

The Freee- Carracci Institute Year Book - Kiosks, Spoken (Manifesto) Choirs, Slogans, Advertising and Props

Participatory art challenges or rejects a number of key assumptions about art that remain firmly embedded in popular consciousness, mainstream art education through schools, popular cultural representations of the artist and even art criticism and the art market itself. Even artists who reject the romantic conception of the artist and work collaboratively or collectively, or whose works are participatory, cooperative or social, find themselves frequently in positions in which society (state funding bodies, art institutions, the various agents of the art market, and so on) demand that they present themselves as artists in the conventional sense.

Against the model of the artist as the author, which is rejected primarily because we have to acknowledge the contribution of the viewer or reader in the production of meaning, several generations of artists have withdrawn from meaning-making. Avoiding modernist practices of constructing, composing, selecting and harnessing materials, the contemporary artist, since the 1960s, has preferred to find their works already fully assembled, laying out existing objects and images in rows and columns, appropriating materials that are already imbued with meaning before the artist encounters them, or working at the level of the exhibition-maker rather than the object-maker in order to disclose the production of meaning by the institution rather than the author.

If the problem with the modernist concept of the artist is author was that it was exemplified by an expressive mode of engagement with the public (ie that the artist had things to say or gave form to certain feelings to which others were meant to be receptive), the problem with the contemporary non-author artist is that it separates the artist off from the public through the opposition between the refusal to make meaning (the artist) and the necessity of making meaning (the public).

The Freee art collective rejects both the concept of the artist as author and the withdrawal of the artist from engaging in meaning directly. As such, whereas artists since the 1960s have typically developed strategies involving rule following in order to prevent the artist from asserting any control over meaning (understood as the domination over the viewer or public), Freee develop rule based strategies for art production in order to expedite the extension of a community of meaning-makers.

Rather than separating the artist off from the public along an axis in which the refusal to make meaning by the artist is opposed to the overproduction of meaning by the public, the Freee art collective place the artists on the same side as the public as collaborators in meaning-making. The artists make meaning (producing works that say what they believe collectively) in order for that meaning to be modified, refashioned and reflected on by others in further acts of meaning-making and the disputation of meaning.

One thing that has survived the transition from modernist authorship to contemporary art making strategies of non-authored meaning (constructed by the viewers, readers and publics of art) is the category of the artwork. Freee, however, do not make works. The Freee art collective develop and reuse existing formats (eg the slogan, the manifesto, the printed T shirt, the badge, the scarf, the kiosk). Indifferent as to

whether a previous use of the format is deployed again or a new iteration of the format is produced, the collective focus on the use of formats as tools for the construction of specific public exchanges. A scarf printed with the slogan 'The Free Market Hates the Poor', for instance, might be used as part of a politically inflected football tournament (in which the teams are selected and named by slogans worn on T-shirts rather than according to ability or cliques) and non-participants in the football game itself are assigned the role of supporter), or equally used as a wearable placard in a march through the streets.

This is why Freee presents all the objects, props, tools and paraphernalia of events within the kiosks at each subsequent event: all the materials are perpetually at hand to be used and re-used since they do not constitute or belong to a previous artwork. When faced with a curator who wishes to stage an exhibition of their work, the artists of the Freee art collective do not say "this is what we have" or "these are what we have produced" but "this is what we do" or "these are the tools we use".

It is not simply a question of stressing the process over the product but of resisting and rejecting the conventional assumption that art practice equals the production of artworks. It is a different narrative of artistic production. Instead of the linear and parcellated sequence of producing artworks, Freee devise methods, techniques, platforms, mechanisms and processes that act as a sort of tool box that can be used in various circumstances.

Kiosks

In 2016 we started to rethink our approach to the concept of conviviality, previously we had rejected it as a method, thinking about it as a version of social niceties, and considering it to be aligned with the more formal social relations of relational aesthetics. We didn't want to have dinner with people that we didn't know and we didn't want the engagement we had with others to be about responding politely to their propositions for collaborative artworks. In retrospect we had been short-sighted in these assumptions and had failed to utilize the idea of conviviality as *part* of a process of politicization and a means towards the transformation of subjectivity.

So we started making kiosks which became structures in which we could activate conversations, and also to function as a focal point for our Spoken (Manifesto) Choirs. Kiosks are more public, more intimate and more approachable than shops. They have a sociality that shops lack. By taking away the commercial profit-making utility of the kiosk we can capture its social dimension. The kiosk shows how socialism exists inside capitalism, trapped in financial exchanges we can see glimpses of a world of public exchanges. By taking away all retail aspects of the kiosk and replacing its branding and advertising with opinions and beliefs we can draw out its full social potential.

