

Politicizing Publics: A Social Framework for Public Artworks

Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan

Introduction

As early as 1996, in her essay '*What is Public Art?: Time, Place and Meaning*', Hilde Hein explores what constitutes public art. Suggesting that 'the concept of public art has undergone radical changes', she acknowledges that 'today's public artworks may be impermanent and discontinuous, like the installations of Suzanne Lacy' (Hein 1996, p. 2). Thus, like the concept of space, 'public art became first an object *in* public space, and then a sculpting of that space as objects too evaporated, leaving only relations behind' (ibid.).

For Doreen Massey space is a social construction that is always under production; space is never fixed but continually being (re)formed. The move from imagining space as a physical entity to the recognition of it as a social and contingent concept (Massey 2005) is not that dissimilar from the trajectory that contemporary art takes – contemporary art shifts from unique physical objects to incorporate social and performative means of production. Artists use action and intervention as a way of performing their social critique - participatory art practice, relational aesthetics and new genre public art can be described as an art that engages directly *with* the political imagination as opposed to representing it.

Jurgen Habermas' theory of the Bourgeois Public Sphere (Habermas [1962] 1989) – as well as other scholars' expansions of public sphere theory Benhabib, Mouffe and Fraser - have been utilised by both W.J. T Mitchell (Mitchell 1992). and Rosalyn Deutsche (Deutsche 2002) to analyse the practice of public art.

By employing the term 'public sphere' as opposed to the term 'public space' we are better able to understand the internal contradictions of 'publicness' and ask what actually constitutes a public space. This is in contrast to the way in which the word 'public' is traditionally used in the expression of 'public art' and 'art in public places' which usually refers pragmatically to the siting of an art work in an 'outside' space. And although the rhetoric around this practice uses the terminology of democracy as Rosalyn Deutsche observes, the divisions between desirable and undesirable publics still remain.

Following a \$1.2-million reconstruction of the park, a neighborhood group, Friends of Jackson Park - a group the *Times* consistently mistakes for both 'the community' and 'the public'-decided to lock the newly installed park gates at night. The City Parks Department, lacking sufficient personnel to close the park, welcomed 'public' help in protecting public space, a defense they equated with evicting homeless people from city parks. 'The people who hold the keys,' announced the *Times*, 'are determined to keep a park a park' (Deutsche 2002, p. 276).

Habermas describes the bourgeois public sphere as being made up of private individuals; what makes it public is simply that they publish their opinions (ibid.). These shared opinions remain the views of private individuals, but by being published they become part of the collective attempt to arrive at common values, decisions, and potential actions. And as Susen explains,

The public sphere is nothing but the socialised expression of individuals' reciprocally constituted autonomy: individuals are autonomous not in isolation from but in relation to one another, that is, in relation to a public of autonomous beings (Susen 2011, p. 42).

The key idea that we take from Jürgen Habermas is not the concept of the public within the public sphere, but the activity of publishing (Habermas [1962] 1989). As such, the public is neither an empirical body, nor a spatial concept. The public sphere is a *performative* arrangement; it is the activity of 'going public' or 'making something public' that fills particular places and spaces with public life. And this is why the public can emerge in private, commercial and mobile spaces too, such as the coffee house, the magazine, the parlour, the Working Men's Club, the political party and the pub (Beech, et al 2007).

The use of a public sphere theory framework to emphasise the social and political interactions within the term 'public', resonates with Massey's theory that space is too

often understood as formal, physical and static. Thus we can move away from the original physical description of both ‘public’ and ‘space’ within the discourse of public art.

Furthermore by taking into account that the social turn in art practices is allied with the public realm, the public domain and public space, and is understood to include temporary artworks that engage people in their production, we identify a parallel set of concerns between Massey’s explanation of space and Habermas’ articulation of the public sphere. Hence we propose that the notion of the ‘social’ in the term ‘social art practice’ and the term ‘public’ in ‘public art’ should be understood as discursive constructs. The ‘social’, understood as in the ‘social production of being’ as opposed to a set of sociable interactions or chance meetings; the ‘public’ recognized as a contingent body of citizens with a degree of shared purpose or common experience rather than a placid community of abstractly equal individuals (ibid.).

By bringing these two theories together, we can better understand participatory art practice. By distinguishing which artworks rely on a limited understanding of the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘public’, and which ones operate with an expanded engagement with ‘space’ and ‘public’, we can begin to articulate the different social relations of production within specific artworks. Appreciating this, we argue, enables us to better analyse in what ways artworks are *public*.

In order to do this, we examine three artworks: *Nowhereisland*, by Alex Hartley, *Gramsci Monument* by Thomas Hirschorn and *Node* by Stealth.

Utilizing this framework we develop three instances in which the notion of ‘publicness’ is utilised in contemporary artworks: We describe these as:

1. Picturing Publics - a picturing of people as part of the artwork.
2. Educating Publics – the function of the artwork is to enable a distribution of knowledge by the artist-
3. Benefiting Publics - the artist provides a service or product for a specific community in which the result and consequences enable a practical enhancement of the users’ lives.

