

Living Documents: On the Role of the Audience in the (After)life of Participatory and Ephemeral Art

Annemarie Kok

[1] “Participatory” art

Participatory art is characterized by a certain “openness,” inviting members of the audience to fill in the gaps of a work of art that is initiated by one or more visual artists.¹ Processes of interaction, collaboration, and co-production are at the heart of this type of art practice, which started to flourish for the first time—at least in the western art world—in the so-called “long sixties” (starting in the late 1950s and ending in the early 1970s).² These temporary processes do not necessarily bring about tangible end products that can be preserved for the future. Participatory art projects tend to be focused on the here-and-now and the results are mostly characterized by

¹ See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

² Anna Deuze, ed., *The ‘Do-It-Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); Samuel Bianchini and Erik Verhagen, eds., *Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016); Annemarie Kok, *Pioneering Participatory Art Practices: Tracing Actors, Associations and Interactions across the Long Sixties* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2024).

Figure 1: Eventstructure Research Group (ERG), *Waterwalk Tube*, Groningen, 1972. Photo by press photo agency D. van der Veen, collection Groninger Archieven. Courtesy of the artists.

mutability, multiplicity, and ephemerality. An example of such a project is the *Waterwalk Tube* initiated by the Eventstructure Research Group (ERG). On August 28, 1972, ERG placed a large air-inflatable tube made from PVC foil in the water of the connecting canal (Verbindingskanaal) in Groningen, a city in the



north of the Netherlands.³ People could enter the U-shaped tube from a platform via a revolving door and—as if by magic—walk on the water (figs. 1–2). In this way, participants animated or “completed” the work. After one day, the tube was deflated and taken out of the water where it left no visible traces.

Many other participatory art projects of the long sixties vanished into thin air, including Yoko Ono’s [Cut Piece](#) (first performed in 1964, Kyoto), the street intervention [Une journée dans la rue](#) (1966, Paris) initiated by the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV), Allan Kaprow’s [Fluids](#) (1967, Los Angeles County), David Medalla’s [Down with the Slave Trade!](#) (first performed in 1971, London) and Joseph Beuys’ [Büro der Organisation für Direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung](#) (1972, Kassel). The artists who initiated these works all invited audience members to interact with the provided materials and tools and to participate in joyful, political, ritualistic, or activist events that

³ ERG had previously presented the *Waterwalk Tube* during a street art program (*Experiment Strassenkunst*, 1970) in Hanover, where the tube bridged the water of the Maschsee in a straight line. See Theo Botschuijver, *Playful Inventions* (Eindhoven: Lecturis, 2021), 66–71.



Figure 2: Eventstructure Research Group (ERG), *Waterwalk Tube*, Groningen, 1972. Photo by Pieter Boersma ©. Courtesy of the artists.

only lasted a few minutes, hours, or days. During such events, various human, non-human, material, and immaterial actors were connected and collaborating. Once the happening was over, the collective dissolved, and the actors went their separate ways.

Being both participatory *and* airy—using “airy” here as a synonym to transitory,

ephemeral, fleeting, volatile—these art practices could also be described as “participatory.” I want to introduce this neologism, involving a blend of the terms “participatory” and “airy,” to point out a particular category of open works that easily vanish into thin air and not only ask for specific considerations from an art historical, but also from a heritage practice (concerned with passing on what we have inherited from the past to future generations) perspective.⁴ In none of the aforementioned cases of participatory art was there a lasting, physical art object left that could find its way into the collection of a private individual, company, or museum, and could, in the traditional sense, be stored and safeguarded. Consequently, alternative practices of preservation and care are needed for this form of heritage and, as I will argue, participating audience members can and should play a role in this.⁵ These participants may—beyond

⁴ The term “participatory art” is commonly used in art historical discourse to refer to practices that invite audience members to participate in the creative process. Related and partly overlapping terms are “do-it-yourself art,” “interactive art,” “community art,” and “practicable art.” See also Kok, *Pioneering Participatory Art Practices*, 19–25. Although the term “air art” is used to refer to art practices embracing air as artistic medium, the term “airy art” is not particularly common in art historical discourse, but introduced here to refer to art projects that easily vanish into thin air. Note that there is a difference between “air art” and “airy art.” Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*, for instance, was not concerned with air as a medium and can therefore not be considered an example of “air art,” but can, because of its ephemeral nature, be described as an example of “airy art.” ERG’s *Waterwalk Tube*, however, provides us with an example of being both “air art” (using air as a medium) and “airy art” (being ephemeral).

