

From Culture-Led Regeneration to Culture-Led Re-Commoning

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Thank you

Slide 1

Introduction In an age marked by the erosion of state intervention and a myriad of social and economic dilemmas stemming from Neoliberalism—a phenomenon often dubbed the 'polycrisis'—we explore the potential of art practice, projects, and artists in the shaping and rebuilding of associational life. Through this paper, our goal is to propose the notion that artists can engender socially driven initiatives grounded in political purpose. We advocate for a new form of agency and autonomy within social projects, enabling them to serve as agents of politicization in the urban fabric, and empower publics in the process.

Our interest in public art comes from our question of what is public and what is private. We are interested in what are public goods and the operations of culture policy in the neo liberal state.

This work is called *the economic function of public art is to increase the value of Private Property*. Primary and secondary audience and the work as a generator of discussion around the function of art and culture for society.

Culture-led Regeneration in the UK

Slide 2 Banksy

From the 1980s onwards, artists along with art organisations and community initiatives that advocate the role of art for community benefit, have played a role in the regeneration of UK cities. During the same period successive UK governments, have implemented deregulation, promoted privatization, and reduced public spending. This political trajectory has notably eroded civil society and transformed urban landscapes. Where art and cultural interventions were once spontaneous,

dynamic, and sometimes unplanned we now see public art projects and festivals commissioned as part of a new type of placemaking in urban space. These are articulated as part of the economic development of a town or city.

Even Street Art works that try to evade the economic conditions of the artworld are not spared. Within an hour of Banksy claiming to be the author of a red stop sign featuring three military drones, the sign was stolen. It was reported that the artwork could be worth up to £500,000.

Slide 3 Deller

While permanent public art projects work towards reinventing a sense of place. Temporary social art projects are typically commissioned as social outreach and then re-coded as community consultancy and public relations. What Raymond Williams (2014) calls a 'stately sense of cultural policy' (in Karvelyte 2021:141).

Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris' 2016 work, 'We're here because we're here', saw 1400 volunteers dressed in First World War military uniform appearing unexpectedly in locations across the UK as a modern memorial to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme (<https://becausewearehere.co.uk/>). 'We're Here Because We're Here' was a song that First World War soldiers sang to the tune of Auld Lang Syne. The repeated lyric communicates both the bleakness of their situation and their acceptance of it.

One understanding of 'We're here because we're here' is that the work enforces the idea of the state through the demonstration of the state, here in its militarized form.

Karvelyte explains how we often fail to 'recognize them [these events] as cultural policy initiatives' (2021: 143). She says, 'During royal weddings, coronation ceremonies, and presidential inauguration days we are presented with a number of cultural practices and rituals that manifest the majesty of the state. This ultimately helps to garner a greater level of respect and recognition for the state from the international community and/or local public.'

During the New Labour era in the UK these types of projects were considered as aspects of Culture-led Regeneration.

Slide 4 Homebaked

Understanding the Political in Art

Social Art Practice projects, workshops and exhibitions create spaces for public interaction and dialogue. It is associated with an impulse to democratize both art production and society. The artist as producer of deliberation and participation was born out of the radical counter-aesthetics of the 1960s and is evident in community arts' 'new genre public art' (Lacy 1995) in which artists worked with specific social constituents as well as the Artist Placement Group that believed that 'context was half the work' (Harding 1997). Although recognized for engaging participants in discussions and creative processes, social art practice frequently emphasizes consensus-building, mirroring the prevailing norm of more formal structured debates in political and institutional processes

As art historian Vid Simoniti suggests there are three strands of understanding the political in art: action, the journalistic, and shaping shared vision or what we can say is world making.

For example Jeanne Van Heeswijk's Homebaked project for Liverpool Biennial, utilises immediate action, organisation, engagement and community collaboration to created a community co-operative bakery. The work enactsnew relationships and promoting associational life.

Slide 5 Forensic Architecture

Forensic Architecture work could be considered as an example of an investigative/ quasi journalistic approach to the political in art, it emphasises objectivity, rationality and truthfulness.

Slide 6 Harold Offeh

Worldmaking works perform new ways of being – usually alternatives to dominant political ideas, this includes replacing old narratives with counter hegemonic narratives for example Harold Offah's 'Body Landscape Memory. Symphonic Variations on an African Air' focusses on the presentation of Black bodies in the landscape. Moving away from stereotypes of the labouring or victimised body, the work explores leisure, play and connections to the physical environment.

Simoniti's proposal is useful yet obviously not precise. The three approaches overlap and intertwine. There are also other considerations to be included (for example the post human, the difference between process, action and spectacle and so on). We would also emphasise the agonistic in political works.

And we would add something about being more than once political - *if he doesn't mind*

Slide 7

A properly political art must be twice political

1. Political art must engage in the political struggles of the day (against neo liberalism and global capitalism and for a 21st Century Socialism)
2. Political art must transform the social relations of art itself, to rid art of its historical elitism, its privileges, its hierarchies and its cultural capital. Political art cannot be political if it leaves arts values, categories, and institutions in place.

The desire for culture-led re-commoning over culture led regenerations

In this paper we want to redirect the project of art from contributing to the economic agenda of culture-led regeneration to embodying and performing a social and political agenda of culture-led recommoning.

