

Auto-archiving 20 years of Pixelache Helsinki

Andrew Gryf Paterson

Pixelache Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland

andrew@pixelache.ac | agryfp@protonmail.com

Abstract

Pixelache Helsinki is a Finland-based creative association on emerging creative practices with almost 20 years of activity in 2022. As part of their 20th anniversary, various strategies were taken to engage with the associational history: 7 processes or events were planned, produced, and reflected upon which engaged with membership involvements, what was left behind in the production office, guided walking tours through the festival's past venues 20 years before, podcasts, as well as inviting an internationally-respected external perspective for 'another story'. Each offers a reflection on what it might mean to try to archive and narrate an association's own history from multiple and diverse angles. This presentation is the start of a new story.

Keywords

Auto-archiving, Community archiving, Festival associational history, Association archival strategies, Workshop design, Event design

Introduction

Pixelache Helsinki is a Finland-based creative association on emerging creative practices with almost 20 years of activity in 2022. Beginning with 1st edition in 2002, the association was legally formed in January 2003. Starting as a Festival of Electronic Arts & Subcultures for the first decade, over the second decade the association has been running a self-described trans-disciplinary platform for emerging art, design, research, technology and activism. [1]

As Finland's longest running media arts festival has maintained an open-mindedness to emergent changes in all related festival aspects, that has been based initially on demoscene and open-source culture [2] [3]. That includes organizational formats, content presented, software and hardware promoted, various participants as contributors, guests and association members, in an intersectional mix of cultural, gender, technological, national and identity backgrounds. The festival has gained a reputation for not only presenting and supporting emerging practitioners, as an association it also dynamically adjusted its production formats to offer support and empower those involved and what they do. However, this diversity has come with a consequence, that there have been changing generations of persons involved in the core production team, the festivals over the years, and

many persons have moved on to do different things, even if they have stayed in the same city. [4]

In advance of the Autumn 2021 cycle of annual funding applications, this author asked their fellows, 'what shall we do to mark the 20th anniversary year?', especially after the latest Pixelache Helsinki 2021 Festival production. [5] The answers yielded in return connected with several ongoing processes that began to be posed, or raised as proposals, in 2019, anticipating these 'big numbers' years. They renew—arguably more traditional ideas of working with an association's memory—and re-vive, or indeed update, those who are present, involved contemporaneously, but were not more 3-4 years or 7-8 years before.

We sought to explore the how the association has developed, sustained or evolved its festival practice, and what may remain. A particular aspect of the challenge of our reflective projects in 2022 was that most of the active association members were relatively new members (within the past 2-5 years of involvement), and few or none active from the so-called middle generation of active persons. However, two older-established active persons—Antti Ahonen as the only member who has been to all festivals, including the first in 2002, who is also our festival & association photographer holding a huge visual archive—and then myself, who first attended Pixelache festival in 2003, and first contributed to the festival programme from 2004 onward, attending all festivals since.

In this short presentation paper, I very briefly share the various approaches the association has taken during 2022, its 20th anniversary year, which each highlight a different aspect of 'auto-archiving', and narrating past endeavors, with one exception when an outsider was invited to review and narrate. The overlap of artistic production and archiving as practices has been long acknowledged, however in overview, there are few examples of artistic communities archiving themselves. [6] I aim to contribute an example of grassroots community archiving [7], including artistic archiving strategies [8], and remind that small-scale and experimental cultural organizations may need to take—and lead—responsibility for their own archival processes, rather than wait until they are dis-associated, dispersed or no longer operational. That creative archival approaches can be a part of cultural programming. That stated, due to limited time for reflection or explanation, this paper is only the starting point

of considerations in auto-archival processes appropriate for a cultural festival with a long history.

I acknowledge that this author is biased, and also subjectively partial in narrating the history of Pixelache, as the festival has meant many different things for 1000s of participants over two decades. I write here as one who has been involved in all the archival processes listed, with exception of the last two listed. It was because of this dominant role I have had in narrating the festival's past, since 2012 onward, that the exceptional non-involvement was explicitly commissioned to offer 'another story'.