⁵ See on the issue of care for ephemeral art forms, with a focus on performance art and media art, Caitlin Jones and Lizzie Muller, “Between Real and Ideal: Documenting Media Art,” *Leonardo* 41, no. 4 (2008): 418–9; Alexandra Saemmer and Bernadette Dufrêne, eds., “Patrimoines éphémères,” *Hybrid*, no. 1

the accounts of the artists and other eyewitnesses—provide valuable information on the participatory artworks and their effects, and help in continuing the works' trajectories, even after their supposed vanishing.

[2] Ephemeral, but not to be forgotten

To a certain extent, one needs to accept that participatory artworks—i.e. works that are both participatory *and* ephemeral in nature—are no longer there and can, in the form of a physical object, not be preserved, stored, and collected for the future. Peggy Phelan has even argued that an ephemeral art form like performance cannot be “saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations.”⁶ She claimed that any attempt to document, capture, or preserve performance art is a betrayal of its ephemeral nature.⁷ Even though it may seem paradoxical to want to make last what is meant to be transient, and one can argue against fixating fleeting artworks, I would want to state that one can consider alternative, more open, and fluid ways to pass them on, in order not to forget about them and enable them to continue acting and having effect on new audiences, in alternative contexts, in other times.⁸ After all, they are part of our histories of art, communities, and cities, have contributed to the formation of our identities and, as such, they—or at least stories, traces, and memories of them—are worth transmitting to next generations. They are worth being cared for and shared, also to inspire and move new publics. And photographs and other documents may play a valuable role in processes of continuation and “reactivation,” as is also argued by Philip Auslander, in opposition to Phelan.⁹

Moreover, even though there might have been a clear wish by the artists to initiate ephemeral works of art for various reasons, including challenging institutional

(2014); Fernando Domínguez Rubio, “Preserving the Unpreservable: Docile and Unruly Objects at MoMA,” *Theory and Society* 43, no. 6 (2014): 617–45; Vivian van Saaze, “In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal’s Constructed Situations,” *Revista de História da Arte*, 4 (2015): 55–63; Dietmar Rübél, “Die Musealisierung des Ephemereren,” in *Plastizität: Eine Kunstgeschichte Des Veränderlichen* (München: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2012), 268–305; Hanna Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman, and Emilie Magnin, eds., *Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Care*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2023).

⁶ Peggy Phelan, “The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction,” in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.

⁷ See Anja Foerschner and Rachel Rivenc, “Documenting Carolee Schneemann’s Performance Works,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 10 (2018): 180–1.

⁸ See also Marilena Alivizatou, “The Paradoxes of Intangible Heritage,” in *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. Michelle L. Stefano et al. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 9–22.

⁹ Philip Auslander, *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).



Figure 3: Negatives from photographs made by Pieter Boersma, showing ERG's Waterwalk Tube in Groningen (1972). Courtesy of the artists and photographer.

systems and escaping forms of commodification, they did not necessarily desire that their work be forgotten or want the effects of their projects to stop. Various artists made efforts to document their work through photography, film, and video, in an attempt to save it from oblivion, an initiative further supported by circulating these documents through exhibitions, publications, and websites. The members of ERG, for instance, photographed many of the participatory events instigated with the help of their inflatable structures or allowed others, including photographer Pieter Boersma, to record their works in the 1960s and 1970s (fig. 3).¹⁰ A selection of these photographs can be found online in the *Jeffrey Shaw Compendium* and in a recently published book by Theo Botschuijver—Shaw and Botschuijver being two of the founding members of ERG (fig. 4).¹¹ One could argue, as Auslander notes in his book *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and its Documentation*, that it is precisely the documentation of these types of fleeting art that “makes it not ephemeral.”¹² In this regard, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be distracted too much by the “myth of ephemerality,” and not only focus on the element of disappearance, but also on what endures.¹³

