

## **PAF: The Bazaar in the Cathedral<sup>1</sup>**

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The following text is instigated by a meeting of around 40 artists, theorists and art practitioners that took place between 26th – 31st of December, 2005 in the small village of St. Erme in the north of France. On invitation of Jan Ritsema, who there has bought an old convent building on his own private initiative, this group of people came together to discuss how to develop this location into an artist-run work, research and education facility. The house itself offers an enormous potential for such kind of concern: up to 50 people can live and work there at the same time and the current condition and infrastructure of the building is sufficient for immediate usage. What it needs is 1. users and 2. a procedure of usage that supports the creation of an open and user created institution on a long term basis.

A preliminary name for this facility is Performing Arts Forum (PAF), although this facility shall be open to artists and practitioners from other areas as well.

As participants in this meeting we share a great interest in the creation of such a resource and facility.

Being based in Berlin we are involved in different groups and projects somehow situated in the field of performing arts. Within these mostly self organised environments we work as organisers, producers, performers, dramaturges, software programmers, technicians, curators and administrators. We adapt to these different practices and competences according to the needs of each specific project.

Our economic and social situation is marked by the conditions for freelance cultural producers in Berlin. We continuously switch between paid (funded) and unpaid projects. Our yearly income is between 8.000 € – 12.000 € with very little social security as a back up. Public funding is not a reliable financial source for our work and the continuous association with a funded cultural institution has so far not occurred to be realistic.

We feel a strong necessity to reflect on our work conditions and gain resources and power in order to play a more active role in the shaping of those conditions according to our needs.

During the last one or two years we have taken part in various discussions between artists and cultural producers in the field of performing arts that seem to share similar problems and needs (Involved in Performance Berlin, Fernwärme at Ausland, PAF Reims).

Starting off from an analysis of the current institutional system for performing arts in (Western) Europe (including production, presentation and education facilities) desires have been articulated in relation to

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- the creation of work, production and education spaces/ environments/ resources that are run by artists and practitioners in a self organised way
- the possibility for continuous networking, exchanging and communicating between artists and practitioners across national borders
- the practicing of collective education as shared research and knowledge production, continuous exchange of knowledge, ideas and information

In various ways the introduction to certain Internet technologies (starting from Weblogs, Wikis, Chatrooms) and especially to the concept and ethics of open source software development and information commons has inspired the way we could think of different ways of exchanging, learning and organizing ourselves in accordance to the above mentioned desires.

### **Commons Based Peer Production**

It has often been claimed, that art production is an avant-garde mode of production. In a nutshell the argument says, that the typical artist has for generations been exposed to market driven working conditions (self-employed, little or no social security, both worker and agent of one's work's products). The argument continues that this mode of production is becoming much more prevalent in society. While this might be the case, this in itself is a good argument for art production having lost its avant-garde status.

Commons based peer production (Yochai Benkler), the mode of production for many free / open source software projects is a different method of organizing information production. Examining this method in terms of its potentials to create other organisational or institutional architectures for artists and theoreticians we are looking for resources that oppose the mechanisms of the performing arts market (creation of authorships, competition, representational products). Furthermore, we suppose that reshaping organisations and institutions of research, production and education according to a not market driven production model will prepare the ground for different knowledge and practices to emerge in the field of performing arts and theory.

### **Content: Copyleft, Commons etc.**

The Information Commons we intend to build upon consists of every cultural artefact that is not 'all rights reserved'. Every ancient text and many modern source codes, all the classical musical scores, in fact most of what could be considered culture and more specifically art is part of the information commons. Taking a commons based approach for an artist's institution means to actively enlarge the Information Commons with our works.

There are a number of reasons to do so.



- > Copyright fuels the art industry while doing very little for the individual artist himself. Art industry is built on copyright and has among others created the stars system where a few artists are given the VIP treatment while effectively blocking any attempt for art to be meaningful.
- > Authorship. Art relies on exchange, referencing and remixing – but the economic reality of the arts market remains tied to specific authors.
- > If we propose an organisational architecture for artistic production and research that supports free access and sharing of information we must rethink how to maintain the growing economic value being produced by its users.

The open source movement used the GNU General Public License (Copyleft) as a tool to ensure that any work created by members of the movement remains accessible to all its members.

We propose to use a similar mechanism e.g. the Creative Commons ShareAlike license that has not been designed for software but for other kinds of creative work such as websites, scholarship, text, video, etc. Such license sets creative works free for certain uses, on certain conditions (“some rights reserved”). It aims not only at increasing the sum of source material online, but also to make access to that material cheaper and easier.

Both the GPL license as well as the Creative Commons license are viral of nature: Once a work has been published under such a license all works derived from it will have to be published under the same license as well.

Such mode of copyright as a trademark of commons based peer production means rethinking authorship as a continuum in which many people work together to create. Neither the ingenious invention nor the artistic intuition is the basis for authorship but being part of a functioning communication and knowledge production network.

## Methods

Commons based peer production promises an efficient solution to a communication problem that we are facing: people working on the same thing from different places.

Just as there are various kinds of software in the information commons, commons based peer production in the arts will enable a wide variety of artistic production.

Commons based peer production functions as a meritocracy: not everybody involved has the same influence on the development of the project but rather those who are involved more will decide more.

Of course, the literal application of a software production model to an artists institution might create some substantial translation problems, some of which might be productive others not so.

