



Manifesto of public relational art

Everything stated here is the result of eleven years of experimentation conducted in the Frosinone area by the association zerotremilacento.

1. Limits of public art
2. Overcoming of limits with the territorial roots and the procedure
3. Interdisciplinarity and the attendance of artists and non-artists
4. An art that raises ethics to the same dignity of aesthetics
5. The form of relational public art
6. Taking charge of acting in the public space
7. Being an Acting Social Body
8. The client
9. Search for sensitive areas for public relational art actions
10. The Open Building Site
11. The City as a set of Open Building Sites
12. The evaluation of public relational art
13. Critical moments of the experimentation
14. What remains
15. Is it possible to represent relational public art?

1. Limits of public art

In the field of public art - or relational art or participatory art - it is necessary for the artist to reside for a short time in the area. This will give him the opportunity to interpret it, to involve local structures and make them take part in the realization and, finally, to assume the role of creator who proposes its representation. He however remains extraneous to the social context and, once the work is finished, he continues his creative research elsewhere.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: what happens around that work of art when, once defined its shape, it begins to act in the public sphere?

Then there is the difficulty in carrying out the procedure, which cannot be limited, like any economic production, by the a priori established time and by the available budget. Furthermore, it often happens that the conclusion of a path acting in a social body is only the beginning of another phase, but in such a system, this will rarely happen so the process must necessarily be stopped.

2. Overcoming of limits with the territorial roots and the procedure

The answer that appears crucial for the experimentation of an artistic action in the public space, which aims at the involvement of the social context in a relational creative process, is to assume the territorial roots as a basic requirement.

Being resident and part of the social body allows you to experience the process in its natural time and spaces, therefore not artificial processes but processes where all the subjects are involved in real creations and changes.

Placing yourself in a position to grasp the results produced by artistic action allows you to evaluate the quality of the action and to plan other interventions that may arise from the completed experience. So then the resident artist, whether individual or collective, will no longer be extraneous but a subject on the move, willing to let himself be transformed by the processes in progress.

3. Interdisciplinarity and the attendance of artists and non-artists

Planning interventions of relational public art requires the analysis of the constituent elements of the territory - from the social context to the historical cultural one, from the environmental quality to the relationship status between man and environment - as well as requiring to start up processes that do not end in the production of aesthetic objects and representations. To conduct these analyses and create artistic paths capable of assuming the complexity of the relationships between the various arts and between these ones and the other disciplines that do not belong to the art world, it is good that the operative group is interdisciplinary. Furthermore, setting the goal to activate creative processes of the multitude, it is very important to experience within the operational group, that artists and people not coming from the world of art can take part in all the phases of creation, thus prefiguring a not separation in the space and time of the experts from the users of the works.

4. An art that raises ethics to the same dignity of aesthetics

The cancellation of ethics from the horizon of art is an “achievement” of the 20th century, when ethics was experienced as a social cage, even worse ideological, which limited the artist’s expressive freedom. Distancing oneself from the power, whether the constituted one or the destitute/constituent ones, is an achievement to be defended and expanded, but it has nothing to do with the conception and the practice of relational ethics, an ethics conceived as the result of an empathic experience, or an experience that requires the ability to put oneself in the other’s shoes.

In the actions of relational public art there is no ethics to be conveyed through the works, but only an ethics resulting from the empathic relationships between the subjects in action with the work and in the context.

5. The form of relational public art

Since every creative act is completed experiencing the relationship that is triggered with the reference's social territory, the form of public relational art will not be just the material form, which may also be at stake, but rather the form of the process, the form of the action. The "matter" that is molded, that is fixed in shape, are the relationships between people, but also the relationships between people and the territory in which one is acting. If the final work is a transformation of the physical territory, it can be represented as the set of works produced by individuals, or by a single work to which all those involved have contributed; in one case or in the other it will always be a relational and procedural work.

6. Taking charge of acting in the public space

If we are aware of having an impact on the city and yet we expect that the artistic experimentation should not set itself limits, we must be aware of the difference between acting in a closed place - such as a private space, an art gallery or a museum, that is places where we choose to go taking responsibility for this - and acting in a public space where everyday life is lived and where everyone has the right to be equal to the others and without suffering the others.

