Art, its function and its publics: public sphere theory in the work of the Freee art collective 2004 - 2010

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Art, its function and its publics: Public sphere theory in the work of the Freee art collective 2004 – 2010 (unpublished narrative section)

A thesis submitted to the Loughborough University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Arts, English and Drama

2014

Melanie Jordan

PhD by Publication (Practice & Theory)
# Table of Contents

Abstract 7
Declaration and Copyright Statement 10
Acknowledgements 11

**Section 0 Introduction** 12
01 Topic 12
02 Research Questions 15
03 Research Methods 17
03.1 Thesis Structure 20
04 Overall Argument 22
05 Original Contributions 24
06 Research Context 26
06.1 *The Bourgeois Public Sphere* 26
06.2 *Public Art and the Public Sphere* 28
06.3 *Public Art as Imagery, Public Art as Publicity* 29
06.4 *Socially Engaged Art Practice* 34
06.5 *From Picturing to Doing* 35
06.6 *The Artist's Body* 36
06.7 *Artists and Politics* 38
06.8 *Public Art and Action* 39
06.9 *Contemporary Art and the Public Sphere* 40

**Section 1: The Social Function of Art** 43
1.1 *'Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness'* 43
1.1.1 Conclusion 44
1.2 *'Futurology'* 45
1.2.1 Conclusion 46
Outcome 1: *'Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness'* 48

Section 2: Art and Opinion Formation

2.1 The Functions of Public Art 2004 – 2006

2.1.1 ‘The Economic Function of Public Art is to Increase the Value of Private Property’, 2004

2.1.2 ‘The Aesthetic Function of Public Art is to Codify Social Distinctions as Natural Ones’, 2005

2.1.3 ‘The Function of Public Art for Regeneration is to Sex-up the Control of the Under-classes’ 2005

2.1.4 ‘The Neo-Imperialist Function of Public Art is to Clear a Path for Economic Expansion’ 2006

2.1.5 Conclusion

2.2 Sloganeering 2007- 2008

2.2.1 ‘Protest is Beautiful’, 2007

2.2.2 ‘Protest Drives History’, 2008

2.2.3 Conclusion


Outcome: 4 ‘Sloganeering’ Freee art collective, 2007 & 2008 – two artworks

Section 3: Art, Co-producers and Publics

3.1 ‘Spin[Freee]oza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’

3.1.1 Conclusion

3.2 ‘The New Futurist Manifesto (Revised, Expanded and Updated)’

3.2.1 Conclusion

3.3 ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’

3.3.1 Conclusion

3.4 ‘The Freee Collective Don’t Want You!’

3.4.1 Conclusion

Outcome: 5 ‘Spin[Freee]oza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’, Freee art
collective, 2009 art project, exhibition and booklet
Outcome: 6 “The New Futurist Manifesto (Revised, Expanded and Updated)” 248
Freee art collective, 2009, journal article and ‘The Freee Manifesto for Guerrilla Advertising’, manifesto and spoken choir
Outcome: 7 ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ Freee art collective, 2009, art project
Outcome: 8 ‘The Freee Collective Don’t Want You’, Freee art collective, 2009, art project
PUBLIC: art, culture, ideas. ‘Civic spectacle’, Spring 2012, Vol: 23 issue 45, 139 – 145

Section Four: Conclusion 292
4.1 Summary of Key Arguments 292
4.2 Summary of Results of Art Practice 297
4.3 Critical reflections on the field of art and its publics 298

Bibliography 302

Word count - written narrative only (19,977)
Abstract

A thesis by publication submitted to the Loughborough University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Arts, English and Drama

Melanie Jordan

Title: Art, its function and its publics: Public sphere theory in the work of the Freee art collective 2004 – 2012
2014

This thesis and subsequent artworks present a critical examination into the degree to which public sphere theory can contribute to an expanded understanding of art and its publics. This research proposes that the notion of ‘public’ in the idiom ‘public art’ should be understood as a discursive construct as opposed to a physical, spatial understanding as in the term public realm. This revision considers the act of being public as a process, a series of inter-subjective temporal experiences, rather than a spatial condition. This helps expand art’s role from an autonomous field of exhibition making into a position of publishing, thereby recognising art as a contributor to collective opinion formation.

As part of this analysis, the thesis develops a theoretical approach based on the work of Jürgen Habermas in order to contribute to and move beyond the existing understanding of the relationship between art and its publics. The artworks function to demonstrate the distinctions between a physical, spatial use of the term public and a discursive use of the term public. The concepts and approaches embraced in the production of the artworks echo key ideas adopted from public sphere theory and operate as instances of publishing in themselves.
The thesis comes to a number of key conclusions. First, if we take into account that artworks are published as a consequence of being exhibited then we can understand art as part of the process of opinion (re)formation, thus contributing to a wider reflection upon art's social function. Second, by clarifying the distinctions between the terms public space, public good, and public sphere it is revealed that the use of the term 'public' in public art is heavily reliant upon the inherent physical, spatial differences between a primary and secondary audience. Third, by examining the traditionally accepted polarity between the street (public realm, open access) and the gallery (private, exclusive) it is determined that these spatial conditions are obsolete when establishing whether an artwork is considered public or not, as in the term public art. Finally, public sphere theory enables us to reconsider what constitute publics; members of the public are hereby declared as agents of opinion formation.