Apart from photographs and film images, pioneering participatory art practices have left us with other immaterial and material traces and remains, including project plans made by the initiating artists, as well as written instructions, props, or reviews by art critics. Moreover, audience members who participated in these events in the 1960s and 1970s may still be around. Audiences contributed, with their bodies and minds, to the coming into being of a particular art project and can, when still alive, be seen as important remnants of the work. As collaborators, these participants were important eyewitnesses of fleeting events who experienced the works firsthand, and can potentially tell more about the developments and results of these co-production processes. They can even be considered *living documents* or *living archives*: repositories of data, stories, and memories to which far too little attention has been

¹⁰ An artist like Allan Kaprow also became increasingly interested in the documentation of his ephemeral works, as the 1960s progressed. See Laura Routledge, “Reconsidering ‘Art’ and ‘Life’: the Multiple Entanglements of Allan Kaprow’s Happenings,” *Journal of Avant-Garde Studies*, no. 1 (2022): 243–68. The other artists mentioned in this article had their fleeting works “captured” by photography as well. In the case of David Medalla’s *Down with the Slave Trade!*, I was even able to trace around 25 photographs, made by at least four different individuals, and now scattered around various archives and collections in London, Oxford, Utrecht, and The Hague.

¹¹ See the online *Jeffrey Shaw Compendium*, <https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/>; Botschuijver, *Playful Inventions*.

¹² Auslander, *Reactivations*, 4.

¹³ Also see on this topic Dorota Sajewska, “Mit efemeryczności teatru,” *Dialog*, no. 1 (2015): 80–92, translation via: <http://re-sources.uw.edu.pl/reader/the-myth-of-the-ephemerality-of-theater/>.

paid by scholars, archivists, and conservators to date.¹⁴ Nowadays, interviewing professional artists and their assistants is a generally accepted part of presentation, conservation, and research practices in order to obtain information on modern and contemporary artworks; participating audience members should not be overlooked in this regard.¹⁵ They might, for instance, tell more about how they experienced Yoko Ono's silent presence on a stage, why they took part in the event initiated by GRAV, what conversations took place while building the ice structures proposed by Kaprow, how Medalla guided and instructed audiences in their participation, and what they learned from entering Beuys' office in Kassel.

[3] From co-production to co-care

From the perspectives of art history and heritage, it may be meaningful and desirable to keep the ephemeral and participatory artworks of the long sixties "alive" and take care of their remnants (including participants), but it also provides art historians, conservators, and other caretakers of art with challenges. How does one pass on these fleeting forms of art without limiting or stabilizing them? How does one keep them "in motion" to prevent them from vanishing? And who should take part in these practices of safeguarding and transmission? This is not the place to discuss all these questions in

¹⁴ In the fields of dance and performance studies, one can observe a growing trend of thinking about human beings as "memory-preserving media" (Sajewska) or "vehicle[s] of knowledge" (Hahn). See Sajewska, "Mit efemeryczności teatru"; Daniela Hahn, "'Our method is transmission': the body as document in Christina Ciupke's and Anna Till's performance *undo, redo and repeat* (2014)," in *Performing Arts in Transition: Moving between Media*, ed. Susanne Foellmer et al. (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), 182. See also André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 28–48; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011); Franz Anton Cramer, "Body, Archive," in *Dance [and] Theory*, ed. Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 219–21; Sajewska, "Körper-Gedächtnis, Körper-Archiv: Der Körper als Dokument in künstlerischen Rekonstruktionspraktiken," in *Seien wir realistisch: Neue Realismen und Dokumentarismen in Philosophie und Kunst*, ed. Magdalena Marszalek and Dieter Mersch (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2016), 339–66; Julia Wehren, *Körper als Archiv in Bewegung: Choreografie als historiografische Praxis* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016). Notions of "the body as archive" and "the body as document" have obtained a central place in ongoing debates on issues related to the documentation, reconstruction, and conservation of (ephemeral) dance and performance practices. The body—particularly that of the professional dancer or performer—is considered a place and tool of documentation, memory and history transmission. I want to argue for thinking about the "minded body" or "embodied mind" as document and—in connection to this—for not only paying attention to the stories of the professional performer or artist, but also to those of the active and participating members of the audience.