No space like a public sphere

As Hein points out, art historian Patricia Phillips, acknowledges the importance of asking what the meaning of public is within the term 'public art'. She recognises the changing concept of *public* in a mass media context when she says,

... The millions of television viewers of the lighted apple's descent in New York's Times Square New Year's Eve celebration are as much a part of the public spectacle as are the thousands of witnesses on the street. Only the meaning of the word 'public' has changed, becoming more 'psychologically internalised' as a result of developments in urban and information systems (Hein 1996, p. 7).

Habermas' ([1962] 1989) concept of the bourgeois public sphere is a virtual or imaginary community that does not exist in any specific location. However a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. Similarly, there is not a singular form of public sphere. For Habermas, contemporary opinion formation can occur through any number of means and can be a combination of processes (for example, in correspondence via letters, printed media, the internet or phone technology, informal meetings in the street, in a public building, in the home, a local shop, park or street), or can be organised as a more formal system of association such as a labour union or a political organisation.

Both Habermas and Massey understand social relations as political. Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere (ibid.) is a historical description of the development of liberal democracy. Massey insists on the multiplicity of space and warns against turning 'space into time'. This view advances the way we think about globalisation; currently a single historical trajectory is inferred by the dominant terminology of 'developed and developing' countries: This trajectory inevitably suggests a hierarchy along which 'developing' countries will progress to the state of 'developed' countries. Such an arrangement fails to take into account the contingencies of space and time and consequently it reverts to a notion of progress through accumulated historical understanding directed by prevailing nation states (Massey and Warburton 2013).

From Public Spaces, to Public Assembly

For the purposes of this text we broadly define public space as accessible spaces which are generally open to people; parks, roads and pavements, beaches, as well as spaces that are owned by the state or the people, public libraries, national parks, government buildings - including objects and services that are paid for by taxes like military bases etc. (Parkinson 2012). There is an important distinction between a public space and a public assembly, as the places in which people gather can be both publicly owned as well as commercially instigated. For example, they include the market place, coffee shops, football stadiums, theatres, churches, etc.

There is no question that disputes over public space are still an essential part of politics. Notwithstanding the collective agreement that access to physical space alone is not the formation of a counter-public sphere, we do however need to meet somewhere and in some place - be it physical or virtual - to generate our collective opinions. The act of addressing the question of what constitutes public space - and furthermore to whom it belongs - is central to political transformation. As Doreen Massey notes, 'space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other; space is the dimension of multiplicity' and therefore 'it is space that presents us with the question of the social' (Massey and Warburton 2013).

The right to public assembly is a stipulated human right; 'Article 20' of 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights', states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association'.¹ The purpose of the congregation is the key to the difference between a public assembly and an audience of an event. A public assembly is comprised of active publics, with an opinion to share. The *content* of a public gathering is the reason why people attend, and the subject under discussion is what attracts passers-by to join in. When discussing the impact of the Occupy movement's occupation of St Paul's Cathedral, Massey says,

While I was there people who had nothing to do with the occupation came up to me and asked questions and talked and it seemed to me that what they managed briefly to create there was a really public space, which means it was a place for the creation of a public, of politically engaged subjects if you like,

of people who would talk to each other about the wider world (Massey and Warburton 2013).

To be sure, accidental publics like shoppers and passers-by can join an existing public assembly and become part of the public sphere, but a bystander is not converted into a public by the formal act of gathering alone (Jordan 2011).

Under neoliberalism the interests of capital have dominated public spaces. Spaces traditionally understood as 'public' have been turned into places of economic consumption not just through commercial advertising but also through state interventions that have led to the physical reshaping of civic spaces, entertainment venues and the high street (ibid.). However as Massey believes, space is a product of our relations with each other, which inevitably includes the matter of power within these interactions. When we become aware of the unequal distribution of power of some groups over others, or power of some places over others, this translates into the political (Massey and Warburton 2013). It is through social exchanges that we transform public spaces into political places: being a passer-by is negotiable: We all have the capacity to change our status whilst in the public realm; each one of us has the agency to interfere, act up and protest, and lots of us do (Jordan 2011).

A public assembly is predicated on social principles and is not simply a physical spatial entity. Understanding this concept can affect the way we consider the 'public' within 'public art', and it enables us to recognise the limitations of declaring an artwork public when it is installed in a 'public' (usually outside) space. In addition, state commissioned and publically funded artworks are also not necessarily public, and an artwork does not necessarily have to be funded by the state to for it to be acknowledged as public. In this sense, the definition of an artwork's 'publicness' is defined by the way it operates within the public sphere of opinion formation (politics) as opposed to its technical specifications.

Public Art towards Participatory Art

During the 1990's UK cultural policy encouraged artists to work in the public realm within culture-led regeneration projects. Due to significant increases in the funding of the arts, opportunities for new commissions and project development increased and

artists established new approaches to working in the public realm. Groups such as Muf and Public Works developed interdisciplinary methods, which provided new models of art practice in urban and rural contexts. Other artists, such as Jeremy Deller, Mark Wallinger and Liam Gillick combined their work in the commercial gallery sector with projects in the publicly funded sector, either with art galleries or in publicly funded regeneration contexts.