In drawing these conclusions, this thesis (including artworks) argues for the validity and usefulness of Habermas' theory of the public sphere (and subsequent extensions of public sphere theory) both in an analysis of the function of art and its publics and in the production of artworks. I conclude that what public sphere theory ultimately provides us with is an alternative version of art and politics.
The concept of public space, beloved of lonely myopic law-abiding right-on gushing morons, can only imagine the public as a mass of bodies.

The concept of the public realm, preferred by shifty piss-guzzling half-witted busy-body nerve-wracked self-serving technocrats, can only imagine the public as a mass to be administered.

The concept of the public sphere, in the radical tradition of Critical Theory, imagines the public producing itself through politicized acts of cultural exchange.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family. My mum, whose intuitive understanding of politics has led me to ask the ridiculous question, ‘could I be a ‘natural’ Marxist?’ I want to thank her for the frank and open discussions she promoted, which were the principle of my upbringing. My husband, Andy Hewitt who in contrast to my mum knows all about politics; thank you for putting up with this ‘angry oik’ from East London, who has ranted through the lack of politics (in most) definitions of the public for long enough. And finally our son Frank(ie), who was named Frankie not only to foster in him the desire to speak openly but to celebrate the theory of the public sphere.

Through the writing of this thesis I hope I have managed to offer something new to Freee’s collective practice. I owe a great deal to my good friend Dave Beech, who always encourages me to form my own opinions about issues I instinctively know are wrong. Thanks also to Ian Bruff, a more recent friend, between us we have established that an artist and a political scientist can work together productively.

A very practical thank you to Julia Masawi who did more than her share of our pooled childcare duties throughout the summer of 2014 when I was trying to write the final version of this thesis. And also to Johanna Hallsten who read the written narrative for the thesis and provided me with some very useful comments.

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Final thanks go to my past students (and probably my future students) who have had to endure listening to my theories of art and the public sphere.
Section 0: Introduction

01 Topic
This PhD submission is ‘by publication’ and therefore I present both a written narrative as well as eight published outputs. The narrative describes the interrelated nature of eight published research outputs, which include both practice and theory outcomes\(^1\). The eight outputs span a period of eight years from 2004 – 2012 and are all collectively produced by the Freee art collective.

This thesis is structured into five parts: introduction, Section 1: The Social Function of Art, Section 2: Art and Opinion Formation and Section 3: Art, Co-producers and Publics. The conclusion attempts to clarify and summarize the results of the research.

In this introductory section of the thesis I present the overarching rationale for my research and I explain my position in relation to the general topic of art and the public sphere. In order to do this I set out a research context (comprising a short literature review). Sections 1 - 3 include a summary of each published outcome as well as a copy of the outcome; in this way the written narrative and the published outcomes are integrated within the body of the thesis\(^2\). The research addresses three particular aspects of contemporary art practice that I have named as: 1. The Social Function of Art, 2. Art and Opinion Formation and 3. Art, Co-producers and Publics.

Freee’s art practice (2004 - 2012) has been concerned with the notion of the public sphere. Public sphere theory, the philosophy of participatory and deliberative democracy in general - theorized by Williams (Williams: 1958), Habermas (Habermas: [1962] 1989), Mouffe (Mouffe: 1999), Fraser (Fraser: \(^1\) Please note, I have decided to use ‘inclusive pagination’ for this thesis; the written published outcomes retain their original pagination as well as the thesis pagination; this was the most suitable way in which to integrate my published outcomes with my written narrative.

\(^2\) I decided against including the published outcomes as appendices to the written narrative as I want to evidence a holistic approach to my research project.
1990) - suggests ways in which dialogic understanding and the resolution of differences may aid engagement by a range of communities, including those normally marginalized or excluded from the public sphere.

I have co-authored artworks with Dave Beech and Andrew Hewitt as the Freee art collective since 2004\(^3\) previous to this (from 1998) I collaborated with Andrew Hewitt as Hewitt and Jordan. I am the sole author of this written research narrative from which I draw my own conclusions in relationship to my proposed research topic and questions.

When choosing to call ourselves an ‘art collective’ we made a conscious decision that no aspect of the work we make together would be ascribed to any one member of the group; this has both political and ethical implications. We aim to avoid the speculation that our group consists of discrete types of workers; we do not embody the intellectual, the technical or the administrative worker. Not only is naming and assigning these roles contrary to the notion of the collective and the common but by disbanding the ‘collective’ by identifying individual contributions there is a risk of:

1. a conceptual return to the idea of the individual ‘genius’ artist (modernist); if the onlooker can categorize who is responsible for the intellectual work than they can feel at ease knowing that really there is only *one* artist in the collective;
2. the representation of art as teamwork (neo-liberal); each member of the collective is allocated individual roles; art is therefore understood as a logical endeavour that can be split into isolated activities.

By calling our practice ‘collective’ over ‘collaborative’ we are able to discourage other people outside the collective attributing different aspects of the production of artworks to any one member of the group. Artist and researcher Stuart Tait, interviewed Freee in 2007 for his PhD on collaborative art practices, he spent a considerable amount of time in the interview attempting to find out exactly what

\(^3\) Freee make artworks collectively, in order that the production of the artworks correlates to the concerns present within the art practice.
it was each of us did; under the guise of practical work-loading he wanted to name one of us as the conceptual lead thereby differentiating the conceptual work from the technical and administrative labour.

For me splitting up our practice in this way undermines the political act of calling ourselves a collective and maintains the gender stereotypes between different types of labour. For example as the only woman in the collective we are all three aware that I could be quite easily considered the administrative lead.

Furthermore it is a key principle of our practice that our work evolves through dialogue and discussion and that it is not technically attributed to any one person, and in fact the longer we have worked together the harder it gets to remember who did what and if it was even the same person that originally initiated the particular project that the output was for.

