Mail Art Then and Now Reflection

With the proliferation of Cloud Computing and Internet of Things, the notion of Mail Art and Correspondence Art, art that does not rely on one sole creator but evolves as different people contribute to the creation of the piece, offers so many new creative potentials. The process of one art being passed on, and another artist correspondingly reacting to the piece could now be done within seconds through emails or other messaging platforms. The time it takes to transport physical objects has also been reduced dramatically. Now, rather than Correspondence art, the name “Simultaneous Art” seems more relevant. Without having to wait days or even hours for mail to be transferred from one place to another, artists can simultaneously work together online and even physically. Think about text art (in the form of mail art) on a Google Doc where all the artists can write all at once. Through motion sensors or virtual reality simulators, we can now collaborate on one project while being physically separated by hundreds of miles. One example is the inFORM, a project created by The Tangible Media Group, which allows users to move 3D objects by controlling a pinscreen remotely (<http://www.fastcodesign.com/3021522/innovation-by-design/mit-invents-a-shapeshifting-display-you-can-reach-through-and-touch>). The increase of crowd sourcing as an artist’s tool further lubricates this movement towards “Simultaneous Art.” Among the artists, Aaron Koblin, now the creative director of data arts at Google, most notably created *The Sheep Market* in 2006 using Mechanical Turk. (Refer to this article crowd-sourcing in art, http://www.artnews.com/2014/09/02/artists-and-crowdsourcing/) The piece shows 10,000 sheep drawings of varying skill levels in 40 days, all drawn by workers who were paid two cents per sketch.

As shown from the examples, Internet of Things and developing computing technologies introduce a myriad of new methods for creative collaboration. These new possibilities naturally lead to the question: how are these new forms of art and art making shifting artist’s agency? In regards to Koblin’s *The Sheep Market,* could the workers paid to draw a single sheep also claim authorship of the final piece? According to the artist, the piece belongs to a “smarmy capitalist person who is selling the sheep drawings.” Designers in tech, especially, could not help but think how our work fits in this world of collaboration. If we take lines of code from Codepen or use open source to fuel our designs, how creative are we really being?