A possible area of conflict involves the usage of advanced Internet communication tools. This entails not only a certain expertise in using these tools (thus effectively creating a threshold



preventing some from participating) but also a certain 'culture of usage' where building a common text and a common discussion is more highly regarded than branching into private texts.

The Internet culture of usage is a culture of short texts, of multiple but small contributions, of patience when waiting for an answer in an asynchronous communication and of constant initiative.

### **PAF open source institute**

We propose to organise PAF according to methods used in the production of open source software.

For such an attempt we need to find roles within that institution that correspond to the following major roles within software development: the maintainers, the developers and the users. A user of an arts institution can be anybody who wants to use this institution for his/her own purposes but who does not take an overly active role in furthering its development. A developer takes an effort in improving (or “debugging”) the organisation of the institution, adding new features or proposing to change others. The task of the maintainers is to keep the project’s development on a healthy course, to prevent features better implemented in a different project to be included or to help lay standards of coding, and to do a substantial part of the development. The maintainer is usually somebody willing to put an exceptional amount of effort into the project and who volunteers (or is chosen) to oversee all or a specific part of the development of the project.

#### a) System requirements

The creation of PAF is a lot of work that needs to be shared with as many people as possible. This group of people can be spread around the globe but each member needs to have a personal interest in PAF. Each member needs to be willing to spend some time on organizing PAF. Each member needs to have sufficient access to the Internet. Each member of this group needs to have some experience with the Internet communication tools used to organise PAF. These tools will include mailing lists, blogs, wikis etc. and all these tools aim to help creating a common text. Writing this common text is what Commons Based Peer Production is about. In the case of PAF this text will consist of rules, applications for money, lists of projects and participants, documentation of projects, schedule plans etc.

#### b) Installation

The biggest challenge PAF is facing now is to name maintainers for a number of tasks that are needed to create PAF. Those tasks should be as self-contained as possible as not to interfere too much with each other. Some of these tasks could be:

- internal communication (communication between maintainers)
- external communication (communication with users, press etc)



- documentation/archive (technics and methods of documentation)
- accommodation (housing, food)
- finance (participation fees, expenses, subsidies etc)
- technical support (web, house, stage)

How each task group communicates internally is up to its members. However, traces of any communication should be available online.

In addition we need to build a mechanism that enables everybody (users, developers, maintainers) to give constructive critique and feedback in order to "debug" the architecture of PAF. This means we need a method for "bugtracking", i.e. a transparent method for keeping a record of how critique was dealt with.

#### c) User guide

PAF needs written documentation, rules, guidelines, how-to's. Prominent among those should be a "how to co-develop PAF" that introduces the ethics of PAF and explains in simple non-technical terms how to use the communication tools used to create PAF. We should try to make the rules around PAF as lean and simple as possible and continuously invite new people to participate in its creation. We need to explain to everybody using PAF that by providing valid and constructive feedback everybody gains. We need to explain that by providing valid proposals to remedy a problem within PAF everybody gains even more. And we need to communicate that PAF is not a place where 'everything goes' but where every feedback and proposal is considered, talked about. Only if it is promising it will be implemented, but the documentation of discussion about its merits will be open for anybody who cares to look.

In a distributed organisation all the functions one individual has within the organization should be clearly identifiable as belonging to this individual. Anybody who agrees to a task as part of his responsibilities to PAF should at least see this task to its end or declare failure to do so. All tasks should be configured in such a way that they can be completed without having to wait for somebody else to complete theirs. And we need to keep documentation at least at such a level that if something unexpected happens PAF would still be able to go ahead by looking through the compiled documentation.

#### d) Success/Failure

Coming back to the initial aim of the discussion it seems necessary to describe measurements with which we can evaluate whether the institution/organisation that we create will be a success or a failure.



Here are some proposals:

PAF fails when it excludes, becomes exclusive, excludes co-development.

PAF fails when it does not attract enough co-developers.

PAF fails when its organisation is not reproducible (but instead seems to depend on charisma).

PAF fails when its set up does not foster free sharing of information, discourse and critique.

On the other hand PAF will be a success if its architecture becomes useful for much more things than art production and education.

### **PAF extended**

The potential that we assume from such an attempt of organising an artist's institution is far bigger than providing a particular functioning workspace in the specific location of PAF. Quite the contrary, we assume that the realisation of such a work structure that enlists a range of co-organisers all over Europe will need to bring forth a networked structure of different European artists initiatives and local forces.

And we should be aware that such a proposal means to take sides in a political struggle, that in its consequence is threatening the arts market and industry as we know it. This struggle is marked by the debate around peer-to-peer networks, software patents, extension of copyright and the building of a genuine public domain of information. To apply such mode of production to the context of performance arts and artists institutions means to enlarge the potential of this movement in society.

### **References**

Eric S. Raymond: The Cathedral and the Bazaar, in: first monday, peer reviewed Journal on the Internet, [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue3\\_3/raymond/](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue3_3/raymond/)

In this article Raymond anatomizes a successful open-source project, fetchmail, that was run as a deliberate test of some surprising theories about software engineering suggested by the history of Linux. He discusses these theories in terms of two fundamentally different development styles, the "cathedral" model of most of the commercial world versus the "bazaar" model of the Linux world.

Yochai Benkler: Coase's Penguin, or, Linux and The Nature of the Firm, The Yale Law Journal, Vol. 112, <http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.html>