In the last ten years, theories of art and participation have centred on ideas by Bourriaud, Bishop and Kester. Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002) has been influential in advocating non object-based practices. His theory redefines the political as 'models of sociability' and 'micro-utopias' in the space provided by the art institution. Bishop is critical of Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics', outlining three issues in this theory that she finds problematic: activation, authorship and community. Firstly, she says, there is an emphasis on an active subject being formed via participation in an artwork. Secondly, co-authorship is presented as non-hierarchical production – the matter of power is overlooked. And thirdly, due to a perceived crisis in community relations, the restoration of a social bond is imagined through participatory art projects. Bishop is critical of arguments made for the virtues of 'Relational Aesthetics', claiming that the participant lacks a distinct role in these exchanges, neither an author, nor a collaborator, the potential for subjects to become an activated public is limited (Bishop 2006, p. 180). The implication here is that Bishop believes that some forms of participation are hegemonic: To support her point, she reminds us of how "participation is used by business as a tool for improving efficiency and workforce morale" (ibid.)

According to Bishop, there are two potential outcomes of participation. One is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative. Bishop believes that Bourriaud's concept of participation in relational aesthetics is both constructive and ameliorative in its 'convivial' encounter with the other. She claims that whilst taking coffee or sharing a meal does reconfigure what art can be, his theory diminishes antagonism in favour of acts of sociability. This 'micro-utopian' togetherness is made frictionless as members undertake a communal activity such as eating together. She accuses Bourriaud of putting 'sociability' or 'conviviality' where dissent and critique should be (ibid.).

Bishop has entered into a series of debates with Grant Kester who advocates the dialogical as a form of art practice.² In her critique of social artworks, Bishop sets up a tension by contrasting ideas of the aesthetics and ethics. Bishop discusses the ethics of authorship in dialogic art practices. In Kester's theory of dialogic aesthetics, she sees a "trend toward identity politics – respect of the other, recognition of difference, protection of fundamental liberties, inflexible mode of political correctness – [meaning] a rejection of art that might offend or trouble its audience" (Bishop 2004, p. 67). Bishop describes Kester as being against sophisticated art and theory, and suggests that his position undermines art's political potential.

It is worth pointing out here that although Bishop complains about the sociability of 'Relational Aesthetics', she herself reverts to a formal question of art's ontology; for her the value in relational aesthetics is in its ability to question what is acceptable as art. Considered in this way, she reduces the social relations in art to merely functioning in order to innovate; formal techniques of what art can be are deemed the primary goal for socially engaged art practice. This has repercussions on her overall critique of relational aesthetics as it presupposes a commitment to the concept of nomination as a convincing method for the production of art practice. We would say that this is contrary to the intentions of the first generation of artists making social artworks. Furthermore Bishop neglects to consider the potential political associations that might be formed from an initial convivial encounter.

Picturing People: Nowhereisland

Alex Hartley's project *Nowhereisland* was commissioned as one of the 12 selected art projects for 'Artists Taking the Lead', the 2012 Cultural Olympiad commission for the South West.

Nowhereisland was devised by Alex Hartley, who whilst on an expedition to the Arctic discovered an island revealed by receding ice, which he declared a new nation, an idea that led to the *Nowhereisland* project. '*Nowhereisland* is a floating sculpture, which is comprised of glacial moraine that the artist removed from the Arctic archipelago in the Norwegian region of Svalbard'³.

In fact, *Nowhereisland* was manufactured by MDM Props, London. The island is a 60-metre long steel structure, with fibre-glass and resin used to form the island's surface; the glacial moraine retrieved from the High Arctic was scattered over the finished structure. The manufacture of the sculpture required the fabricators to wear masks, boiler suits taped at their wrists, as well as ankle protectors and safety boots.⁴

The website claims that *Nowhereisland* was pulled from the High Arctic to the South West of England, where it undertook a 500-mile trip around the South West coast (ibid). However, as it was made in London it is not clear what part of the island was pulled from the High Arctic.

The environmental agenda would appear to be a key motivation for the production of *Nowhereisland*, as is evident in claims made in the promotion of the project. Statements about the project make clear a critique of contemporary life, contrasting the quiet unpopulated Arctic with the social conditions of the busy world, and the impact of the latter upon the former. The website states,

Nowhereisland began in a place far from the noise of the urban centres of the Western world. Far (it would seem) from the passport controls and security checks of our journeys across national boundaries. Far from the riots and protests of our streets. Far from the ringing of our phones, the buzzing of our cash points, the tapping of our keyboards. And yet of course, *Nowhereisland* began in exactly the place in which all the actions made by us and decisions made for us are brought to bear - the Arctic (ibid.).