As part of the Freee art collective I have utilized the theories of the public sphere as the central criteria for assessing and reflecting upon my art practice, the practice has also enabled me to test out the validity of these theories in practice. It has enabled me to develop a new approach to thinking about art in relation to its' publics. For example, by employing the term ‘public sphere’ as opposed to the term ‘public space’ we are better able to understand the internal contradictions of ‘publicness’ and ask what actually constitutes a public space? Is there such a space or place, and is it possible to bring about a public place? This is in contrast to the way in which the word ‘public’ is traditionally used in the expression of ‘public art’ and ‘art in public places’ which usually refers pragmatically to the siting of an art work in an ‘outside’ space. And although the rhetoric around this practice uses the terminology of democracy as Rosalyn Deutsche observes, the divisions between desirable and undesirable publics still remain.

'Following a $1.2-million reconstruction of the park, a neighborhood group, Friends of Jackson Park-a group the *Times* consistently mistakes for both "the community" and "the public"-decided to lock the newly installed park gates at night. The City
Parks Department, lacking sufficient personnel to close the park, welcomed "public" help in protecting public space, a defense they equated with evicting homeless people from city parks. "The people who hold the keys," announced the *Times*, "are determined to keep a park a park." (Deutsche, 2002, 276)

The key idea that I take from Jürgen Habermas is not the concept of the public within the public sphere, but the activity of publishing⁴ (Habermas, [1962], 1989). As such, the public is not an empirical body, nor a spatial concept. The public sphere is a *performative* arrangement; it is the activity of ‘going public’ or ‘making something public’ that fills particular places and spaces with public life. And this is why the public can emerge in private, commercial and mobile spaces too, such as the coffee house, the magazine, the parlour, the Working Men’s Club, the political party and the pub.

**02 Research Questions**

The primary research question that this thesis addresses is, ‘*To what extent can public sphere theory contribute to the understanding of art, its function and its publics in the practice of the Freee art collective 2004-2012?*’

A series of subsidiary questions are posed which are tackled by eight existing published outputs.

**Section 1: The Social Function of Art**

In section one I explore a historical understanding of the function of art via the ideas of Adorno, Greenberg and Kosuth in order to examine the function for art in public for publics (outcome 1), this takes into account the role of the institution which is addressed through *Futurology*’ art project and subsequent edited book (outcome 2).

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⁴ By publishing Habermas’ means the declaration of opinion by an individual to another individual or group of individuals, this initial publishing of opinions leads to debate with others, which in turn leads to further opinion formation. (Habermas, [1962], 1989).

⁵ All of the published outputs for this Ph.D submission (by practice and by publication) are collective. Mel Jordan works collectively with Dave Beech and Andy Hewitt as the Freee art collective.
In the text ‘Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness’ I ask how the theorists Adorno, Greenberg and Kosuth conceptualize art? And attempt to understand what is their interpretation of the social function of art?

In the ‘Futurology’ art project and subsequent edited book I enquire into the function of art in public for publics.

Section 2: Art and Opinion Formation

In section two I develop a type of ‘public spherian’ art in which I utilize key ideas from public sphere theory to determine decisions made in the practice. I enquire into what is the value of employing public sphere theory to public art in public? And what does a ‘public spherian’ art practice look like?

‘The Functions of Art’, and ‘Sloganeering’, artworks enable me to directly publish my opinions in the public realm and through reproduction allow me to the consider significance of primary and secondary audiences in this arrangement.

Section 3: Art, Co-producers and Publics

In section three I turn to the questions of collective production and pose the questions, what does a public spherian approach to art reveal about the significance of public collectivity in art practice? And what does a public spherian approach reveal about the consequences of art being public in public?

The ‘Spin(freee)noza’, (Shop Windows and Balloons)’ art project enables me to consider the spatial placing of slogans within the public realm, testing the limits of public space by using clearly commercial contexts to publish texts. Manifesto readings in the form of ‘spoken choirs’ as in the ‘The Freee Manifesto for Guerrilla Advertising’, gives me the opportunity to ask others to agree or disagree, in the spirit of the historical manifestos this work allows for dissensus as part of the process of liberal democracy.

‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ art project proposes that participants are reconsidered as witnesses and that actions in the public realm need to be witnessed in order to become part of the collective memory. And finally the journal article The Freee Collective Don’t Want You!, describes some of the
current literature of participation in art practice.

**03 Research Methods**

This thesis represents a combination of research methods including literature review, argumentation and practice-based research. My overarching research question ‘*To what extent can public sphere theory contribute to the understanding of art its function and its publics in the practice of the Freee art collective 2004 - 2012?*’ is addressed through five secondary questions, which eight existing published outcomes address. The written narrative unites the eight existing published outcomes in order to enable a focused account of my research aims; the outcomes have been selected in relation to their function in tackling the overarching research question. This research thesis does not represent the total sum of my published work.

The eight cited outcomes utilize different methods in there completion which include; written argumentation (a book chapter, two journal articles), curation, commissioning, exhibition-making and book production (a curated project for New Art Gallery Walsall in conjunction with Creative Partnerships), and the production of artworks in the public realm (in partnership with galleries and publics).

The overall methodology in the research is concerned with the relationship of theory to practice and practice to action in the public realm; public sphere theory is utilized in order to propose a reconsideration of the meaning of the term ‘public’ within the idiom of Public Art, including both art history and practice. Both Habermas’ original articulation of the public sphere and extended theories of the public sphere, (McGuigan, Fraser, Butler, Benhabib, Warner) operate as a logic for the decision-making within the practice-based outcomes, thus ‘going public’ with ideas based on conceptions of the public is a key principle of my research6.