Slide 8 Manifesto writing

We conceive of politics as discourse in the public sphere, it is the debate and exchange of opinion between actors. In order to think about art and politics, for us we have aligned art with the theories of the public sphere in doing this our aim is to establish a connection between artists' practices and the advancement of democracy and social equity.

We have made works in the form of Manifestos. We write manifestos to be shared and read out together, at what we called spoken choirs. We leave some parts of the original texts intact; as well as changing words and added sentences to make our own new meanings. We want to keep the original ideas not far from the surface to demonstrate shared authorship in the production of ideas – the history of critical ideas informing each other.

We asked volunteers to read the manifesto and underline the things that they agreed with, ready for them to then read aloud at a spoken choir.

Slide 9 Manifesto reading *Talk about choirs here*

We meet up and read the text out loud together. We read all of the manifesto as we had already made our changes from the original, but there were some sections of the text that were not read by others. When the site is full of voices we hear the most assented parts of the text loudly. And when fewer people join in we understand these parts of the manifesto to be less popular. The choirs are not conventional performances, there were about performing re writing, and getting used agreeing and disagreeing together.

Habermas' concept of the public sphere, rooted in 18th and 19th-century democratic development denotes a social setting where people gather to debate issues, shaping public opinion and affecting political decisions. It spans beyond official institutions, including places like coffeehouses, newspapers, and social media. Habermas' theory is justifiably criticised for overlooking marginalized groups such as women and minorities. It centres on rational debates within spaces that lacked diverse perspectives beyond the bourgeois class. Scholars such as Nancy Fraser, Michael Warner, and Craig Calhoun have sought to rectify these gaps by incorporating feminist and class concepts, exploring the intersection of media, democracy, and public discourse, and the sociology of public life. More recently Zizi Papacharissi explores the concept of affective publics, delving into the ways in which the digital public sphere shapes geopolitics and the way that debate is not limited to rational exchange.

Slide 10 Thompson's books

In the concluding part of this paper, we want to demonstrate our approach to the challenges we have outlined by presenting two recent artworks. We use writing and rewriting to create study and close reading, as we described in the manifestos, which are re written, performed with others and through the performance they are again rewritten. Scores, scripts, instructions and rules have emerged both as our methodology, history of conceptual art, minimalism, that lead to action-based practices, but also as method of making things. Methods and Methodology are both

together in how we develop practice responses to engage with the public sphere of opinion formation, with the results foregrounding process over outcome.

Slide 11 Thompson book cover

Firstly, we show part of a short film 'Talk to the Land,' which is a film that represents our engagement with the work of Irish philosopher William Thompson (1775–1833). In a previous project 'After Thompson: The Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness' we used forms of membership and study to create a temporary institutional framework to debate political issues.

Slide 12 Study manual/ workshop activity

We produced a Workshopping Manual #1, and developed study-workshops where people could translate Thompson's ideas into statements, texts and artworks, corresponding to their own experiences and viewpoints on working life, equity and happiness.

Slide 13 Workshopping images – Coventry Biennial

Workshop attendees then produced their own workshops based on questions raised by Thompson's text.

The 'Distribution'... was Thompson's first major work in political economy, and it contains his most comprehensive critique of capitalism as well as his proposals for a co-operative society as an alternative to the existing state of affairs, which saw acute poverty amongst the lower classes in Ireland and the UK. He condemned the narrow mechanical approach taken by political economists but also the naïvely utopian and moralist approach of philosophers and attempted to combine a scientific and ethical critique of the system, concentrating on how wealth is created, and also how it is distributed. To this end he introduced the term 'social science' in English, as a name for his approach. Marx was influenced by Thompson's book and read it in the library in Manchester. It influenced Marx's concept of value.

Slide 14 Talk to the Land

Produced in conjunction with Sirius, an arts organisation based in Cobh County Cork we made '*Talk to the Land (Carhoogariff)*, 2022 (5 min film). Here we visit the site of

Thompson's Co-operative settlement outlined in his book *Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities on the Principles of Mutual Co-operation, United Possessions and Equality of Exertions and the Means of Enjoyments*. We rewrite his introduction to the book, updating it to include non-human actors, in particular, the land.

The work on Thompson allows us a chance to experiment with disentangling art from the prevailing focus on heritage narratives—narratives that have been formed without considering theories of decolonization here the English relationship to the Irish and intersectional politics including class. Thompson is an historical figure who is little recorded and uncelebrated. He fell out with the English Co-operatists like Jeremy Bentham, as he believed their approach had a reformist agenda that aimed to manage the working classes. However, later in the early 20th century the Irish republican leader James Connolly stated that Thompson was the first Irish socialist.

Slide 15 Gallery view

Finally we share a work called 'How to practice a culture-led re-commoning of cities', 2022

This work *writes* for a new type of city making and makes clear demands for new ways to live together. It is realised in the exhibition at Sirius as a free-standing text. The text calls forth new constituents of the city to take over its making. Identifying actors that have been overlooked and disregarded and infrastructures that have not been widely considered such as platform co-operativism, municipal socialism and mutual care networks.

Slide 16 Image of pink The City does not exist pamphlet calling in for re-adjustments

Thank you

ENDS