In an attempt to point to the cause and effect of global warming, the social world is described as crowded and noisy in contrast to the tranquil landscape of the arctic region. The consequence of this is that *Nowhereisland* is therefore demarcated as a flat, objective space, and denies the 'throwntogetherness' of space that Massey endorses (Massey 2005)⁵. 'To hold onto the idea of open space is a dubious concept' (Massey 2005, p. 152) and presents a de-worlded view of the problems we collectively face. The idea that we can achieve a space without people, nations states and technology can only be an ideological construct; this romanticised notion of being

alone and therefore individual is utilised by neo- liberalism to ward off threats of collectivity. It is reasonable to imagine that many people accept and understand the deleterious effect industrialisation and global capital are having upon our environment, yet it is unclear how crucial a romantic, solipsistic world of explorers, tall ships and artistic integrity is for inquiring into what constitutes a responsible geography.

Audiences congregated on points along the South West coastline to catch a glimpse of the island. The island's mobile Embassy (a motor vehicle) arrived in ports and towns to represent the visiting nation. As well as a mobile museum, it was also a vehicle that functioned to provide interpretation for the project at points on the coastline. The website describes it as,

a place at which citizenship can be conferred, ceremonial duties undertaken and it will carry with it the stories of its origins and will gather new stories as it moves from location to location (Nowhereisland 2015).

Certainly the project aimed to raise awareness of eco-politics. Looking to galvanise people's imagination, it encouraged them to engage in thinking about what they wanted the island (and, by association, the world) to be like, through a 'vox pop' method of immediate response. The top ten propositions from the Nowhereian citizens included 'Every child will be read to each night' and 'Every Nowhereian has the right to be silent' and 'Every Nowherian has the right to be heard' (ibid.). These demands seem tame, and in fact they are not as radical as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948 and warns against slavery and servitude, supports the right to be able to eat and keep warm, and promotes the right to belong to a nation.

The project team imagined the island as a tool intended to be outside of current thinking on matters of the political, as well as a catalyst for urgent action. Simon Anholt (one of the 52 resident thinkers of *Nowhereisland*) says, it's about the opportunity to "stop the world, I want to get off" and "it's the first *non-country*, a piece of truly neutral territory where people can get outside the system to think about the system" (Anholt 2011). In this way the project encourages the viewer to turn their

back on the particularities of space and time. It is therefore no surprise that the propositions suggested by its new citizens rely on generic and universal ideas of public good.

Nowhereisland's constitution was to be devised by its citizens by eliciting answers to questions about migration, sovereignty and global warming, as well as inviting responses to what life would be like in a place where we could begin again. In this way, the project does have the possibility to become a public sphere as it offers the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas about how people want to live. However, the abstract notion of the concept of *Nowhereisland* means that there is not much at stake, nothing to actually invest in, because this is not a step towards a real exchange of opinion: Rather, it catches fanciful ideas for potential change.

Anholt makes it clear that, he sees its value in its independence:

There could be no better vantage-point to take a fresh, clear, cool, hard non-country look at the world and see what we can do to solve these non-country problems (Anholt 2011).

This disregards the question of art's autonomy from the social sphere as a crucial consideration for a generation of artists occupied with the social function of art. Whilst we are not searching for a quantifiable amount of change affected by Hartley's project, more importantly we would expect a challenge to the aesthetic role of the artwork as well as alternatives to art's autonomy. That is not to say artists have to offer up pragmatic solutions, but it is not much to ask that they be aware of the politics of space and notions of the public when they utilise these concepts in the production of their artworks.

Public engagement was seen as a key component of the project. However, it seems engagement here is used loosely as a term, which speaks of audiences, onlookers and passers-by. A significant claim for 'engagement' is made by the project team in the evaluation report, (as evidenced by the number of people involved), which actually constitutes audiences as well as project partners. There are photographs of the project that includes people looking out to sea at *Nowhereisland*, as well as audience

members pictured with the mobile Embassy. These images demonstrate evidence of popular interest in the artwork. As they represent people engaged with the sculpture, this manifests as publicity and is managed through the interpretation of the artwork.

Insert illustration of Nowhereisland here

Educating Publics: Gramsci Monument

In 1999, Thomas Hirschhorn began making monuments to philosophers; to date he has completed monuments to Spinoza (Amsterdam 1999), Deleuze (Avignon, 2000), Bataille (Documenta 11 Kassel 2002), Gramsci (New York 2013). Hirschhorn describes these monuments as precarious; they are purposefully temporary in order to be “a monument for a limited time” (Hirschhorn 2014). They differ from conventional sculptural tributes which commemorate the life of an authorised individual, typically of someone who has served in wars and campaigns, contributed to science, technology or industry or is a member of royalty. And in doing so, Hirschhorn attempts to break the authority of the regular type of statue, by conceiving his monuments as ‘community commitments’ (ibid.).

Hirschhorn’s monuments are composed of at least two parts: Firstly, what Hirschhorn calls the ‘classical-part’, which is a representation of the thinker depicting his head or body, and secondly the ‘information part’, which comprises all types of material including books, videotapes, statements, and biographical documents⁶. It is in this way that the concept of the monument is extended to include not only a depiction of the philosopher but, more significantly, to also embrace the work of the philosopher. His version of the monument marks a decisive shift away from statues that manifest as representations of a person’s form. Hirschhorn proposes that we should celebrate the contribution that these philosophers have made by collectively engaging with their work rather than publishing what they looked like, for he does not care for the convention of figurative representation (ibid.). This tactic succeeds in socializing the formerly autonomous monument, and furthermore it (re)activates the work of these thinkers, thus enabling viewers, publics, and onlookers to engage in their ideas in the here and now.