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6 On reflection it is appropriate for the research that I am submitting this PhD by publication as my interest in the public sphere is predicated on publishing in the public domain, this brings a coherent logic to the research methods.
The research methods rooted within the artworks are concerned with the realization of ideas as physical deeds within the public realm. The decision-making within the conception and production of the work relies on an understanding of public sphere theory. For example the use of text as a format within a series of public artworks in the public realm enables me to directly declare my opinion and at the same time to publish the work in a range of ways.

By speaking the same words that constitute the artwork over the telephone I can reiterate the content of the work. In this way I can distribute my opinions and communicate with additional spectators, thus enabling the artworks to operate as a type of public sphere.

The reiteration of an artwork over a number of forms; speech, photograph, poster and performance as well as the variety of places that Freee's artwork are published enable the shift from exhibition to publishing. No doubt an exhibition is a form of publishing but by emphasising the opinion in the artwork over the particular type of form and output, the spectator is forced to attend to the work differently and repeatedly. She is forced to respond to the work by both looking at it as well as actually 'reading it'. The difference between the primary audience and the secondary audience is purposefully collapsed in Freee’s approach to making artworks; as there is no static version of a particular work the primary viewer (the spectator of a exhibited version of a work) and secondary audience (the spectator of the documentation or reiteration of the artwork) is deemed equivalent.

I should make it clear that the practice-based research, in this case the production of artworks, supports the development of key arguments in the thesis; the practice is not used as a 'testing' mechanism (as say in sociological fieldwork), neither is the resulting artworks discussed as part of a technical process of studio-based 'making', which is traditionally premised on formal experiments with processes and materials, in which one artwork might inform the making of the next.
The artworks demonstrate the power of acting and doing things within the public realm. The research does not seek responses or qualification from audiences or viewers of the artworks but rather proposes a new form of political artwork that takes into account the function and methodology of the public sphere. As a consequence the production and publishing of artworks enables me to extend the definition of the term 'public' in the category of public art. I understand this as a type of argumentation via the production and publishing of artworks.

Publishing photographic documentation of artworks, which are sited in the public realm in the media (magazines, journals and web-sites), prompts a range of questions around primary and secondary audience. The notion of a secondary audience for an artwork i.e. looking at an artwork as a reiteration, removed from the act of original viewing relates to the debates of the role of documentation within performance art and the issues around the importance of context in site specific art practice. According to Peggy Phelan documentation cannot stand in for the original experience of performance, she says,

‘Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance, that it cannot be saved, recorded documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance’ (Phelan: 1993, 146).

Richard Serra when discussing the notorious removal of his sculpture ‘Tilted Arc’ from Federal Plaza says,

‘Titled Arc’ was commissioned and designed for one particular site: Federal Plaza. It is a site-specific work and as such not to be relocated. To remove the work is to destroy the work.’ (Kwon, 2002, 12)

The utilization of public sphere theory with art enables us to understand how art practice engages with the public sphere of opinion formation and in some cases
we know that through social and dialogical practices a public sphere emerges. However, more crucially public sphere theory allows us a way in which to transform art practice from imagery to deeds and from form to content. Just as art is never simply representation, politics is never purely discourse. Art and politics are at all times productive activities.

03.1 Thesis Structure
The published outcomes that make up this research submission are integrated into the written narrative and account for the majority of the content in the three key sections. I include each published outcome in the sections as well as summarize the outcome within the written narrative.

In section one, ‘The Social Function of Public Art’, I set out the context and definitions of functionality with a literature review. This takes the form of a written text, called ‘Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness’, (Beech, Hewitt and Jordan, 2008, 113 – 125) which was published in ‘Art Theory after Socialism’ (Jordan & Miles, 2008). I also address the function of art for publics in public with the inclusion of a curatorial project and edited book entitled Futurology (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

In section two, ‘Art and Opinion Formation’, I rely upon two projects to demonstrate the value of employing public sphere theory to public art by speculating on what an artwork can do in the public realm rather than what it can represent to its public.

The series of text works from 2004 – 2006 entitled ‘The Functions of Art’ express an opinion about the function of public art as well as being published in the public realm. The intention of the series of the six artworks (three of which I include in this PhD submission) is to establish both a primary and a secondary audience for the opinion published within the artwork.

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7 I edited this book with Malcolm Miles.
The ‘Sloganeering’ artworks, ‘Protest is Beautiful’, 2007 and ‘Protest Drives History, 2008’ depart from ‘The Functions of Art’ series to include content related to the history of dissent. As opposed to critiquing arts function, as in the earlier artworks, these slogans call for spectators to acknowledge the role of protest, dissent and resistance in liberal democracy.

Finally in section three, ‘Art, Co-producers and Publics’, I include two art projects and two journal articles that engage with the question of public collectivity in the production of art.

‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ consisted of a walking tour of Cambridge town in which the participants wore bright costumes (including “Liberty bonnets” as worn by Jacobins, and performed scripted ceremonies.

In 2009 the Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge UK commissioned the project, for the exhibition, ‘Generosity Is the New Political’ 4 September - 1 November 2009.

The project explores the idea of public participation by means of a small group of participants who witness the renaming of the streets of Cambridge. The aim of the project is to recast the participants into witnesses. Wysing trustees, staff and artists are invited to contribute and take on the role of participants overturning the idea that the public is somehow a distant collection of individuals that have no connections with the organization.