20th Anniversary Archival Processes

Audiozines

Engaging with organizational meta-data, considering the production office as a tangible memory device, and producing two 'audiozines' proposed by member Irina Mutt, we gathered conversational perspectives from active members of period 2015-2021 reflecting upon how the organization has changed, with objects and anecdotes as prompts. The 'audiozines' were edited together and post-produced with Sumugan Sivanesan. The conversational aspects of the audio format don't explain everything, but it was hoped the spirit encouraged listeners to delve deeper into our archive webpages. Two exhibit installations were additionally made, one featuring photographs of process and objects engaged, while a second installation exhibited the actual referenced objects also in a small exhibition. [9]

Gatherings of Elders

The 'Gathering of Elders' format took place in December 2020 with intention of a physical gathering but eventually realized as a 5-hour zoom call bringing together local and international festival guests & organizers from the 'Kiasma Years' (2003-2010). A second iteration was organized by Antti Ahonen & Jenna Jauhiainen into a guided walking tour in May 2022 in Helsinki of old Pixelache festival venues from 2002, accompanied by A4 colour print-outs of people and events of that year. None of the venues remained as they were 20 years ago, although we gained access to one old club venue that was in-between iterations. Active festival contributors and producers from period 2002-2010 attended the walking tour, many who had not met for more than a decade, and ended up with pizza and drinks in a downtown bar. [10]

Symposium and VJ-remix Party

Organizing a 1-day symposium co-curated with 2 other newer members who are curators, Irina Mutt and Soko Hwang, we curated together a day of presentations and screenings which combined both founding persons of the festival, new locals who have never attended the festival before, mixing both contemporary topical cultural issues with nostalgic and reflective perspectives. We were very conscious of the need to make an event interesting to younger

and newer audiences. However, towards the end of the day, it was only the 'old guard' who were left in the auditorium. However, the evening party produced by members Arlene Tucker, Mathilde Palenius, Antti Ahonen together with Jenna Jauhiainen. One specifically archival-performative aspect of the party was an interactive VJ interface which allow party goers, many of whom were former and current Pixelache associations members, plus friends, to joyfully live-remix visually the huge festival photography archive of Antti Ahonen. [11] [12]

Co-authored Histories & Herstories

Together with Juha Huuskonen, I was commissioned by Minna Tarkka, one of the 'MEHI' Finnish media art history anthology editors to write an article, summarizing 20 years of festival content & practices, highlighting emblematic art works. The festival was framed theoretically as an evolving community of practices. Juha Huuskonen, co-founder in 2002 and artistic director until 2011, plus myself involved from 2003-ongoing, combined our two authorial voices: the founder's & this author's perspective, respectively holding 10+ years and 18 years of involvements. It was a challenge to do so succinctly in a modest brief of 20,000 characters, and also represent a broad schema and range of activities. This article was written in English together, translated to Finnish, and will be published, to the authors' knowledge, first in Finnish, but according to the editor "contract with the publisher prohibits the publishing [of this article].. in any language before 2024". Hence, it will not be readable during either of the 20 year anniversary periods, neither 1st festival nor association founding, but of course after. [4] [13] Ideally, we can use this time delay in 2023-2024 to develop several more versions of this article is written with different pairings of older and newer active producers, to create missing herstories. We, or at least I am, are living in archives. [14]

Wikimedians-in-residence

This meta-archival processes was funded by Wikimedia Foundation rapid grant, to explore and reflect upon why Pixelache Festival's Wikipedia profile is 'stuck' with a profile made in 2005, updated a little in 2007, but largely left as a time capsule from more optimistic open knowledge, 'dot-org-boom' days. Initiated by Z. Blace, a Wikimedian-in-residence at Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, and friend of Pixelache Helsinki scene since the early 2000s, Pixelache collaborated with 4 other Wikimedians—Florence Devouard, Rebecca O'Neill, Toni Sant, Nikki Zeuner, and Z. Blace—to record & release conversations about Wiki practices and cultural organizations. [15]

Rotating Co-directors

The issue of similar people narrating has been an interest in Pixelache, and trying to find ways out of it have been meta-archival interest since 2014. To recapitulate, with an awareness of irony in me writing this, often the author of Pixelache histories over the past 12 years, finding ways to hand-over is a bunch of processes. Note to reader: The association

has had no dedicated artistic director since co-founder Juha Huuskonen stepped away from the role in late 2011. Following several years of open camp-style participant-curating of the Festivals 2012-2014, from Festival 2015 onward, there have been rotating co-directors model for each festival since. This has meant that each festival led by different co-directors connect with new themes, venues, collaborators, partners and of course participants.