¹⁵ See Lydia Beerkens et al., eds., *The Artist Interview: For Conservation and Presentation of Contemporary Art: Guidelines and Practice* (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2012). See also Lucia Farinati and Jennifer Thatcher, eds., *Theorising the Artist Interview* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

JEFFREY SHAW COMPENDIUM

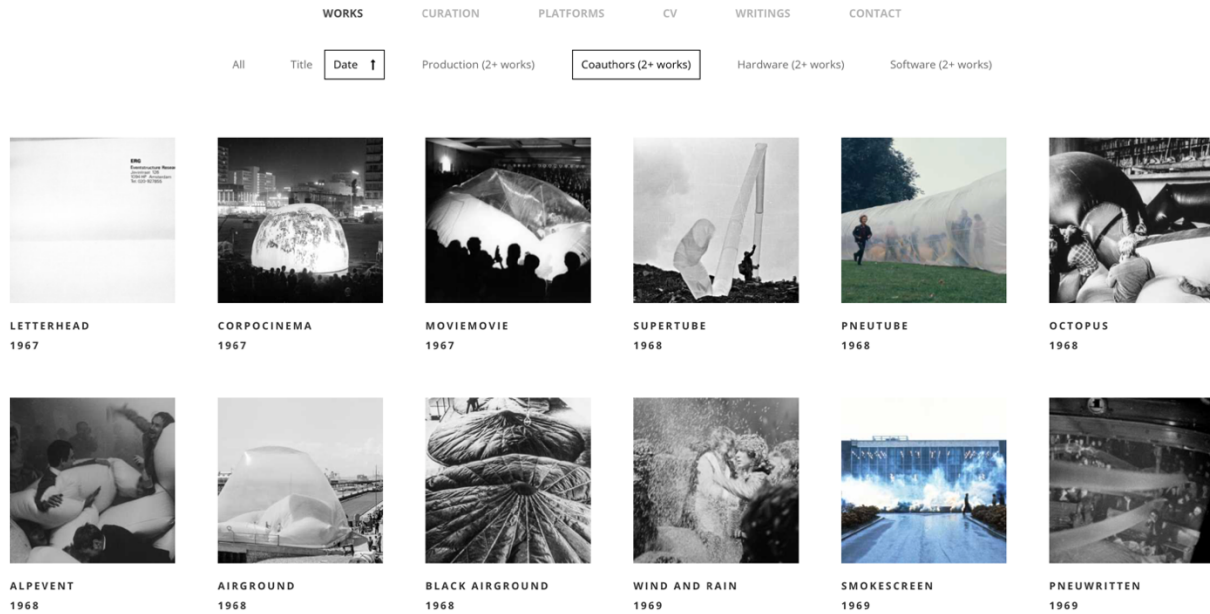


Figure 4: Screenshot of the online *Jeffrey Shaw Compendium*, including projects by ERG. Archive facilitated by Chronus Art Center, Shanghai. Produced and coded by Raphael Chau Tsz Kin. Courtesy of the artist.

detail or come up with definite, unequivocal answers—if possible at all. What needs to be pointed out here, however, is that respect for the open, changeable, and ephemeral nature of these art practices seems an important starting point for thinking about their transfer and continuation. As with other forms of intangible heritage, such as language, dance, and legends, caretakers could consider strategies of reenactment (not to truthfully recall or capture an event from the past, but to re-activate it in an up-to-date, alternative version), as well as open archives for documents, memories, and remains (to which different people can continuously add new elements and perspectives) or forms of oral transmission (to pass on conversational versions of a work).¹⁶ These strategies can all contribute to keeping artworks “in motion” and preventing them from decay or fixation.