The project entitled ‘Spin(freee)noza’ utilizes Spinoza’s ideas on democracy as a way to engage with the local Amsterdam shopkeepers, publishing ideas about democracy directly on the outside of shop windows. Billboard posters reiterate these slogans inside the gallery space and balloons can be taken away so the
viewer is encouraged commit to a specific slogan that she believes in and to carry it back into the public realm.

The ‘Spin(free)e/noza’ project was commissioned by SMART Project Space, Amsterdam and was part of the exhibition ‘On Joy, Sadness and Desire’, curated and organized by Hilde de Bruijn. The exhibition was held at SMART Project Space and ran from, 9 May – 28 June 2009.

The text entitled ‘The Freee Collective Don’t Want You’, started out as a paper for the Association of Art Historians Conference, entitled, ‘Art, Participation, and Counter-Publics in UK Cultural Policy’ in 2011 and was then developed as a journal article for the journal Public 45: CIVIC SPECTACLE, spring 2012.\(^8\)

**04 Overall Argument**

This thesis demonstrates the value of an approach to art based upon public sphere theory that enables an understanding of art as part of opinion formation rather than as the object of aesthetic experience. I argue that by utilizing the theory of the public sphere we can better understand art's political efficacy as a form of publishing.

The shift from exhibition to publishing redefines art's ontology from unique objects in spaces to published multiples that circulate within publics. This theoretical innovation has the added advantage of explaining within the same expanded terms both the politics of pictorial art and the politics of recent developments in art after the social turn. Furthermore, the public sphere theory of art allows us to reconsider the term 'public' within the category of public art.

Yet we need to recognize this proposed arrangement of art and the public as having a far wider significance than enabling a new definition of terms. I argue that what public sphere theory ultimately provides us with is an alternative version of art and politics.

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\(^8\) Finally this text was extended for a book chapter called *Impossible Participation for Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice* edited by Kathryn Brown (to be published Nov 2014).
I claim that W.J.T. Mitchell’s configuration of art and the public sphere is concerned with the notion of publicity and therefore public art is viewed as an ‘image’ not as an ‘act’. The debates that ensue from the public artworks that he cites are concerned with whether the artworks properly represent the events that they are suppose to memorialize. For him the function of publicity is to reveal controversies within the form and content of the artwork. For Mitchell artworks in the public realm represent violence and politics, and it is the ‘critical’ publicity they create through this representation that he believes constitutes a public sphere.

Rosalyn Deutsche formulates an expanded version of public sphere theory in her essay ‘Agoraphobia’ where she extends the politics of the public sphere to include a diverse range of publics including the homeless as the disfranchised victims of gentrification. Through the application of theoretical developments in gender theory and identity politics she argues for the relationship between art and the public sphere as an art of ‘critique’ (Deutsche, 2002). Thus both critics neglect the role of art as a ‘productive activity’ overlooking the potential for art to present alternative ways of living. If the practice of critique is valuable for developing new ways in which to see the world then it needs to not only deconstruct accepted norms but to propose a reconstruction of how we should live.

I argue that the difference between various types of space is irrelevant to the production of a public sphere. As I specify the bourgeois public sphere was predicated on the virtual of independent men being able to meet together in privately owned coffee shops. A public sphere is not contingent on the space in which it is occurring; it is not the status of a particular space that facilitates a public sphere but the congregation of private individuals coming together to agree on collective opinions. Therefore I argue that the type of space an artwork is produced or viewed in has nothing to do with it being categorized as public; it is not useful to confuse the amount of people who have access to an artwork with the definition of its ‘publicness’. Yet I acknowledge that the type of publics that
gather choose a particular space for a range of reasons, as in 1990's Armenia, because of political and economic circumstances, the kitchen is the place in which people gather thus the kitchen becomes the public sphere.  

In conventional conceptions of art history the viewer of the actual artwork is usually considered as the authentic onlooker whereas viewing a document of an artwork is seen as a superficial engagement with the artwork. However, if artworks are 'published' and therefore demand that the spectators literally read them as well as look at them then the phenomenological act of viewing is put into question.

My point is a public sphere is predicated on social principles and is not a physical spatial entity. Understanding this, I argue, enables us to recognize the limitations of declaring an artwork only public when it is installed in a ‘public’ (usually outside) space. In addition, state commissioned and publically funded artworks are not necessarily public in the public spherian sense – again, it does not matter in which way an artwork is funded, it is more to do with what the artwork does that makes it public or not. Thus I claim the simplification of the term public in the idiom ‘public art’ has a consequence for the way we think and understand arts and its publics.

I extend both Mitchell and Deutsche’s theories of art and the public sphere by deploying public sphere theory in order to produce artworks in the public realm. The use of public sphere theory as a framework for making artefacts enables us to devise a new concept of the public within the presentation and viewing of an artwork; at the same time it enables us to think about the difference between exhibiting artworks and publishing opinion.

05 Original Contributions

In making these arguments this thesis seeks to make three original contributions. First of all, by addressing the gaps in existing definitions of art and

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9 I discovered this fact during a conversation with Armenia Art Historian Vardan Azatyan.
public sphere we can extend the literature and explore the potential of public sphere theory for an improved understanding of art and its publics. When speaking about temporality in public art Patricia Phillips says,

‘The errors of much public art have been its lack of specificity, its tendency to look at society - at the public – too broadly and simply.’

