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Participation and collaboration in contemporary art : a game without borders between art and 'real' life

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EPILOGUE

Ways of doing and making, ways of saying, articulating, formulating, asking, responding, ways of conceptualizing and narrating ... ways of connecting, engaging, communicating, coordinating, organizing and framing, ways of relating, collaborating and delegating ... ways of moving between a domain of images and imagination and a domain of “real” actions, positions of subjects and ways of co-existing. Ways of reflecting back onto all the above what is perceivable, thinkable, sayable or audible about them by means of a practice that simultaneously re-produces them as what they are, and as what they are like. Continuously negotiating on what differentiates the two, but also on what triggers the necessity of negotiating their differentiation.

By looking into engaged, participatory/collaborative, public art practices in this dissertation, I have tried to explore transformations in art production over the past couple of decades that have influenced our perception of what constitutes an art project and how it operates. This perspective turns attention to aesthetics very close to Rancière’s. In his understanding of the distribution of the sensible, of “what is *aestheton* or capable of being apprehended by the senses,” Rancière maintained that the aesthetic regime of the arts “did not begin with decisions to initiate an artistic rupture. It began with decisions to reinterpret what makes art and what art makes.”⁵⁷⁵ In this book I took into account the socio-political issues dealt with by artists and respective discourses that have permeated the artistic field. What I have tried to show about them is that these have influenced not only the thematic interests of artists, but also artistic practices in profound ways: what previously was not considered as part of the art product - such as ways of communicating its content or relations of its production - have been reconfigured into forms produced as part of the art.

This approach is not judgmental as such. It does not aim at providing criteria for assessment of the artistic value of projects or their social and political relevancy. But it does point to the necessity of reconsidering the concept of criticality for art,

as it investigates possible changes in the role and operation of art, artists and art institutions on the wider horizons of their reception. That was made most explicit in the discussion about “Relations.” There I maintained that, at a first level, it is the artists who take a critical perspective on socio-political conditions that - for instance in cases such as the situations addressed in TAMA and Gudran - force groups of people to marginalization. At the same time, as the artists draw to their practice various strategies, tactics and relations from the “real” world, the projects become more and more complicit with interests of “real” world relations. Thus their projects tend to reproduce and re-present in their own internal operations and structures, problematic aspects of “real-world” relations, something that renders them susceptible to negative criticism. However in this way, from the very criticism made on problematic aspects of the projects, one could draw tools – concepts, arguments, a language - to articulate a critique on socio-political “real-world” relations that the projects re-produce and re-present in the internal operation of relations that are simultaneously producing them, and produced by them (see here also relations of production merging with relations produced). Consequently, in an indirect, or rather in a reverse way, the projects of the artists do provide tools for a critical perspective on the socio-political realities they engage with. But these tools come more in the form of the critique made on the art projects themselves.

Even though the above was a conclusion particularly of the discussion around “Relations,” the very idea that the art critique could be transformed to a critique of social or political realities falls within the wider frame of thinking proposed about “Concepts and narratives.” According to that discussion, in the fluid, ephemeral, but also long-term existence of the projects, something important that takes place is the production and elaboration of a number of concepts and narrations. At a first level, these refer to ideas about the role of the specific art project, as well as generally of art and the artist in today’s world. In that context, ideas about today’s world are also formulated and examined. In addition to that, I have maintained also that distinctions between artists, audiences, participants, curators, critics and theorists as producers often become quite blurry (as, for instance, in the case where an art critic’s approach may enter the narrative domain of an art project, and become fused with its narrations). Within this frame of thinking the collectively produced, process-based, public art project becomes a platform of transfers, of both practices as well as concepts, between various “producers” besides the artists. And exactly in this conception of the art project as a domain where such metaphors and exchanges take place between the art and the non-art, it is that one can also perceive of the aforementioned (in the conclusions of “Relations”) transfer between art critique and social and political critique as a way of reconsidering our concepts of the criticality of art.

Last but not least, all the above revolve around what art “does” - or at least what I maintain that the projects analyzed in this book “do” as art - with regard to the specific contexts they derive from, and issues the artists deal with. What is not explained in the above is the question of how these metaphors and exchanges take place, of what is the form of this to-and-fro movement between art and non-art, its mechanics if you like. For this question, theories of play and games proved most apt for providing a theoretical model for the operation of these “mechanics.”

At the time of finishing this dissertation everyone discussed in this book is still working. While also the discourses especially on notions regarding collectivity in art and transfers of practices between fields and disciplines are growing. All phenomena and processes investigated in this book are still underway, a fact that renders any final conclusions irrelevant. Instead, this study was intended as a contribution to expanding the ways of viewing them and thinking about them. It derived from the observation that some ways of making art have changed, thus influencing also what art makes “aestheton” to us and how. In closing I would like to thank the artists who afforded me their time and materials, and who later patiently read my analysis of their practices, an analysis that often deviated from how they themselves see their work.