We don't see the kiosks as objects but as tools in which to exchange opinions, a platform from which to swap views and reinvent attitudes. We 'open' the kiosks to share badge making activities and through this we instigate conversations and discussions. We like to think of them as 'open' when we are working in them and 'closed' when there is nobody around; we see them as social encounters and not to be contemplated as sculptures. Kiosks draw people in not exactly like the offer of a

cup of tea or a slice of cake, but they are our version of conviviality, we can accept this, knowing that this is only the beginning not the end of the social relations we have instigated.

Spoken (Manifesto) Choirs

We produce manifestos and instigate group readings of manifestos for the action of agreeing or disagreeing. We are looking for dissensus as well as consensus in contributions made by participants. That is what the Spoken (Manifesto) Choirs aim to generate; the group are invited to read the given text and make their own minds up about what part of it they subscribe to by underlining the words that they want to read out loud. The group assembles and the participants only read out the words of the manifesto they agree with. The reading then becomes a collective process in which individuals publicly agree as well as disagree and declare their commitment to our manifesto.

We produce our manifestos by reworking an existing text or manifesto; in effect our 'new' text is used and reworked again by those who read it to formulate their own opinions just in the same way we have reworked it from the original. Thinking that you definitely don't agree with something brings you closer to understanding what it is you do believe in – you are prompted to clarify your own position when you are faced with a statement that sets out a clear belief. The technique of the Spoken (Manifesto) Choirs enables us to establish that ideas are developed collectively through the exchange of opinion.

Slogans

We employ two mechanisms to enable participation with our slogan works: adapt, change the slogan to say what you believe in, or adopt, choose one of ours and wear it or embody it by saying it out loud. The thing about slogans is that they only work when they are adopted collectively; a slogan doesn't mean much if only one person uses it. We run slogan-writing workshops where we work with people to devise a slogan that embodies their belief or position. We think that by writing slogans and publishing them you can more easily exchange opinions with others. The process of thinking up a slogan needs to be in context to a belief or an action. We instigate this process by asking others to adopt and adapt a slogan; one of ours, or one that exists already in the collective imaginary. For example; 'Peace Not War', 'Black is Beautiful' and so on. In the workshops and in the 'kiosk conversations' we explain that this is the process we use to arrive at our slogans and statements.

We prefer not to ask a question but to make a statement. Being confronted with a particular attitude prompts other people to decide where they stand in relation to it, thus supporting the process of reflection upon their own judgements. The participation in our practice is motivated by the process of opinion formation, and its relationship to the development of individual political subjectivity.

Advertising

"Freee propose that the most radical response to the hegemony of commercial advertising and the debasement of the media is not to call for its reform (or even its abolition), but to encourage and promote the emergence of a 'counter-advertising' or, as they otherwise put it: 'publishing differently'. When Freee make the claim that 'everyone is or can be a guerrilla advertiser' they are proposing that the public should reclaim advertising from the debased public sphere by publishing their political

opinions to other private individuals. The inclusivity of this message is underscored in their billboard poster *Advertising for All; Or For Nobody at All; Reclaim Public Opinion* (2009) that depicts an inverted photograph of the trio standing in front of a construction site, wearing shopping bags over their heads that display the slogan.“

Emma Mahoney

Mahony, E (2014) 'Locating Simon Critchley's "interstitial distance" in the practices of the Free Art Collective and Liberate Tate', *Art & the Public Sphere* 3:1, pp. 9-30

Props

We call the objects and billboards that we make 'props'; we see them as having a function; they are tools for a discursive interaction with others. We don't regard the things we make as Sculpture or Painting; they have a particular purpose as part of a collective ritual that we invent around them. We don't think of them as sculptural objects that one might 'look at' or contemplate, but things that help instigate an exchange of opinion or communicate a collective belief. Similarly, the billboard images are not pictures but moments of publishing our opinion. We republish the same slogans using new props, in new places, with different people. We are aware of the dominance of the press and the way it creates certain value systems this is why we want to imagine everyone publishing to one another; we think this process will help exchange ideas and affect empathy. If you start thinking about art as publishing it immediately changes the social relations of the work. In this way art affects all and is not apart from the political and social aspects of our lives.

Free art collective