¹⁶ A lot has been written on these strategies, including Barbara Büscher, “Traces and Documents as Medial Transformations, or: How to Access Performance Art History,” *Stedelijk Studies*, no. 3 (Fall 2015), <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/traces-and-documents>; Yaël Kreplak, “Artworks in and as practices: The relevance of particulars,” in *Practicing Art/Science: Experiments in an Emerging Field*, ed. Philippe Sormani et al. (London: Routledge, 2018), 142–63; Cristina Baldacci et al., eds., *Over and Over and Over Again: Reenactment Strategies in Contemporary Arts and Theory* (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022); Cristina Baldacci and Susanne Franco, eds., *On Reenactment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools* (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2022).

In line with the collaborative engendering of participatory art projects (i.e. co-production), it also seems appropriate and desirable to jointly take up the care of these works and let different people and institutions participate in it (i.e. co-care). In this regard, it is important to include participating audience members—the so-called “living documents.” Although artists initiating participatory projects in the 1960s and 1970s wanted to share their actions and agency with members of the audience, the focus of heritage institutions and the art historical discourse remained for a long time on the artist(s) and their stories, intentions, and memories. Fortunately, within the fields of archiving, conservation, and research, there is growing interest in documenting and studying art audiences and their experiences with an emphasis on oral and dialogical forms of transmission.¹⁷ As a historical method of inquiry, oral history is particularly concerned with “history from below” and with giving voice to those groups in society who have been excluded from official accounts.¹⁸ The audience of participatory art is such a group. It is urgent to start listening to their voices; to include these “living documents” in practices of archiving, conservation, and reconstruction; to make them active participants again. As is also the case for artists, the participants’ recollections will not necessarily reveal the truth (since, for one thing, their memories may fail them) or complete the story, but they may fill some gaps in the “official” records, add new and alternative perspectives or layers to the works (that are physically no longer there), and help to pass them on in fluid ways, with the potential of sorting further effects among new audiences. In these ways the trajectories—or lives—of participatory works may continue, even after they vanished in their initial form.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Lizzie Muller, “Towards an Oral History of New Media Art,” Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, 2008, <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=2096>; Lizzie Muller, “Collecting Experience: The Multiple Incarnations of Very Nervous System,” in *New Collecting: Exhibiting and Audiences after New Media Art*, ed. Beryl Graham (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 183–202; Hélia Pereira Marçal, “Conservation in an era of participation,” *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 97–104; Katja Kwastek, “Documenting Interaction,” in *Histories of Performance Documentation: Museum, Artistic, and Scholarly Practices*, ed. Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman (London: Routledge, 2018), 132–48; Gabriella Giannachi, “Documenting the Participants’ Points of View: Re-Thinking the Epistemology of Participation,” in *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage: Learning through and from Collaboration*, ed. Christoph Rausch et al. (Cham: Springer, 2022), 13–23; Gabriella Giannachi, “Documenting Hybrid Mixed Media Art Forms: The Role of the Audience,” in *Conservation of Contemporary Art: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice*, ed. Renée van de Vall and Vivian van Saaze (Cham: Springer, 2024), 217–33.

¹⁸ See Staughton Lynd, “Oral History from Below,” *The Oral History Review* 21, no. 1 (1993): 1–8. See also Derek Reimer, ed., *Voices: A guide to oral history* (Sound and Moving Image Division: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C., 1984), quoted in Muller, “Towards an Oral History,” 5; Hahn, “Our method is transmission,” 189.

[4] The challenge of finding “living documents”

In my own search for the stories (in the sense of personal accounts of past events) by audience members who interacted with participatory art projects in the 1960s and 1970s, I experienced how difficult it is to find these. In the archives I visited, hardly any documents have been preserved—apart from photographs—that report about the participants of that time, let alone about their background or their experiences. With regard to the *Waterwalk Tube* introduced above, I therefore tried to trace people who once participated in the work, hoping they could, in hindsight, share their personal recollections with me. ERG’s project was part of a program with all kinds of events organized for city residents, in order to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Groningen Liberation Day (Groningens Ontzet). Photographs of the *Waterwalk Tube* in Groningen demonstrate that many people went to take a look at the airy art project, which lasted only one day, and quite a few (at least 100 different participants can be counted in the photographs) also dared to enter the plastic event structure.