(Philips, 1989, 335)

Although a discussion of art and its publics is commonplace in art historical literature (public art is particularly well discussed in the US not so in the UK) this thesis analyzes a phenomenon of art and the public sphere in the work of the Freee art collective during the period 2004 - 2012.

In his initial use of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere W.J.T. Mitchell is particularly concerned with the notion of publicity within public art discourse and hence he endorses an interpretative reading of public artworks. Mitchell suggests that a public sphere emerges from the controversy of such artworks; explicitly the political and social content that is revealed in the artworks encourages a range of publics (users, as well as viewers) to deliberate the consequences of the exposed issues (Mitchell, 1992). This view fails to take into account the developments within art practice specifically the move from representation to action – the shift artists made from picturing politics to doing politics. This type of social art practice performed in the public realm engenders a different type of public sphere not a public sphere of controversy around what is accepted as art (as in Mitchell’s examples of Serra and Maya Lin) but a public sphere of acts. Notwithstanding the development of dialogical practices themselves in which production is centered on deliberation (Kester, 2004).

Whilst I acknowledge that Mitchell’s version of art and the public sphere was one of the first accounts that utilized Habermas’ theories; I believe that careful attention to existing artworks engaged with analyzing the social function of art -

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10 The essay also includes an account of the publicity surrounding Spike Lee’s 1989 film Do the Right Thing, (Mitchell, 1989, 29)
from Alan Kaprow and others as I go on to argue - enables an alternative theory of art and the public sphere; one that privileges action (including debate) over commentary and coalesces with the function of the public sphere for democratic means.

The second original contribution that this thesis makes is that it brings Habermas (as well as extended public sphere discourses) to bear on contemporary art practice. My research departs from a range of theoretical accounts of art and the public sphere via the practice of making artworks and publishing them in the public realm. I provide a critical analysis of existing literature and whilst not advancing a static definition of art and the public sphere, I provide an extended discussion of art and the public sphere in relation to recent developments in art practice; relational aesthetics, and socially engaged art practice.

Finally, this research seeks to demonstrate that Habermas’ work can be applied in an explanatory way to relatively concrete phenomena. This thesis argues for Habermas’ applicability and usefulness through a demonstration of public sphere theory in action.

In this way public sphere theory enables us to reconsider what constitutes the public of art and to question ways in which art can contribute to opinion formation beyond its knowable function as a commentator of social and political issues.

06 Research Contexts

06.1 The Bourgeois Public Sphere

The theory of the bourgeois public sphere - a term commonly confused or used in place of the terms public space or the public realm\(^{11}\) - means in-between private and public. The historical bourgeois public sphere is generally thought of

\(^{11}\) For example Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* 2007 continually misuses the term public sphere, when she means ‘state regulated’ or even ‘public sector’ (Klein, N, 2007).
as civil society - the totality of voluntary, civic and social organizations and institutions. According to Habermas’ theory the bourgeois public sphere is where collective opinion formation takes place, which can challenge oppressive state bureaucracy as well as capital (Habermas, [1962], 1989).

Collective opinion formation operates as a shared force to monitor the decisions made by the state and the market; a united view by a particular group of individuals can persuade the state and the market to reconsider its actions and policies. To enable collective opinion formation individuals require public forums, arenas of communal interaction where people meet together and discuss the deeds of the state and the market. This can take place in any space, ‘private’ (in Armenia during 1990s the public sphere took place in the kitchen), ‘commercial’ (the coffee house) or ‘public’ (the city square) as long as a collection of individuals are present declaring their opinions on current affairs (Habermas, [1962], 1989). In Habermas’ ideal, citizens discuss issues rationally in order to arrive at a consensus that satisfies the public good. Individuals are required to put aside their private interests in order to think altruistically about the needs of all; decisions are (anticipated to be) arrived at for the public good.

The public sphere is always made up of private individuals, what makes it public is simply that they publish their opinions; these shared opinions remain the views of private individuals, but by being published they become part of the collective attempt to arrive at shared values, decisions, and potential actions.

‘The public sphere is nothing but the socialized expression of individuals reciprocally constituted autonomy: individuals are autonomous not in isolation from but in relation to one another, that is, in relation to a public of autonomous beings.’ (Susen, 2011, 42)

Questions of dissemination are central to Habermas - as he describes the historical development of the bourgeois public sphere; the public sphere is

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12 The notion of ‘public good’ as an interest free concept is contestable, no doubt there has to be a collective understanding of what constitutes ‘public good’ therefore it is always ideological as well as contingent.
brought to life with the flow of information and exchange of cultural opinion, via the publication and distribution of ideas in newspapers, journals, clubs and coffee houses. However, Habermas’ conception of an ideal public sphere was short-lived due to what he saw as the professionalization of politics with the rise of the liberal constitutional state and the refeudalization of the press as it came to be controlled by a few individuals (Habermas, 1962, 1989).

Habermas’ version of the public sphere has since been criticized and developed by other theorists - a desire to think about what the theory of public sphere means in a contemporary and pluralist context has meant the introduction of expanded versions of the public sphere. The exclusion of women has been contested, (Fraser, 1990); new class-based antagonisms and race issues are deliberated (Benhabib, 1996), the public sphere is extended by the efforts of various aggrieved and excluded counter-publics (Warner, 2002). Habermas has also been criticized for developing a conceptual framework of the public sphere that is also idealistic and overly rationalistic (Susen, 2011).