For his latest work, the *Gramsci Monument* (commissioned by Dia Art Foundation in 2013), he developed a project, which was sited in a working class area of New York. From July to September 2013, *Gramsci Monument* was open seven days a week on the grounds of Forest Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development in the Morrisania neighbourhood of the New York City borough of the Bronx.

The *Gramsci Monument* takes the form of a village hall with functioning rooms, and spaces for a library, discussion space, exhibition space, canteen, museum, classroom, along with facilities including a newspaper, workshop, computer room and radio station. The temporary construction was built by residents of Forest Houses; the buildings were constructed using Hirschhorn's trademark materials, plywood, tape, tarpaulin sheets and rough-sawn timber, adorned with slogans, instructions and information (Gramsci Monument 2013) Gramsci Monument, no author),.

A programme of events ran daily between 10am and 7pm, which included political and philosophical lectures, theatre performances, children's workshops, and art classes run by Hirschhorn. My mission, says Hirschhorn, "is to establish a new term of monument, provoke encounters, create an event, think Gramsci today" (ibid.).

His monuments rethink the conventional idea of statues, presenting structures that introduce people to new ways of tribute. This is not formal innovation but political engagement: The intention here is to think political for political action. Hirschhorn talks of the monuments in terms of encounters, however his desire for the encounter is one based on the pursuit of active assembly, not happenstance convivial meetings.

There is no doubt that the *Gramsci Monument* project sits awkwardly in its physical siting; this is Hirschhorn's intention: He spent a considerable amount of time choosing the location, and the people with whom to work. Visiting Forest Houses in the South Bronx puts most art 'insiders' in unfamiliar territory; conversely residents of Forest Houses are comfortable in these environs but almost certainly are not used to thinking about contemporary art (there, and maybe not at all). The insertion of the artwork in this particular place is part of the way Hirschhorn asks political questions about the function of culture and the problems of social division.

The *Gramsci Monument* temporarily alters the material economic and social conditions of the site. The South Bronx residents accept their guest, as Hirschhorn's visit has been negotiated with key community leaders who ratified his temporary tenure of the green space between the apartment buildings. People take from the project what they want (and here there are material choices), they accept the windfall of paid work, the physical changes to their locale, the spectacle of the visual intervention, the rush of strangers who come to visit the neighbourhood, and when the project is completed and is broken down they benefit from a share in Hirschhorn's materials and equipment.

The monuments to philosophers are not permanent but mirror the duration of contemporary art exhibitions, enabling Hirschhorn and his projects to occupy a new spatial and social territory before moving onto the next place and project. The monuments are for commemorating and engaging with the likes of Gramsci, they are not for quiet isolated contemplation. Instead they address collective exchange as well as functioning as a type of pedagogic apparatus.

The political education of viewers or visitors to the monument places an emphasis on learning about the significance of the critical thinker in question.

Hirschhorn's educational framework introduces ideas of political thought and subjectivity reminiscent of the adult education of the 'New Left' in post war UK, which included writers and activists such as Raymond Williams, Ralph Miliband and E.P. Thompson. This approach to educational practice was significant, as it promoted a discussion of a 'history from below', as a way to examine literature, culture in general as well as political theory. According to Tom Steele and Richard Taylor, it "produced a much greater interest in Marxist theory in Britain than ever before and many student dissidents subsequently sought careers in adult education and its more radical offshoot, community education" (Steele and Taylor 2004, p. 586). Certainly the English translation of Antonio Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks' in 1971 was influential: Gramsci emphasised the idea of 'cultural struggle', education having a pivotal role in the transformation of class structure. This was mirrored in the view of Williams, Thompson and Hoggart.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony referred directly back to the early Marx of

The German Ideology and claimed that the ruling class ruled more by the consent of the subordinate classes to their ideas and values than by direct coercion – although this, of course, was always the ultimate backup. Constructing the counter-hegemony therefore became the rationale for many adult educators (ibid.)

Hirschhorn is equally informed by the notion of the ‘organic intellectual’: an idea that contested the concept of an intellectual class and called for the acknowledgement that all work, including *manual* work, involved the intellect. Thus all types of workers were capable of intellectual development and political understanding. For sure, Hirschhorn’s project does not have the structural capacity to effect change on the scale of the introduction of adult education in post-war Britain but it has at its core a critical intention of understanding how culture needs to operate towards social transformation. Gramsci did not want to further educate people in order for them to fit more effectively into the existing apparatus of education, but rather his project called to alter the social structures of education in order to recognise and endorse different forms of knowledge. Thus, managing the (re)education of the public is not the sort of change Gramsci wanted. Gramsci calls for the actual (social, economic and political) apparatus to be restructured, and this is the purpose of Gramsci’s formulations of hegemony. For Gramsci the practice of hegemony is precisely what keeps the apparatus intact.

