criteria that other perspectives can be expanded, new connections established, new insights into the initial situation or the object of research gained.[a] In doing so, it is not important to follow an initial structure, but rather to engage with diverse, complex, and sometimes contradictory compiling procedures and to allow multiple outcomes.

The inclusion of the interview partners as co-researchers, as in a collective development of organising criteria for the materials, offers the possibility of collective participation[7] within the framework of participatory knowledge generation. Katharina Kellermann, for example, involved her interview partners in several workshops and listening sessions in the analysis and sequencing of the collected sounds in *Call to Listen*.

Although her method is oriented towards the qualitative sciences, in the following steps the developed material is transferred into the *Performative Collection* through artistic methods of associative selection and musical composition. Accordingly, the development of organising principles through methods of compilation and composition might have participatory dimensions or it might be set up by one researcher. If the researcher intends for this process to be explicitly participatory, she has to devise it in a way that makes it accessible and transparent.

How to document a *Performative Collection*? Obviously, the archive/the collection in itself

modified, whether the format should be changed entirely or whether researchers should proceed to another application/publication.

6   Research design: The original projects our research formats are based on were developed in the frame of the two postgraduate programmes, where methodologies had to be considered within a research design that fulfils academic standards. However, our formats are also intended to be applicable outside of an academic context, in art projects, education, or activist action. Researchers are invited to pick, choose, mix and further develop the proposed research formats within a bigger research design or within a single PABR project. Within a wider research design, several research formats can interlink, modify and support each other.

7   Participation: From an art perspective as well as from the perspective of political critique, certain types of participation arouse the suspicion of merely simulating participation, while at the same time promoting neoliberal concepts of governance and self-discipline. Participation can be misused as an instrument of power instead of being used to distribute knowledge, resources and control. It is precisely the artistic experimentation with new forms of assemblies and participation that opens up a field in which art and academia can differentiate between different types of participation and discuss them using concrete examples, while also proposing other forms of (political) participation   (Burri/Evert/Peters/Pilkington/Ziemer 2014).

can serve as documentation[8]. Beyond this, there should however be a concept for how users can document their enactment of the archive/collection.

POTENTIALS, PROBLEMS AND OUTCOMES

The format *Performative Collection* as an academic art-based method of knowledge generation stands precisely for an open, subjective, searching, processual and changing confrontation with established taxonomies. Materials are newly collected in an associative way and flow into the *Performative Collection* as experience. This aspect poses the problem that the underlying classification criteria of the archive are not necessarily comprehensible. Particularly when a collective presentation format is involved, the distinction between the archive and other forms of collections cannot always be drawn sharply.

Outcomes can include media installations of video interviews or sound compositions. *Performative Collections* that move around in space are constantly generating new constellations. In a broader sense, the *Performative Collection* explores discourses on preserving and publishing media artefacts as an artistic as well as a curatorial practice (Arsenal – Institut für Film und Videokunst 2013).

Through the performative compilation of different voices and materials, *Performative Collections* repeatedly generate new constellations of memory that simultaneously challenge and question the classification criteria of a conventional conception of the archive. However, the head researcher still holds a strong position in the decision-making between the phases of collecting, formatting and arranging material. This hidden form of control needs to be eluded by insisting on the possibilities for the user to rearrange materials. This is not an add-on but a condition of this format.

ENDNOTES

a. This is reminiscent of a comment by the ethnologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who, when asked by Didier Eribon about his collection of field notes and index cards, said that these cards, covered in writing containing all kinds of information about his field research experiences – fleeting ideas, notes from readings, quotations, observations – are a central element of his knowledge production. When he was stuck in his thinking or wanted to understand something, he took a deck of cards and laid them out as in a game of solitaire. The continuous and random combinations helped him to reconstruct his memory and gave him a new view on the matter (Lévi-Strauss/Eribon 1988: 5–6)

8 Documentation: How processes of PABR are documented depends on each project and cannot be determined in a general way. Researchers are advised to put documentation measures in place that help to store and translate processes and outcomes for those contexts in which she wants the project to proliferate. Documentation should be intertwined with moments of presentation and of gathering research material. Each project should develop a documentation method appropriate to the project, which may consist of several forms of documentation. Performances can be documented by video recordings, whereas collections, archives and media artefacts may become their own documentation. However, the collective activities are fleeting and perceived differently by each participant. The same event can be evaluated differently from the outside than from the perspectives of the performing participants. For comparison and evaluation purposes, these different experiences need to be represented in some form: collective writing, questionnaires, drawings, transcriptions of discussions or interviews, formal responses, and so on.

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