It is now acknowledged that the public is comprised of multiple public spheres with opposing as well as sometimes overlapping spheres of discourse and action. It is widely acknowledged in public sphere literature that society is no longer considered a singular public as Habermas’ historical account of the bourgeois public sphere, but is composed of numerous publics. (Fraser, 1990, 61)

06.2 Public Art and the Public Sphere
On 16 September 1989 the one-day symposium, ‘Art and Public Spaces: Daring to Dream’, took place at First Chicago Center, USA. The conference was organised by John Hallmark Neff and sought to explore a series of questions about art and public spaces:

‘what role, if any could art play in a public context today? Are “monuments” and “memorials” really possible within the alleged vacuum of mutually respected beliefs? Is it possible for sculpture or even site-specific work to avoid the obsolescence of supposedly “public” art if the
work has no intellectual or contextual resonance beyond itself? Is artwork in public venues justified at such low level of ambition?’ (Hallmark Neff, in Mitchell 1992, 7).

The conference papers were published as an anthology entitled ‘Art and the Public Sphere’, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Mitchell, 1992). The twelve chapters in the book address Hallmark Neff’s wide-ranging conference questions in relation to existing public art practice, function and purpose. Although Hallmark Neff, regards the symposium ‘as an opportunity to step back from the mechanics of public art and dream’. (Mitchell, 1992, 8), the contributions cover both conceptual and technical responses from artists and theorists on contemporary public art practices.

The title of the volume, ‘Art and the Public Sphere’, is addressed specifically by Mitchell’s editorial, ‘Introduction: Utopia and Critique’ and is further developed in his essay, ‘The Violence of Public Art’. Mitchell’s argument is an early instance of public art being considered in respect of the public sphere as set out by Habermas’ in his book, ‘The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere’, (Habermas, [1962], 1989). 13

06.3 Public Art as Imagery & Public Art as Publicity
Mitchell’s claim for art and the public sphere is based upon two concepts; public art as imagery and public art as publicity. For Mitchell public art functions through the creation of ‘images’ (even though these artworks are not necessarily symbolic and in most cases are sculptural), which are decoded by the viewer in order to create a talking point between audiences (including the state and market) that generates both critical and manipulative publicity (Habermas, [1962], 1989).

By means of Habermas’ theory of the bourgeois public sphere Mitchell succeeds in expanding the definition of public art from a hitherto spatial version of art in public towards an issue of public accessibility enabled through the proliferation of mass media images. However, whilst Mitchell extends the notion of public access to art (and images of art) in the field of public art I believe his claim for art and the public sphere is incomplete.

As D.S. Friedman says in his 1995 article ‘Public Things in the Modern City: Belated Notes on Titled Arc and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial’

‘Mitchell and Neff would probably agree that what couples the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Titled Arc is not form, but controversy.’

(Friedman, 1995,63)

Mitchell’s use of the public sphere theory with public art is concerned with ‘the relation between beauty and publicity’ (Mitchell, 1992, 2) and in his essay in the volume, ‘The Violence of Public Art’ he states,

‘Even in the United States the “publicness” of public images goes well beyond their specific sites or sponsorship: “publicity” has, in a very real sense made all art into public art.’ (Mitchell, 1992, 30).

Habermas warns against the misuse of publicity to undermine the concept of the public sphere, ‘Critical publicity is supplanted by manipulative publicity’ (Habermas, [1962] 1989, 178). He asserts that it is manipulative publicity that debases the public sphere,

‘Publicity loses its critical function in favor of staged display; even arguments are translated into symbols to which again one can not

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14 See Doreen Massey (urban geographer) and Ernesto Laclau (political theorist) for their critiques of urban space. Massey believes space is formed by discourse and that we must reject the notion of space as an unchallengeable objectivity, whilst acknowledging this Laclau also considers discourse to be essentially spatiotemporal.

15 Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is an artwork by Maya Lin produced in 1982.

respond by arguing but only by identifying with them’ (Habermas, [1962] 1989, 178).

Contemplating the colonization of public art by publicity, Mitchell alerts us to the potential of public art to function for the interests of, ‘state media management’, suggesting that ‘public art will be the province of “spin doctors” and propagandists.’ (Mitchell, 1992, 2). Nevertheless Mitchell is hopeful of the role art and culture could play in supporting a public sphere.

‘Or does the internationalization of global culture provide opportunities for new forms of public solidarity to emerge, leave openings for intrusion of new forms of public resistance to homogenization and domination?’ (Mitchell, 1992, 2)

Mitchell believes,

‘The very notion of public art as we receive it is inseparable from what Jurgen Habermas has called “the liberal model of the public sphere”, a dimension distinct from the economic, the private and the political. This ideal realm provides the space in which disinterested citizens may contemplate a transparent emblem of their own inclusiveness and solidarity, and deliberate on the general good, free of coercion, violence or private interests.’ (Mitchell, 1992, 35)

I would argue this is in fact imprecise; Habermas historical account of the bourgeois public sphere describes a space of institutions and practices between rather than ‘distinct from’ the private interests of everyday life in civil society and the realm of state power (Habermas, [1962] 1989, 3). Habermas’ acknowledges that the private and public spheres are mutually dependent. As Simon Susen sums up,

‘Paradoxically, the relative autonomy of the private and the public was contingent upon their reciprocal determinacy. Given the structural interdependence of the two spheres, the public/private polarity can be
conceived of as a public/private reciprocity. The socio-historical analysis of the public/private dichotomy is essential in that it enables us to explore the material and ideological contingency of the public/private reciprocity, which is rooted in the spatiotemporal specificity of every society.’ (Susen, 2011, 39)

