

Collectivising Vauxhall, Mel Jordan with Naomi Siderin and Dafna Talmor
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On being together; memberships, collectives and unions

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Abstract

A short performance / speech outlining a new art project for Beaconsfield. A summary of the new work entitled 'On being together; memberships, collectives and unions' which addresses, passers-by, publics and the potential role of partisanship in democratic politics.

Introduction

I was one of the founding member of the Free Art Collective and now I work with artist Andrew Hewitt and others as part of a provisional group called The Partisan Social Club. We are working with artist and architect Sean Griffiths on the project for Beaconsfield

I am going to try to outline some of the thinking that led to our project which is currently titled, ***On being together; memberships, collectives and unions***. To do this I have to explain some of the principles of our practice which includes 1. Social Kiosks, 2. Opinion formation and 3. Publics.

With the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, we have to learn to cooperate for the sake of a better more equal world. Since the current system is pretty much based on multiple versions of capital this new world has to be made by those sceptical of capitalism. We have to coordinate, mobilise, act and speak for a better place to **be** together and as Lea Ypi says 'Capitalists are united and so should anticapitalists be'. (Ypi, L: 2011)

1. Social Kiosks don't sell anything but create social exchange

We have previously worked with groups but more recently we have been thinking specifically about the passer-by as a subject in public space who has the potential to be politicised. We developed a series of Social Kiosks which do not sell anything but enable us to produce conversations - we build these in a range of different spaces; and they operate as a form of legitimising our presence in the public realm

With artist and architect Sean Griffiths we made CitizenShip, CitizenShip is a portable pavilion designed as a public meeting place with a resemblance to Milton Keynes bus shelters it is part-public sculpture, part-kiosk and part-publishing laboratory. We enabled new groups to exist through production of collective artworks that are displayed in and on the public structure.

2. Opinion formation - agree and disagree whilst working together.

Our mode of working together is not the typical technical exploration expected in visual art projects. Rather it is concerned with agonistic political ideas and debates - it aims to enable the exchange of opinion and values and also the discussion of differences through conversational narratives. The idea is to make this an everyday event.

Our art and engagement methods are directed at opinion formation in order to understand how communities create and perform collective values. In the case of the project CitizenShip, visitors and passer-bys developed new slogans and published them by making badges, vinyl lettering, ribbons and teletext messaging. The process engages publics through techniques that derive from artistic techniques of montage: individuals and groups are temporarily cut out of the community and pasted into new configurations, rearranged through processes of splitting and joining (disagreeing and agreeing) and then reassembled in a new totality through acts of collective publishing

3. Publics are never permanent – accept the erratic nature of being public!

We like the idea that the passer-by is informal and not already labelled as part of a community group. The passer-by, as she is passing by, is seen by capital as an individual in the public realm and since a lot of our public space / outside space is dominated by commercial enterprises - the multinational marketing of goods and services target her as an individual consumer. But she isn't. She is never a static member of a mass public, a passer-by is a temporal condition she moves between being a consumer, shopper, friend, wife or girlfriend, mother etc as she walks through these shared spaces - she always has the potential to be transformed and no matter how prevalent capitalism is in public space, through commercial activity, she is never *only* a consumer.

Lea Ypi believes that the role of partisanship could be a method to improve existing versions of democracy. "Partisanship is typically associated with negotiating and bargaining from a self-interested perspective recognised as best a concession to political realism." (ibid)

However, partisanship unlike factionalism involves efforts to harness political power not for the benefit of one social group among many but for that of the association as a whole. Partisanship is a practice that involves citizens acting to promote certain shared normative commitments according to a distinctive interpretation of the public good. Their goals are to make their concerns heard in the public sphere so that they may be brought to bear on the course of collective decision-making. (ibid)

The project for Beaconsfield - ***On being together; memberships, collectives and unions*** Working with spaces like Beaconsfield Gallery offer an alternative place in the public domain in which to construct membership – a marginal place to collect and engage and form mini-publics. Therefore, we want to utilise the project at Beaconsfield to create a new group, a new set of members that work together on practically transforming the outside spaces here whilst doing so, to also reflect upon their understanding of community, membership, collective action and local citizenship.

So we will produce a social sculptural structure dedicated to the ideas of membership. A call for members to join in the work, the design, the build and the programming of activities around collectives, unions, groups and clubs will enable a new assemble to emerge who will work together to publish ideas and thinking on collectivising now! Members will come from a range of places – People supportive and known to Beaconsfield, students and friends of ours, University of Westminster, RCA, University of Northampton. We are keen to develop new collaborative and informal techniques of working on architectural structures – enabling improvised responses from a team of members working in a 'real' and 'now' situation. Our aim is to respond to being *on* a site and make structures and props *with* the site.

The final artwork will include text as slogans; architectural and sculptural props; print; photography and montage; participative processes; speech acts; and performance.

The new 'members' will make a badge and Scarf for BGV as a reminder of the project.

References

White, J & Ypi, L, 'On Partisan Political Justification', *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 105, No. 2 (May 2011), pp. 381-396
Ypi, L, 2018 'Capitalism will not give us the will to fight capitalism – what we need is a new International', Permalink: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/capitalism-will-not-give-us-the-will-to-fight-capitalism/>