One of our newest members, Irina Mutt, auto-designated this year acting as co-director for Pixelache 2023 Festival together with Soko Hwang, made a 3-part podcast process called 'Oral Text', where-by they "invited an artist to situate their stories in a timeline; past, present or future. Each episode and each artist took a different format as well; interview, sonic picture-sound field recordings and a conversation". [16]

Another Story

Proposed by Egle Oddo near the beginning of their tenure as association chairperson 2019-2022, an international media arts curator, Kisito Assangni, was commissioned from outside Pixelache to write a new interpretative narrative of the festival, based on what can be found online, without dialogue with associations members, and especially not those who have been involved in shaping past narratives to offer 'Another Story'. This essay was published in November 2022 in a high-profile contemporary arts online journal, before other association members had the chance to read it: A bold surprise (!) to sincerely aim at re-contextualizing Pixelache with new references and within broader movements of media art archiving and art histories. [17]

Conclusion

At its best, Pixelache Festival is a community of hybrid & media art practices, fostering several generations of emerging practitioners and genres, inspired by an open, pragmatic and emerging culture over 20 years with various trans-disciplinary -mindsets. While not everyone has followed the same path, it may be argued that progressive and necessary changes in Finnish society and life have been regularly emerging at the festivals. For this reason Pixelache Festival is worth investing time in to archive and share with others what has been done over its whole duration. Finding plurality of voice, a poly-vocal approach to narratives and stories about what has happened is important, as it reflects the many 1000s who have been involved.

The challenge for all of the described auto-archiving processes above was the longevity of the festival and the changing active members and production office workers has meant that various strategies had to be taken to engage not only the newer members, but also reach out to the older ones. In the last case, outsourcing the development a new narrative—another story—based upon what is found online

about our association, engaging with our Content Management System (CMS) designed in 2012, but not developed much regularly in the past decade, raised anxieties (at least in this author) of how to make accessible what we have done despite the 'link-rot' and CMS that happens to webpages after a decade or more. [18] Of course, that is a common problem and how most of the online-engaged audience see us as a festival or as an association. It may be objective, but it may just as well be partial, subjective and generated narrative based upon what remains, what is left behind, that which can be found or scrapped together at any given time. That is a dynamic reality of archives, that they are living entities. There is, however, an even harder angle to share more about associational engagement in archiving. It is one I have regularly discussed with my fellow Pixelache 'old-timer', and out of such conversation I wrote this in 2017:

Archiving is often seen as a dull aspect of cultural production. Life, events, festivals and performances go on whether they are archived or not, so there is always more to do. However, an important point of archiving is to question how we remember the passions, enthusiasms, associations and processes that we make for ourselves in the name of art, culture, activism, research. Hybrid practices are already difficult to describe. How can we archive them? How can we do the labour of sorting, selecting, renaming, meta-tagging, uploading, re-presenting and so on: tasks that can become deadly boring, tedious, and under the eternal threat of never being completed. After all, there is always the next upcoming thing.

I believe our approaches to the complexity and hard-to-describe quality of Pixelache over 20 years—at the time of our double decade anniversary years—give rich creative example of self-organized auto-archival strategies for other cultural associations and festivals.

Oi! Did I forget to mention that Antti Ahonen & Jenna Jauhiainen arranged for a Pixelache time-capsule to be made before the end of last year? Apparently they put some things from our production office—leaflets, flyers, DVDs, badges, T-shirts hopefully—actually I don't know what is inside. It is a fawn leather bag, early 90s style, and it is cling-film wrapped up, and currently sits on top of our shelves, above the archive boxes. Let's hope someone finds it in a cellar in 10 to 20 years time.

