

## **VII**

### **Summary**

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*Contemporary art is like an iceberg: only the top 10% are visible to the public. It's basically those 10% that you get to see in the traditional art media, in galleries, museums, art books and art magazines.*  
(Guy Schraenen: "Kunst-enaars-publikaties". Ghent, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1984)

### I

The testimonies of the international, so called marginal art scene, which were usually not presented in traditional art media, are kept in the archives of artist publications, like those of Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Happening and Concrete Poetry. For the first time, the archives as such – meaning an art historical phenomenon – have been the subject of a focused research project which has sought to establish their history and significance within a larger art historical epoch. This work presents primary and fundamental research in the field of artist publications of the 1960s and 1970s. This period was the main phase for artist publications and covers the central stage of the development of the archives.

The term 'artist publications' is used for all published works by artists. It comprises a variety of visual and auditive forms and media. Among them are included such items as books and magazines, multiples, postcards and videos. Each issue of an edition is an artwork in itself. At that time artist publications were important because they could be mailed easily and could circulate within the network of the international alternative art scene. They were both object and medium of communication between artists.

The following thesis is proposed: The archives of artist publications are 'individual' places. The singularity of every archive was created throughout a historical process: One part of the archives is marked by their context: They demonstrate the criteria and principles of contemporary aesthetic and theoretical concepts. The other part of the archives is shaped by the respective archivist, representing their personal attitude, view on art and interests, as well as the individual archival practice they developed. The archives do not have a uniform structure or demonstrate similar criteria. Although they differ from each other, they are manifestations of the same phenomenon.

### II

Altogether seven archives show the necessary conditions to be described as an 'archive of artist publications'. The main task was to locate and

assemble the chronologies of the individual archives and to analyse their different conceptual bases. The following provides a brief outline of each archive.

#### *Archive for Small Press & Communication*

This archive was founded in Antwerp by Guy Schraenen in 1974. Schraenen established a critical attitude towards a bourgeois, commercially oriented art system because most of its institutions were not interested in promoting or conserving the productions of a new avant-garde. They considered these movements insignificant. The critique of institutions articulated in the work within the archive can be seen as a political statement, one that Schraenen saw articulated via art. Today it belongs to the collections of the *Research Centre of Artists' Publications/ASPC* founded in Bremen in 1999.

#### *Archive Sohm*

As the earliest of the seven archives, it was founded in 1963 in Markgröningen near Stuttgart by the dentist Hanns Sohm. Sohm's main focus for his archive was its assembly, completion and organization, maintained especially through an extensive correspondence with artists, collectors and curators. The emphasis of the archive lay in Fluxus and Happening works. In 1981, Sohm donated his archive to the *Staatsgalerie Stuttgart*.

#### *Art Information Centre*

This archive was founded in Middelburg (in the Netherlands) by Peter van Beveren in 1969. Taking the work of Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers as an example, van Beveren began to send letters to artists on behalf of the *Art Information Center*, asking them to send him information in return. The archive, compiling these responses, thus began as an artistic idea and became an institution thanks to the initially intuitive and later more and more archival strategies developed by van Beveren. In 1993, he sold the archive to a second-hand bookshop in Amsterdam.

#### *Exchange Gallery or: Galeria Wymiane*

The Polish artist Józef Robakowski founded the *Exchange Gallery* in Lodz in 1978. It was a gallery in name only. Its true function was – unofficially – to serve as an archive and a meeting place for artists. The materials in the archive were to him of equal value; they were an expression of independent communication, mutual respect and shared opposition towards the communist regime. In 2003, Robakowski began to prepare the donation of the archive to the *Muzeum Sztuki* in Lodz.

#### *Other Books and So*

The Mexican artist Ulises Carrión founded the gallery-shop *Other Books and So* in 1975 in Amsterdam. It was dedicated to artist books and various artist publications. He closed his shop in 1978 and in the following year

opened an archive of the same name. Carrión considered the archive an artistic medium with which he was able to organize exhibitions in this field. In this sense, the exhibitions can be regarded as works of art in themselves. Before Carrión died, he handed the archive over to a friend, an art-dealer, who took it with him to Geneva in 1989.

#### *Zona Archives*

This archive was the archive of the alternative art organization *Zona* of Florence. The basis of this archive was formed with material from the Italian artist Maurizio Nannucci that had been collected since the mid-1960s. When he co-founded *Zona* in 1974, he opened his archive to the activities of the group, under whose care it became more extensive. In 1985, the group of artists disbanded. Nannucci again took over management of the archive and is still working with it today.

#### *Artpool Archive*

*Artpool* was founded in 1979 in Budapest by the artist György Galántai and followed from a number of exhibitions that Galántai had organized between 1970 and 1973 in the provinces. The exhibition location had become a meeting place of resistance expressed through the arts and was finally closed by the communist regime. In 1978, however, Galántai established communication with the international artistic network via Mail Art, which composes part of the archive's material. In 1992, the archive became an official institution, the *Artpool Art Research Center*, which is still run by Galántai.