Through extensive photographic materials showing recognizable faces and the strong sense of community in Groningen, I hoped to identify and track down people who participated that day in August.¹⁹ By way of both traditional media (regional newspaper and radio) and digital, social media (Facebook, X, and LinkedIn), I put out several calls for people to come forward with information (figs. 5–6). To increase visibility and reach, I also received help from a number of heritage institutions, including the Groninger Archives (Groninger Archieven). Eventually, only two people contacted me and shared their memories of their interaction with the *Waterwalk Tube* in Groningen in 1972.²⁰

¹⁹ See, with regard to the strong sense of community, the results of a survey on the identity of Groningen and its citizens by Sociaal Planbureau Groningen in 2019: <https://sociaalplanbureaugroningen.nl/brede-welvaart/ervaren-leefbaarheid/trots-op-groningen/#sterke-verbondenheid-met-provincie>.

²⁰ One of these two individuals, a man, shared his account of the event with me through email on August 30, 2023. The other person, a woman, also contacted me through email on August 28, 2023 and agreed to meet me in person for a so-called semi-structured interview on September 12, 2023 in Assen, which was audio recorded. See Svend Brinkmann, “Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2014), 277. See also the *Stories in Motion Workflow* that resulted from the research project “(Re-)Tracing History: New Methodologies for Making the Past Tangible, Palpable and Negotiable”: <https://sprekendegeschiedenis.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SIM-WorkflowOralHistory.pdf>. Both the email correspondence and the audio recording are (for now) stored in my personal archives. Ideally, there would be one central, digital, and open repository for these type of participant interviews.

GRO

Honderden Stadters waagden zich tijdens de 300ste viering van Bommen Berend massaal in de ruim 200 meter lange 'Waterwalk Tube' die in het Verbindingskanaal was gelegd. Kunsthistoricus Annemarie Kok van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen wil voor haar onderzoek naar participatiekunst hun ervaringen optekenen.

FRANK VON HEBEL

Tijdens de 300ste editie van het Groningens Ontzet in 1972 werd stevig uitgepakt.

Zo bracht koningin Beatrix, opgewacht door 15.000 duiven (die uiteindelijk werden losgelaten), 4000 scholieren, een Rijdend Carillon en Show drumband Avanti, een bezoek aan de stad die in 1672 de bisschop van Keulen trotseerde.

Maar wie herinnert zich nog de bijna 250 meter lange plastic buis die in het Verbindingskanaal op de huidige plek van het Groninger Museum dreef? Stadters werden aangemoedigd om door de 'Waterwalk Tube' te wandelen.

De plastic buis was een initiatief van de Eventstructure Research Group (ERG), een kunstcollectief dat in 1967 was opgericht door Theo Botschuijver, Jeffrey Shaw en Sean Wellesley-Miller.

'Hoe hebben de deelnemers dit beleefd? Daar wil ik achter komen'

„Het doel van de kunstenaars was om de deelnemers te stimuleren op een andere manier naar de wereld te kijken”, legt kunsthistoricus Annemarie Kok (1984) uit. „Ze hoopten ook dat dit tot meer bewustwording van vrijheid en creativiteit zou leiden.”

Kok is bezig met een studie naar participatiekunst. „Deze kunstvorm kwam in de jaren zestig voor het eerst in beeld. Het doel is dat het publiek deelneemt aan het kunstproject, want deze kunst kan anders niet bestaan. Maar we weten helemaal niks over de bijdrage van dat publiek. Hoe hebben de deelnemers dit beleefd? Daar wil ik achter komen.”