References

- [1] Pixelache Helsinki, “About” webpage, accessed March 24, 2023, <http://www.pixelache.ac/pages/about>
- [2] Katri Halonen, “Open Source and New Media Artists,” *Human Technology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 [9] (2007). Accessed August 17, 2023, https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/20205/HT_2007_v03_n01_p_98-114.pdf
- [3] Andrew Gryf Paterson, “Case Study of Camp Pixelache 2010-2014,” In *Agents of Alternatives: Re-designing our realities*, eds. Alastair Fuad-Luke, Anja-Lisa Hirscher and Katharina Moebus (Berlin: Agents of Alternatives e.V., 2015). Accessed August 17, 2023, <https://olsof.pixelache.ac/publications> | <https://archive.org/details/agryfp-2014-camp-pixelache-2010-2014-agents-of-alternatives-interview>
- [4] Andrew Gryf Paterson and Juha Huuskonen, “Pixelache-festivaali käytäntöyhteisönä (Pixelache Festival as an evolving community of practices),” In *Suomalaisen mediataiteen ensimmäinen vuosisata -antologia (First 100 Years of Finnish Media Art Anthology)*, eds. Heidi Tikka, Petri Kuljuntausta, Tytti Rantanen and Minna Tarkka (Helsinki: Suomen Mediataideverkosto & Parvus kustannus, 2023).
- [5] Pixelache Helsinki, “Festival 2021 #Burn_____” website, accessed March 24, 2023, <http://burn.pixelache.ac>
- [6] Charles Merewether. ed. *The Archive (Documents of Contemporary Art)* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006).
- [7] Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Arch Sci*, Vol. 13 (2013): 95-120.
- [8] Ernest van Alphen, ed. *Productive Archiving – Artistic Strategies, Future Memories, and Fluid Identities* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2023).
- [9] Pixelache Helsinki, “CreaTures experimental production: How do we keep going?” project website, accessed March 24, 2023, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://pixelache.ac/projects/creatures/pages/how-do-we-keep-going> | <https://creatures-eu.org/productions/pixelache/>
- [10] Pixelache Helsinki, “Gathering of Elders” 2003-2010 & 2002 event webpages, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://www.pixelache.ac/events/gathering-of-elders-the-kiasma-years-2003-2010> | <https://www.pixelache.ac/events/gathering-of-elders-2002-edition>
- [11] Pixelache Helsinki, “Contact: 20 years of Pixelache” event webpage, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://www.pixelache.ac/events/contacts-20-years-of-pixelache>
- [12] Pixelache Helsinki, “Looking Backwards >< Looking Forwards: 20 years of Pixelache party” event webpage, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://pixelache.ac/events/looking-backwards-looking-forwards-20-years-of-pixelache-party>
- [13] Suomen Mediataideverkosto, ‘MEHI: Mediataiteen historia Suomessa’ project webpage, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://media-art-finland.fi/mehiinfo/>
- [14] Annet Dekker, ed. *Lost and Living (In) Archives – Collectively Shaping New Memories* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017).

- [15] Andrew Gryf Paterson, Pixelache Helsinki, “Pixelache Wikimedians-in-residence 2022: Podcasts about Wikimedia & grassroots cultural organisations” press-release blog post (April 21, 2023), accessed August 18, 2023, <https://pixelache.ac/posts/pixelache-wikimedians-in-residence-2022-podcasts-about-wikimedia-grassroots-cultural-organisations>
- [16] Pixelache Helsinki, ‘Oral Text’ podcast series on Soundcloud platform, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://soundcloud.com/pixelache>
- [17] Kisito Assangni, “Distangling Archives - How We Are Entering a New Era: The Case of Pixelache Helsinki (2022)”, *ArtDependence Magazine* website, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://artdependence.com/articles/distangling-archives-how-we-are-entering-a-new-era-the-case-of-pixelache-helsinki/>
- [18] Pixelache Helsinki, ‘Archive 2022’ webpages, Content Management System by No Culture Icons, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://pixelache.ac/archive/2022>

Bibliography

Edited books

Charles Merewether. ed. *The Archive (Documents of Contemporary Art)* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006).

Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Arch Sci*, Vol. 13 (2013): 95-120.

Ernest van Alphen, ed. *Productive Archiving – Artistic Strategies, Future Memories, and Fluid Identities* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2023).

Annet Dekker, ed. *Lost and Living (In) Archives – Collectively Shaping New Memories* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017).

Author Biography

andrew gryf paterson (SCO/FI) - 'Artist-organiser', cultural producer, educator, curator and independent researcher. They specialize in exploring connections between art, digital culture, science, cultural activism related to the commons, DIY-Do-It-With-Others.Do-It-For-Research, ecological and sustainability movements, along with cultural heritage and collaborative networks. Originally from Scotland, Paterson has an international practice, including activity over the past ~20 years in the Baltic Sea region, based for most of the time in Helsinki, Finland. He works across the fields of media/ network/ environmental arts and activism, pursuing a participatory practice through workshops, performative events, and storytelling. Strengths lie in hybridity, communications, organization and network arts: the ability to bring together and involve people in creative, collaborative exploration, developing temporary communities, gathering unexpected elements and components as new spaces of/for cultural activity. What is left behind as social, digital, material and ephemeral residue of 'being t/here' has been a consistent concern. Archived more or less here; <http://agryfp.info> | archive.org member since 11.2015