For the artist, this means creating forms and languages that can act in the chosen contexts in order to allow the subjects of the public space to enter into a relationship with the artistic action. Which also means acting in that void that separates popular culture from the research and the artistic experimentation.

7. Being an Acting Social Body

The artist who works in the field of public relational art does not conceive himself as a demiurge who transcends processes, but as a subject engaged in them, aware of the need, like everyone else, to follow a path of research and experimentation of relationships.

In other words, the artist, individual or collective, places himself as an avant-garde that triggers a process whose purpose is the establishment of an Acting Social Body, which becomes the subject that takes responsibility for the path and self-governance.

8. The client

Both in traditional clients and in “New Clients” we start from the assumption of codified roles: the artist, the curator, the social or artistic intermediary, the institutional managers of the public space, the client, the art critic, up to the roles of the performers such as roles, artisans, administrators, supervisors. Therefore, the art system reproduces categories, division of labor and hierarchies that are typical of existing society.

An alternative model is to operate with interchangeable roles, sharing skills, carrying out processes through creative relational exchanges until the end of the work. Thus the interdisciplinary group takes on a whole series of functions, the one of commissioning and direction, the curatorial one and, although not always, the productive one of the works.

This operating model is also applied when the process is taken by the Agent Social Body, which thus becomes the real “New Client”.

9. Search for sensitive areas for public relational art actions

Changing points of view, moving away from stabilized representations, taking into consideration the unusual, the marginal or the useless, allows the artistic operator to identify the “sensitive areas” that are present in the territory in question. Speaking of “areas” we do not mean only the physical places and by defining them “sensitive” we mean that they can be invisible and/or degraded; areas of conflict and/or of separations and suffering; areas of unrecognizable and / or unrecognized beauty; areas of expropriation and/or embezzlement; areas of identity dissolution and/or identity creations. At the end of this research, we come up with a map of the sensitive areas that have been identified and for each of them a project can be formulated that acts on the relationship, that activates the creative impulses, allows processes of subjectivation.

10. The Open Building Site

Acting on a sensitive area can take the organizational form of an “Open Building Site”. As the name borrowed from productive activities suggests, we want to underline the sense of “work in progress” for the realization of something.

The “operational subjects” in the Building Site are the artist, individual or collective, the social body of the operating territory involved and other organized subjects interested in the realization of the project.

The operational territory where the Building Site is open, must be imagined as a field of dynamics in which relations already exist, some of them already consolidated, others in formation, others still in crisis. The relational dynamics are not only between people but also between these and all the other elements that make up that territory, where there can be aggregate poles of relationship such as a school, a church, an association, a public place, a square, a shopping street, etc.

11. The City as a set of Open Building Sites

If we start the implementation of projects as “Open Building Sites”, the city becomes a continuously active laboratory in the experimentation of relations. Relations can be very articulate and complex and certainly not all will be under the process control. Indeed, if this happens it is good because those relationships that are beyond control can constitute the imponderable element that allows the creation of new subjectivations, which must not be hindered, but taken into consideration as further variables that can also modify - in part or entirely – the project.

12. The evaluation of public relational art

Public, relational and participatory art are rarely subject to critical evaluation for several reasons: the first concerns the objective difficulty in evaluating a work that expresses its value over time and within a social context, the second concerns the art system characteristics whereas the value is expressed also on the basis and as a function of the market.

To express a critical evaluation of a relational public work of art, one cannot but be present during the process, which can last for years, and one must then evaluate the aesthetics and relational ethics, that is the quality of participation and action of the social body in relation to the work and in the process.

13. Critical moments of the experimentation

What mainly appears the most difficult critical knot to be solved is the search for a new balance in the I-Us relationship, which starts from the affirmation of the irrepressibility of the Ego and from the choice to create an Us. This happens in the social body as well as in the artist, individual or collective, and presents itself with the need for continuous renegotiation of the “sufferings” between the Ego that can feel repressed and the Us that cannot become a harmonious entity.

Other critical points are the involvement of the administrations that govern public space and the relationship with the political powers.