This brief introduction reflects the following: The archives had been exclusively founded in Europe. They were dedicated to artist publications of all avant-garde art tendencies, movements and groups between the 1960s and the 1980s. In addition, all testimonials and expressions of artistic engagement since the 1950s found their way into the archive volumes, such as the artistic material and documents of events and the correspondence. The archivists worked with their inventory, allowed the artistic material to circulate and/or organized exhibitions using archival holdings. Beyond that, some had their own small presses and published within the frame of their archive's holdings.

### III

The archives are compared under different aspects which determined their concept and realization: the aspect of the *political*, the *artistic*, the *archival* or the *institutional*, the aspect of *collecting* or *documenting* and the aspect of *being active*. Aside from these aspects, the archives are compared in terms of their precursors (or rather their models) and concepts. The aim is to determine whether the archives can be described as different manifestations of one and the same phenomenon, in other words, as archives of artist publications.

To highlight the particularities of the archives, Wittgenstein's term "*Familienähnlichkeit*" ("family resemblance") is applied (Wittgenstein PU, § 67). *Familienähnlichkeit* refers to the essential properties or qualities common to all members of one family. In this model, what is significant is the notion that although the members belong to one family, the relations among them are of different kinds and qualities.

From a comparative perspective, the archives indeed show a number of similarities and these similarities overlap between the archives in different constellations. Therefore, a unity of the archives can best be paraphrased by using Wittgenstein's notion of "family". All seven archives are individual sketches of a cultural development that appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. The most significant similarities and relations between the archives can be summarized as follows:

The archives founded by artists are a part of their artistic work as a whole. In the context of their oeuvre, the archives functioned as artistic media as well as artworks *per se*. The new avant-garde movements wanted to cross or open the borders between art and daily life or rather non-art. The archives represent examples as well of this tendency in the arts.

In the archives, art and institution were connected. This connection appeared differently in each archive. For example, the *Archive Sohm* was not based on an artistic concept. It was perceived as an institution for avant-garde movements already in the 1970s. When looking at the *Archiv Sohm* via an *artistic* perspective, attention must be drawn to the archive's arrangement of material: The ephemeral and chaotic material had been integrated into the archival order and system, which results in its own particular aesthetic. This aesthetic was enforced by the special design of two rooms: the so called 'Fluxshop' and the so called 'room for the work of Dieter Roth'.

Some of the archive founders focussed on the archival function of their archives or rather worked with the institutional criteria of their archives to achieve their goals in the context of art. This aspect is related to the political dimension of the archives. In assembling an archive, most of the archivists were confronting or questioning the hegemonic position of museums and other official art institutions. With this, the archives claimed to define cultural knowledge towards the formation of a cultural memory. They stood in opposition to the collections of established art institutions that functioned as "cultural archives" (Groys 2004a, p. 55).

The archivists worked from the inside and not from the outside of the art scene. With their archives, the founders provided an interface between the alternative art scene and the public, representing the archives in the public sphere through events and activities. The archives were created

to serve as free and independent spaces or rather as forums for alternative art.

Communication was the foundation of all archives of artist publications, especially in the period between the 1960s and the mid-1980s. The significance of communication (and exchange) for the archives indicates that it was a generally accepted key concept in the artistic context of this period.

The archives were influenced by the radical change of the art system in the mid-1980s and the political context of their respective country. Most of the archivists ceased documenting, turned towards the presentation of their materials or gave their archives away.

In contrast to the other archives, Galántai started to organize his archive and his activities in the international Mail Art network at the beginning of the 1980s. While Mail Art lost its relevance at that point in time for the artists in Western countries, it still offered for Eastern European artists one of the few opportunities to establish contact and communicate with other artists during that decade.

The projects that Galántai is still organizing in the context of the *Artpool Art Research Center* are based on the concept of Mail Art projects. It must be pointed out that *Artpool* differs from the rest of the archives of artist publications in that it shows an affinity to Mail Art archives. It thus occupies a special position among the seven archives.

As far as the notion of *collection* is concerned, it can be summarized that the activity of 'collecting' the archivists engaged in differs from the activity of the traditional or conventional collector. The investigation of this aspect is supplemented by Jean Baudrillard's definition of "collection" (Baudrillard 2001, pp. 110-136), functioning as a scale. The aspects of a collection, Baudrillard claims, are the process of collecting, the passion for collecting, the series, the abstraction of objects, and the feeling of possessing the objects. The arranging, dividing and grouping of objects are actions of the collector. They are ultimately aimed at fulfilment of the wish for completing a collection. From this perspective, the archives can be distinguished from collections: In contrast to collectors, the archivists received (the largest part of the) material through a system of exchange. The satisfaction of possessing the material was not the motivation for building up an archive. This was motivated by the notion of constructing a picture of the alternative art scene, as complete as possible, as a tool of reference for future generations.