Ze stuitte bij toeval op het kunstproject van ERG. „Ik was jaren geleden voor onderzoek naar participatiekunst in een archief in Kassel (Duitsland, red.). Hier las ik voor het



De plastic buis lag op de plek waar later het Groninger Museum zou komen. FOTO: PIETER BOERSMA

Gezocht: Groningers die over water liepen

eerst over de interactieve lucht-kunst van ERG. Later ontdekte ik dat ze ook in Groningen een project hadden gedaan. Er gingen meteen allerlei alarmbelletjes af.

Kok ontdekte dat de 'Waterwalk

Tube' in 1970 voor het eerst in Hannover werd gebruikt. „Naar het schijnt is deze na Groningen ook nog in Delft gelegd, maar daar heb ik nog geen beeld van gevonden. Voor mijn onderzoek concentreer ik me

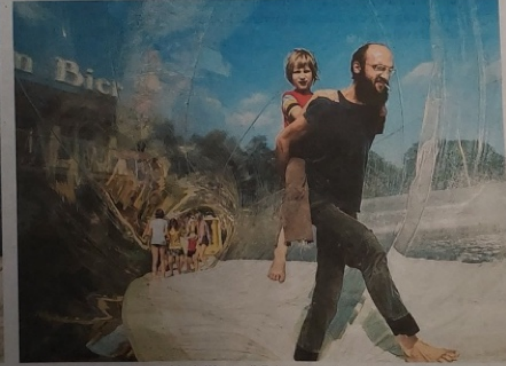
op Groningen.”

Overigens, de 'Waterwalk Tube' is niet meer. „Een van de kunstenaars heeft deze nog jarenlang bewaard, maar op den duur was de buis gewoon 'op'.”

Lezers die zich hun wandeling in de plastic buis nog herinneren worden verzocht te mailen naar m.f.a.kok@rug.nl.



Kunsthistoricus Annemarie Kok zoekt mensen die in de buis liepen. FOTO: PIETER BOERSMA



Stadters waagden zich in 1972 in de Waterwalk Tube. FOTO: PIETER BOERSMA

Figure 5: Article in regional newspaper *Dagblad van het Noorden*, September 16, 2023, with a call for people who “walked on water” in 1972 using ERG’s *Waterwalk Tube*. Photo by the author, 2023.

As scholar and curator Lizzie Muller notes, and I agree with her, “as few as three audience interviews can demonstrate a great variety of detailed and unexpected experiential aspects.”²¹ Two stories also do provide us with valuable information about the participatory project in Groningen, including the insights that participants indeed had to take off their shoes before entering the tube (confirming what is visible in the pictures); that walking inside the tube was not easy; that there was an atmosphere of joy and excitement, but also that there were incidents of bullying; and that the experience—at least for these two respondents—has created a lasting memory that is even shared with grandchildren. Apart from the accounts of the two initiating artists and the photographs, there was little to no information about the effects and experiences of this work—not even a newspaper report was found. The two stories of the participants fill these gaps and complement the stories of the artists, who are inclined to focus on their intentions, the used materials, and the success of the project.²² As important contributors to the animation of the *participatory* tube, the participants can rightly play a valuable role in forms of aftercare and afterthought; and since the work is *airy* (i.e. ephemeral) in nature, their stories are much needed to make the work “survive.” This example may alert contemporary artists, curators, conservators, archivists, and other art and heritage specialists to pay attention to, record, and collect the stories of participants in current *participatory* art projects and

²¹ Muller, “Towards an Oral History,” 14.

²² See also the two interviews with Theo Botschuijver and Jeffrey Shaw, respectively, conducted by the author on July 11, 2023 (in Amstelveen) and September 28, 2023 (in Lausanne).



Figure 6: Call for people who “walked on water” on August 28, 1972, spread by the Groninger Archieven via Facebook on August 28, 2023. Photo by the author, 2023.

involve them in practices of sharing and caring. Nevertheless, the result of the two accounts of the Groningen tube is somewhat thin, and I hope that there are more voices and stories to be found in the near future, possibly via alternative routes. But time is ticking: if yet undiscovered “living documents” die, important knowledge and memories disappear with them.

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