

FROM ABSENT ARTWORKS TO ARTWORKS AS MEANS WITH NO END

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I am not at all an expert in economics, and therefore all my convictions in the area are vague and dilettante, but I have frequently thought this: that men, at the very least Westerners, since capitalism has existed, live in the hope and in the attempt to make money work in the same way as ideas function, that is to say following the principle of unlimited growth and without bringing any harm. It seems highly unlikely for this to actually be the case, as periods of »economic crisis« seem to attest – even if these signs are soon forgotten or put aside.

However, specifically for ideas it seems not only that every human mind is capable of producing an unlimited quantity, but above all that every meeting between two or more people can produce a quantity of ideas which goes a long way beyond the sum capacity of single »producers«.

It seems to me that Aldo Giannotti and Tomaz Kramberger happen to have noticed precisely this, and as a result they have tried to make us notice it as well. The moment two artists meet to do an exhibition together and decide not to limit themselves to simply placing each of their respective works one next to the other, their ideas start to grow. The first says »Perhaps we could do this« and the second responds »Absolutely! But perhaps in that case we could also do this«; and the first »I like it! And therefore we should perhaps do this other different thing ...« and so it goes on, in a situation which I know quite well but which I always find intriguing – where every idea stimulates another. And this produces a multiplication – a little ramificated, a little rhizomatic – of thoughts and projects for works of art; one moment beautiful, then absurd, one moment infantile, then unrealisable, poetic, tautological, banal, scandalous, etc etc. The multiplication of ideas is, especially for artists, an exhilarating process with something magical to it, bringing about thoughts one didn't know one was capable of thinking. And the enthusiasm for all these ideas can make it impossible to choose, or rather privilege, one over the other: again, thinking of »this« leads one to think of »that« and then »that again«...

It is not strange, therefore, that Aldo and Tomaz decided finally to record all – supposing the use of this paradoxical word to be possible – the ideas which came to them regarding possible works to be done at the Forum Stadtpark.

And they decided to propose, as their work for the exhibition, a publication gathering all these ideas. Such a choice seems at first glance simple, but has some interesting methodological and theoretical implications.

CO-AUTHORSHIP

Deciding to produce ideas »in common«, or rather to recognise as »common« certain ideas, is in itself a critique of the position of the author, which is radically occupied with the question »whose idea is it?« Such a question obviously recalls Foucault's »Who cares who is speaking?« in »What is an Author?« What legitimacy is there for the usual process of attributing certain ideas to certain authors as if they were their exclusive property? Given that thoughts always emerge from a dialogical and relational context, how is it possible to associate a particular idea to a particular name, dissociating this from the context of collaboration, plural contributions and occasional interference in which both the author and his thought have developed? The question is even more valid at a time when knowledge travels in networked and interconnected ways, and in which, by imaginatively using key-words and search engines, we can find in a blog of some brilliant unknown or a youtube video, precisely the thought we just had – try it if you don't believe it.

It is unsurprising that Giannotti and Kramberger, having made the first step towards sharing, decided that the book of »their« ideas should be distributed for free – as if to say they renounced their rights of authorship – by copy-left – no right even over the distribution. And, above all, that the book should be an instrument for further sharing, changing roles between »thinkers« and »realisers«, stimulating imbricated, multiple further realisations, which could even be anonymous. A bookwork which is therefore a medium, an intermediate product, and not an end, nor the end of the work.

MULTIPLE BELONGING OR THE PERFECT DILETTANTISM OF THE ARTIST

Allowing ideas to flow, to branch upwards or root downwards from their origin – if we admit that a real origin exists and that thought is not an intermediate spatial-temporal territory between subjectivities – signifies opening the potential sphere of action in many directions, outside of the ambits of defined disciplines, outside of academic or specialist memberships.

The artist is the social figure who paradoxically defines his own work in the space created by the crossing or the invasion of diverse fields. And he is also the one who can bring together specialists from diverse sectors in a certain project, not only managing to summarise their contributions but also, sometimes, to create a situation in which each can see his own field of intervention as it were from the outside, following a logic which is extra-disciplinary or absolutely «non functionalist.»

In times of technological hypertrophy, of the diffusion of machines which are ever more capable, reliable and often also easy to use, the contemporary artist is the social figure who manages to subordinate even the most powerful means to the logic of his own project, and thereby to establish with the means – with technology, for the most part –, a relation of instrumentality.

This is why, as I have said on other occasions, if the artist does not know how to do anything, if he is not an expert in any particular technique, it is all to the good, because he will have less of a tendency – or temptation – to fall into virtuosity, into the hypnosis of special effects or into the demonstration of the »technological muscles« of the means. The contemporary artist is the perfect dilettante: he who does not know how to do anything, but attributes to himself the possibility of doing anything.

THE POTENTIALITY AND THE «ABSENCE» OF THE WORK

The terrain of action of this perfect dilettante is not, I repeat, defined by a given space, but rather by a vectoral component, by the movement between one space and another. His field of action is, in effect, more an action than a field, more a potentiality than a thing. The non-position of the artist becomes at this moment radical and in some way vertiginous. It is no longer a question of «doing» something – the work –, or rather of being ever able to reach a stage where the work is definitively «finished». Moving over, so to say, to potentiality means putting at the centre of the work the creation of a space where anything could happen, where the exploration of the possible indicates to everyone that liberty still exists. The question is not therefore that the work is «absent». On the contrary, the work is present as that which is most essential: the practicability itself of the space and time of our thought, and our ability to act beyond the socially recognised norms of behaviour and the limits of the rules of our languages.

SHIFTING LEVELS

One of the things that thought allows is the construction of levels. There are ideas referring to other ideas, ideas on ideas, meta-ideas. The construction of a meta-level always comes through an enlarging of outlook, from a changing of point of view, from a process of displacement. The work of the perfect dilettante does not exist in a given content, but rather in this process, in the possibility of seeing that which one does – and also that which one is – not only from the inside, but also from a critical distance, from the outside. Once again, the question is not the absence of the work, but the possibility of jumping levels and creating a critical space, transforming any artistic expression – paintings or videos, performances or concerts – into a means rather than an end.