The question is whether a monument to Gramsci extend beyond the pragmatics of educating publics to disrupting the way things are managed. Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument* may not be an all-out attack on the ideological state apparatus, but it can be considered as an acknowledgement to the need for political and social change.

Insert Illustration of Gramsci Monument here

Benefiting Publics: Node

Nodos de Desarrollo Cultural No.1 (Cultural Development Node No.1) is a project by the group STEALTH.⁷ It is an architectural project that aims to extend and enlarge the

activities of the Cultural Development Center of Moravia (CDCM), located in a poor district of Medellín in Columbia.

STEALTH have developed a number of low-cost temporary ‘buildings’ to house and extend the existing cultural community development programme. Through the use of locally sourced materials - much of it recycled - and the use of local craft skill and labour, they have been able to design and build structures that function as neighbourhood centres. The area of Moravia is where much salvage work and recycling is done, so STEALTH worked to utilise the availability of these types of materials as a component of the final project. STEALTH envisage this example of the *Node* as a prototype, and propose that similar urban situations can adopt the method they have employed. Therefore by utilizing freely available materials as well as local skills and labour to produce architectural arrangements, no two ‘Nodes’ will look the same. The premise of the *Node* is to formulate the process as a template and acknowledge that the structures will vary from site to site (STEALTH.unlimited 2015).

In August 2010 STEALTH held three workshops in Medellín with El Puente Lab and a number of architects, artists and architecture students. The group recognised that shared space was a key problem in Moravia, an area that has a large population drawn from rural districts to work in manufacturing and construction industries, as well as the informal subsistence economies that emerge in such large new communities. The area has no central planning and hence few services. It is densely populated without building regulations, which has led to narrow streets and no ‘public’ space. As STEALTH observe, the project’s aim was to “tackle the lack of cultural spaces in a marginalised, densely populated neighbourhood, and in addition, work under the condition of a low budget, using recycled materials and strict conditions of use of public space” (ibid.).

The workshop team established the methodology for the Node project and began to identify available materials and workable design solutions, while looking for potential spaces where the structures could be sited. Three buildings were designed that offered functional spaces for community use. In the case of one building made of steel, the doors, windows and chassis of a bus formed its base. This example shows

the required innovation in this context, but also hints at a vernacular that marks out the project in terms of form and aesthetics. This methodology enabled them to have access to a space in which to conduct their community programme, which includes reading and literacy, health and wellbeing, as well as visual art workshops. The space is also adaptable for other social activities for example as a community kitchen.

It was El Puente Lab - a small group of urban activists - that invited STEALTH to Moravia to develop a project. El Puente Lab aims to literally form bridges with other cities in the world to create alliances that bring good ideas to their context, a move that has led them to work with urbanists, designers and architects from the Netherlands, Italy and the UK. Their motto is 'we have to be self-sustaining', as they accept that due to the political, economic and social challenges facing Columbia they cannot wait for an intervention by the state or by businesses, but must first establish community-based development before looking for outside support for their ideas. They use cultural work, including art, video and events as a means to engender awareness and garner support and participation in their initiatives⁸.

STEALTH is an architectural practice. As urban designers and architects, they aim to "shape opportunities where various fields of investigation meet and where thinking about possible future(s) of the city is mobilised" (STEALTH.unlimited 2015). In this way, STEALTH place an emphasis on the technical, on infrastructures *for* people, and - in the case of the Node project - by providing spaces for social activity where no civic spaces had existed before.

They state that they 'consider space both a tool and an agency, and focus on innovative aspects of sometimes hidden, temporary or unplanned urban practices that challenge ways in which to create physical aspects of the city, and of its culture.' (ibid.). Culture, for them, is thus a means to stimulate social change. This concept is not unfamiliar, although the political and economic situation in Moravia is very different from the post-industrial conditions in the UK, for example. Under New Labour the UK was subject to forms of culture-led regeneration which included gallery education programmes or community development, and were employed to produce change in 'hard to reach' communities. However, STEALTH are interested in bottom-up practices to effect change, and use their skills and experience to promote

alternative ideas to urban planning and civic organisation. STEALTH encourage the ‘shared authoring of urban space and culture’ (ibid.) and perceive their interventions as a mix of urban research, visual arts, spatial intervention and cultural activism, as employing the potential within the organisation of urban space for social transformation.

The concrete benefits to the users of this art project are obvious; it provides spaces for education and social interaction, and although the structures are temporary, they are provisional architecture and therefore distinct from Hirschhorn’s temporary cardboard and wood constructions. We acknowledge that the question of whether this project constitutes art is fundamental to a conventional comparison of the *Node* with *Nowhereisland* or the *Gramsci Monument*. However, we would like to suspend the urge to address this ontological question and rather focus again on our inquiry, which is concerned with asking in what way is this work *public*.