There are administrations that are attentive and ready to enter into a relationship with what emerges from the participatory culture of their territory, but these are a minority. In most cases, and especially in recent years, art and culture are considered only a luxury that can be granted when there are economic surpluses.

To this is added the typical attitude of politics that opens the doors only to artistic operations, to the extent that these create consensus towards one’s own power, whether constituted or constituent. So it often happens that participatory cultural projects that activate civil action, rather than being supported as an indispensable resource for the realization of the Common Good, are seen as an obstacle and a potential counter-power to be neutralized.

Finally, there is the fragility of social participation to be considered. The initial enthusiasm is often followed by a progressive reduction of participants, as the active engagement requires a very different awareness and resilience.

14. What remains

What are the commensurable factors that testify to the results of a relational public art action?

The first elements are the physical transformations of the territory of action: the aesthetics of the spaces, the spread of works of art and places to create and enjoy culture, the spaces available to citizens to relate each other the number of subjects that aggregate the citizens working for the city and for the Common Good.

Then, there are other elements that require different tools from those used by the art system to define tangible signs, and they are: the level of participation of the social body in the processes of transformation in progress; the relationships that were previously non-existent and then acting; the removal of social and cultural preclusions; the displacements of aesthetic and ethical taste; the quantity of subjectivations or creations activated and in operation; the moments of self-governance of the Common Good carried out.

15. Is it possible to represent relational public art?

If the characteristics of public relational are the processuality, the involvement of the social structure in the processes and the production of participatory and site specific works, how can be shown in an exhibition, in a gallery, in an artistic event such a form of art? It will be possible only if the subject on which you are acting is the same world of art or that specific space or the specific visitor of that space.

But almost always in the designated spaces one encounters public art as a documentation of what has been produced elsewhere, perhaps making the effort to create “documents” that have high aesthetic quality in order to be “shown” and, above all, to become fetishes to be placed on the art market. These operations lead the viewer to confuse what are only demonstrative documents with the work itself, which in reality could never be present there in its formal completeness. Finally, these documents do not “tear away either perceptions or affections”, almost always they appear boring, dry and sometimes even incomprehensible.

If on the one hand we understand the need for artists to be taken into consideration by the art system, to acquire economic autonomy through the sale of “something”, on the other hand it must be clearly said that these operations are incorrect because those “remains” are not the work of art.

There is a need to investigate this problem and to experiment with other solutions, but if none of them are found, it must be accepted that public relational art is an art that remains “other” and outside the current art system.

zerotremilacento

arte pubblica relazionale

zerotremilacento is an open, interdisciplinary group that creates *public relational art for the area and social context it lives in.

zerotremilacento is a plural, composite entity, and the mediation that constantly unfolds within it between the We and the I, between collective and individual subjectivity, makes the association the first subject on which its form of relational art is tested out.

zerotremilacento's locus of observation and action is the city and surrounding area, the city of places and people, the city as a community.

zerotremilacento believes that when a society develops an awareness of its own needs, of the shortcomings and idiosyncrasies of the area it lives in, and of its own creative potential, it becomes the agent and tool of its own urban revitalization.

zerotremilacento is represented with the work which is the set of works produced by individuals, or with a single work to which several subjects have contributed, in both cases it will always be a related and processual work.

Goals and purposes

Through its activity, zerotremilacento:

- builds a movement of creative research geared toward the cultural revitalization of the people involved and the area in which they operate;
- explores the languages and mechanisms of social interaction, envisioning, testing and implementing new forms of empowerment centered on social creativity (humanity needs each person to discover and exercise the artist within himself);
- tries to combine ethical, aesthetic, and physical elements within its art-making;
- tries to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach that moves beyond the compartmentalization of knowledge and society so characteristic of our era;
- tries to merge different fields within the creative act, reducing or even completely eliminating the division between creator and viewer;
- tries to reduce or completely erase the currently unbridgeable gap between artistic and cultural experimentation and a mass fruition.

Frosinone

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- zerotremilacento is: Mariangela Calabrese, Lucia Collicorto, Gianluca Fricchione, Valentina Gentile, Antonio Limonciello, Marina Longo, Nazzareno Massimiliani, Claudia Paludetto, Massimo Terracciano, with the collaboration of Renato Reali.

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