#### IV

To propose a working definition of the term 'archive of artist publications', the archives are conceptually and phenomenologically limited.

The archives are established in relation to the basic term “*Archiv*”, with respect to archival science (“*Archivwissenschaft*”). In relation to this, the following can be deduced for the archives of artist publications: They demonstrate essentially the specific criteria of the scientific term “*Archiv*”.

They have grown organically in a work process. The archives that still exist consist of a totality of artistic and documentary material intended to be permanently preserved.

The archivist carries the task of deciding what is worth being preserved permanently and what not. His task can be described as “selection and deletion”. The founders of the archives of artist publications made their selection in this fashion, as they excluded from their inventories the artistic and documentary material collected by official art institutions.

To summarize, the archives of artist publications can exist as (private) archives within the frame of the scientific definition of the term: By developing their *archival practices*, they expanded the term or gave it a new meaning.

Apart from this, the archives relate to other types of archives that existed within the same time and artistic context: Many artists and people working in this scene preserved the artistic and documentary material they obtained by participating in the network: Collections of material and archives developed. Apart from the archives of artist publications, three other types of archives occurring within the same period and art scene are being identified and defined: First, the *specialized archives*: These archives are limited to a particular subject, e.g. a certain genre, medium or a geographical area. Second, the *Mail Art Archives*, which were numerous at that time. They were created by participants of the Mail Art network, who received unsolicited Mail art works and maintained the documentation of Mail art projects. The third type of archive, the *artist estate*, grew organically in the context of one artists’ work. The inventory focused on the material of the respective artist. The archive was not central to the activities of the artist.

In contrast to those three types of archives, the archives of artist publications stand out as manifestations of an independent type of archive between the 1960s and the 1980s due to the following facts: The archives were central to the activities of their founders.

The inventories were (as some of the archives do not exist anymore) more than mere documentation of their own (artistic) work. Rather, they unified material of different contemporary art movements. All variations of artist publications were collected.

The founders did not only document the alternative scene, but were actively involved, within the framework and under the name of their archive. They participated in the alternative artistic network that existed between artists, artists groups, small presses and alternative art spaces at that time. The archives belong to their respective epoch.

Each of the archives was based on a concept or an idea, a vision or an ideology, which originated from its respective founder. This concept marked and influenced the realization, activities, functioning and the focus of the inventory of every single archive.

## VII

In conclusion, the main results of the work are summarized as follows: The significance of the archives lies in their contribution to the history of art and culture in the documentation and preservation of artistic and documentary material produced during their time. Every inventory includes or included approximately 30.000 entries. The archives offer the possibility to discover largely unknown works, such as the publications of some of the Arte Povera artists which have so far gone generally unmentioned in scholarship.

Until today 80% of the archives' materials remain unexplored. The analysis of this material will raise questions that may lead to a larger perspective on the events and developments of the period. This refers, for example, to the field of political science and history as well to the field of art and cultural history. Nonetheless, a future inclusion of the material preserved in the archives may modify, expand and complete the perspective of a holistic impression of the epoch.

The archives and their method of organization are an expression of their respective era. As such, they offer evidence of the principles and functioning of the art scene from the 1960s to the 1980s. The archive itself organizes what can be analysed on the basis of the archive itself: it opens questions based on the contents of its inventory, its structure, its organization, its criteria of selection, its priorities and its concept. The archives are *per se* (art historical) documents.

This becomes more evident considering the following: Most of the founders tried to implement traditional artistic or cultural systems of organization, such as galleries or bookshops, before or during the existence of their archives. These are systems that are principally based on commercial structures. These enterprises of the archive founders failed, which refocused their attention on the archive, based as it was on the concept of information and documentation. Both aspects corresponded to the aims of the founders and supported their democratic intention to disseminate the art-related information to a wider public. It was the form of the archive

which was important for the founders and for their time. This is confirmed by the significant number of archives that existed in the same period. The importance is based on the capability of an archive to preserve the subject *and* its context. This kind of contextualized preservation was integral to the alternative art scene; not only was the single document of basic relevance, but the single document in its entire context. From this aspect, an archive also represents a particularity of the art scene during the 1960s and 1970s.

The term “archive of artist publications” is now applicable for further research. On one hand, this serves to contextualize material that has still to be analysed or which remains unknown. On the other hand, it can be helpful in the understanding and investigation of archives which may emerge in the future. The development of artist publications did not end with the 1980s. It is possible that in the future other archives will be founded in the art context that may be defined by the term “archive of artist publications”.