Through the *Node* project, STEALTH bring a civil society model of social organisation to Moravia, and they acknowledge the limitation of their project when they recognise that these temporary structures do not replace the need for permanent buildings. They say

the context of Moravia – a neighborhood that is undergoing major changes that will continue in the coming years – and the requirement to install with salvaged materials from the city have forced us to adopt a flexible design approach instead of waiting for the location to a new building (STEALTH.unlimited 2015).

The manifestation of STEALTH’s work into actual structural assistance can be considered as a charitable act. This type of intervention is pragmatic and directly affects the quality of people’s day-to-day lives. Charity is not only the complex mixture of ethics and politics, but can also be comprehended through space and time. In fact it must be understood as contingent, and each act must be assessed in context to the situation in which it is carried out.

Evaluating the notion of charity as a generic concept is unhelpful and suggests a static

view of ethics and politics. However, what is at stake is the function of aid as a hegemonic influence: If the results of charitable acts stop people from transforming their lives into something more economically sustainable, then charity plays a repressing role for dominant political ideologies. Charity can be considered ‘public’, if through the stabilisation of resources it enables the politicisation of subjects. Yet if it suppresses people’s action and deters them from working towards a better future, then its role is one of controlling marginalised publics and of benefiting powerful publics. The growth of charity within neo-liberalism demonstrates the preference for individual acts over infrastructural change.

Insert illustration of Node here

Conclusion

This chapter specifically addresses the issues of *publicness* within public artworks and attempts to further understand what we mean by it. By bringing together Doreen Massey’s concept of space and Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, we develop a critical framework that enables us to recognise the importance of the political when considering the term *public*. Whilst at the same time acknowledging its wide range of use from defining a type of space to characterizing a mass of bodies, we call for artists to understand the complexity of the public.

Art criticism is limited to how it understands publics and relational artworks, because of its long-standing preoccupation with the object. As art historian Claire Bishop (Bishop 2010) points out, participatory art is a relatively underdeveloped area of critical analysis, since the curator who commissioned the project typically writes and publishes most of the project documentation. Bishop acknowledges that this is logistical because of the nature of these projects, which are usually site-specific and temporal, but, even so, this is a disadvantage when attempting a critical analysis of the artworks produced. In her essay ‘Responsible Criticism: Evaluating Public Art’, Senie (2003) suggests a series of questions that should be asked of public artworks, but the function of these enquiries are to aid art criticism and to evaluate the social function of the specific public artwork.

What we are suggesting here is that, by further describing the ways in which publics are utilised and enabled within and for artworks (both as the content and material of certain works as well as the way that artworks address particular publics), we enable a more accurate understanding of art and politics. However we need to recognise this proposed arrangement of art and the social as having a far wider significance than simply enabling a new definition of terms. This understanding needs to enable a new articulation of art and politics. In this essay we have sought to discuss the way in which artworks utilise notions of publics, and to this end we have proposed three ways of considering art and the concept of publics: Picturing Publics, Educating Publics and Benefiting Publics.

We argue that the picturing of publics sees the managing of opinion formation. This is problematic from a **public spherian** point of view as this results in a manipulative publicity that advocates art as a public good. Habermas believes that the misuse of publicity undermines the political public sphere. He says, ‘Even arguments are translated into symbols to which again one can not respond by arguing but only by identifying with them’ (Habermas [1962] 1989, p. 206).

Nowhereisland is neither a public sphere nor a contingent space. Its social intervention becomes one with which to nominate spaces of environmental concern, as apart from the people that live on the planet. In this way, the project manages people as part of its technical format, as well as utilises the public body as a publicity tool with which to promote and justify its existence. Yet the work is separated from the social as well as the political, through its physical and social distance from its onlookers, which approximates to a desire for autonomy. As Massey makes clear, ‘instituting democratic public spaces, necessitates operating with a concept of spatiality which keeps always under scrutiny the play of the social relations which construct them.’ (Massey 2005, p. 153). *Nowhereisland* is a folly to publicness as it operates as both a symbol of the public and the political.

Educating the public is clearly a time-invested activity, and Hirschhorn is dedicated to proposing an alternative way for others to engage with conceptual and philosophical ideas about how to live and be. The *Gramsci Monument* is the fourth in the series of monuments dedicated to philosophers (the previous three are for Bataille, Spinoza

and Deleuze). If post-structuralist interpretations of Spinoza and Gramsci focus upon discourse and language, practice and action are viewed through intertextuality and an aestheticised idea of life. What Hirschhorn does to these thinkers in the monument projects is to position them within the social and material world, publishing them, and arranging them to be engaged with, and communicated through.

The *Gramsci Monument* is distinct from Hirschhorn's other monuments in that the content of Gramsci's work was aimed at the politicisation of the public through the notion of the organic intellectual: You could say that this relates to the methods that Hirschhorn employs within the Monument artworks; i.e. the desire to introduce the residents of Morrisania to Gramsci's ideas and writings. Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* maybe not be as 'Gramscian' as Hirschhorn would have it, but there is no getting away from the fact that his acts of engaging with publics have a political purpose.

Node by STEALTH utilises a social definition of both space and public, as does the pedagogic model of the *Gramsci Monument*. *Node* develops new conceptions of artistic action; in this case we see the 'artist benefactor', the artist as the provider of a service or product for a specific community, in which the result and consequences enable a practical enhancement to the lives of that community. This social function of *Node* is clearly a radical and purposeful intervention into the lives of others. The artwork's relationship to charity, and therefore its place within neoliberalism, needs more exploration than we have space here.

As early as 1989, Patricia Phillips called for a more precise examination of the notion of public within the field of public art when she said:

The errors of much public art have been its lack of specificity, its tendency to look at society - at the public - too broadly and simply (Phillips 1989, p. 335).

It's about time we responded to this demand, and for us there can be no public other than a political public: Massey's theory of space and Habermas' account of the public sphere allow us to move away from a universal and convivial interpretation of the public towards a *political* public. Applying their theories to an exploration of the

function of the public within public artworks enables us to understand how art can not only picture, educate and benefit its publics, but also more crucially how art can begin to politicise its publics.

Bibliography

References:

Book.

Bishop, C. 2010. *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso.

Bourriaud, N., 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris, Les presses du reel.

Deutsche, R. 2002. *Evictions: art and spatial politics*, Cambridge Mass., MIT press.

Habermas, J., [1962] 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press 1989.

Kwon, M., 2002. *One Place After Another: Site Specificity, Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press

Massey, D., 2005. *For Space*. London, Sage.

Mouffe, C., 2000. *The Democratic Paradox*, London, Verso.

Parkinson, J. R., 2012. *Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press,

Edited Book.

Mitchell, W.J.T., 1992. *Art and the Public Sphere*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

Chapter.

Beech, D., Hewitt, A., & Jordan, M., 2007. *Functions, Functionalism and Functionlessness: on the social function of public art after modernism*, in Jordan, M. and Miles, M. (eds), *Art and Theory After Socialism*, Intellect Books, Bristol, October 2008, pp. 114 - 125.

Benhabib, S., 1992. *Models of Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jurgen Habermas*, in Calhoun, C., 1992. (ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

Fraser, N., 1990. *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, in CALHOUN, C., (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge Mass., MIT press, pp.109-142.

Internet.

Anholt, S., 2011. *Step outside Somewhereislands for Nowhereisland*, Available from: <http://nowhereisland.org/resident-thinkers/#!/resident-thinkers/1/> [Accessed 12 November 2014]

'Article 20' of 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights', states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association'. Available from: (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a20>).

Accessed [20 October 2014]

Gramsci Monument , Dia Art, <http://www.diaart.org/gramsci-monument/index.ph> [22 October 2014]

El Puente Lab. www.elpuente.org

Stealth, www.stealth.ultd.nethvyy0u

Welcome to the Embassy, Nowhereisland,

<http://nowhereisland.org/#!/embassy/>

Journal Article.

Bishop, C., 2006. *'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents'*, *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 178-183.

Bishop, C., 2004. *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, October 110, Cambridge, Mass., MIT, pp. 51-79

Fraser, N., 1995. *From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age*, *New Left review*, 212: pp.68-93.

Hein, H., 1996. *What is Public Art? Time, Place and Meaning*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.54, No.1 (winter 1996).

Jordan, M., 2011. *We are all everyday superheros*, *Art and the Public Sphere* 1:3, pp. 239- 241

Phillips, P., C., *Temporality and Public Art*, *Art Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Critical Issues in Public Art (Winter, 1989), pp. 331-335

Steele, T., & Taylor, R., *Marxism and Adult Education in Britain*, *Kingdom Policy Futures in Education*, p. 586, Volume 2, Numbers 3 & 4, 2004

Online Journal.

Massey, D., & Warburton, N., 2013. *Interview with Massey*, *Social Science Bites in Association with SAGE*. Available from:

<http://www.socialsciencebites.com> Massey Jan/2013 [Accessed 12 Oct 2014]

Senie, H., 2003. *Responsible Criticism: Evaluating Public Art*, *Sculpture*, December 2003, Vol. 22, No. 10. Available from:

<http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag03/dec03/senie/senie.shtml> [Accessed 1 Jan 2014]

Other

Hirschorn 2014, According to Hirschhorn personal communication, 4 Sept, 2014, from his document 'Timeline Texts' written in 2003

¹ See <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a20>.

² Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, vol.44, no.6, February 2006, pp.178—83; and Grant Kester's response letter and Bishop's response to his response (*Artforum*, vol.44, no.9, May 2006, p.22)

³ <http://nowhereisland.org/#!/embassy>

⁴ One of Mel Jordan's students worked on the production of the '*Nowhereisland*' object.

⁵ The authors note that Doreen Massey is named as a resident thinker of *Nowhereisland* and contributes an existing text to be published on the website.

⁶ The Royal College of Art, Visual Cultures Lecture: Thomas Hirschhorn, 11 March 2014, 6.30pm, introduced by Mel Jordan.

⁷ STEALTH are Ana Džokic and Marc Neelen, based in both Belgrade and Rotterdam established STEALTH in 2000.

⁸ See <http://www.elpuentelab.org>.