Mitchell categorizes two versions of public art practice: utopian and critical. Mitchell’s utopian model of public art practice attempts to facilitate an ideal public sphere through ‘a nonsite and a imaginary landscape’ which he compares to Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere which he claims as being,

‘an all-inclusive site of uncoerced discussion and opinion formation, a place that transcends politics, commerce, private interests and even state control.’ (Mitchell, 1992, 3)

The above definition assumes that art is ‘interest free’ and could somehow stand in for a bourgeois public sphere because of its apparent ‘functionlessness’ (Beech, Hewitt, & Jordan, 2002); in this way Mitchell aligns the interest-free bourgeois public sphere with the modernist idea of art’s autonomy (Crow, 1987). In Mitchell’s account of his ‘critical’ model he says,

‘art that disrupts the image of the pacified utopian public sphere, that exposes contradictions and adopts an ironic subversive relation to the public it addresses and the public space where it appears.’ (Mitchell, 1992, 3).

Mitchell’s use of ‘utopia’ and ‘critique’ rely on abstract considerations of the terms, i.e. there is no claim for what constitutes utopia and its relationship to critique is not addressed. Therefore Mitchell’s attempt at establishing a dialectical concept between utopia and critique collapses since he overlooks that fact that utopia is fundamentally negative. Ernst Bloch and Theodore Adorno

17 For a more detailed account of functionality see Freee’s (Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt, Mel Jordan) essay Functions, Functionalism and Functionlessness: on the social function of public art after modernism, in Jordan & Miles (2008) (Section 1 of this thesis).
shape a critical and material outcome of utopian thought in their discussions on
topia, asserting that utopia is a way of thinking about the future that
demolishes the present. Utopia refers to what is missing; in short utopia and
critique are both part of the same function for art (Bloch, 1989).

Mitchell considers artworks as ‘images’ (Mitchell, 1992, 37) and therefore
develops an interpretative reading of the public artworks that he examines
(utopian and critical) consequently he fosters a decoding of the works to
extricate their meanings. For Mitchell artworks in the public realm represent
violence and politics, and it is the ‘critical’ publicity they create through this
representation that he believes constitutes a public sphere.

Mitchell cites Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1987) as a violent artwork
but fails to explain the critique in the artwork in fact he describes the empathy in
the artwork,

‘It achieves the universality of the public monument not by rising above
its surroundings to transcend the political but by going beneath the
political to the shared sense of a wound that will never heal or (more
optimistically) a scar that will never fade’ (Mitchell, 1992, 37).

Although Mitchell is clearly interested in the public sphere as a mechanism to
consider the future and function of public art the other essays in the volume
return more conventionally to contesting the technical and legal considerations
for the production of public art; in the case of James E Young he extends the idea
of controversy within public art practice and Christopher Griswold develops the
interpretation and describes the function of imagery in memorials. Certainly
Mitchell uses the theory of public sphere to shift public art into a new
constellation - beyond the notion of the primary audience and into the realm of
the mass media. This may constitute an innovative shift for the articulation of
public art by Mitchell but it does not address the potential of public sphere
theory for altering our understanding of art and its publics or the way art is
produced.
Hilde Hein points out that art historian Patricia Phillips, acknowledges the importance of the secondary audience for public art when she states,

‘that the millions of television viewers of the lighted apple's descent in New York’s Times Square New Year's Eve celebration are as much a part of the public spectacle as are the thousands of witnesses on the street. Only the meaning of the word "public" has changed, becoming more "psychologically internalized" as a result of developments in urban and information systems’. (Hein, 1996, 7)

06.4 Socially Engaged Art Practice
Public art practices have expanded and include what we now call socially engaged art practices, (Kwon, 2002); artists concerned with social and public practice connect with a tradition of avant-garde perspectives on arts’ potential for emancipatory change and for democratic politics. This new type of public art practice consists of a temporary and discursive public engagement with both audiences and participants that extend beyond the act of producing and siting a permanent monument; they have been variously named as Socially Engaged Art Practice 18, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogical art (Kester: 2004), littoral art, relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2000) and participation in art (Bishop, 2006).

Socially Engaged Art 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 who believed that, ‘context was half the work’, (Harding, 1997). Notwithstanding that a certain group of artists were developing a critique of arts function; reallocating the artist role of commentator to one of actor.

18 Although these debates were originally initiated in the US, critics Nicholas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop have since addressed these issues within the UK/European context.
Kwon (Kwon, 2002) has described the art historical trajectory from site to location, explaining how artists have explored ways to enter into deliberations with publics, with outcomes not defined in terms of material, but by processes of interaction between the context and local participants and the commissioned artist. Socially Engaged Art Practice is multi-faceted as it generates a complex set of social relations between the outcome and the audience; it has a primary audience of those involved in its coproduction as well as a subsequent secondary audience that is produced when the resulting artworks are displayed at exhibition and published.

06.5 From Picturing to Doing
Picturing poverty as well as promoting political causes has undergone various 20th century critiques - including Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘Author as Producer’; in which he uses the example of documentary photography to demonstrate the difficulties in relying upon picturing as a representation of politics. He says,

‘It (photography) has succeeded in making misery itself an object of pleasure, by treating it stylishly and with technical perfection. For the ‘new objectivity’, it is the economic function of photography to bring to the masses the elements which they could not previously enjoy – spring, movie stars, foreign countries - by reworking them according to the current fashion; it is the political function of photography to renew the world as it actually is from within, or in other words, according to current fashion.” (Benjamin, 1970, 5)

Here Benjamin alerts us to the dangers of reworking content in a formal way; even ‘traditional’ political content such as poverty, can be incorporated in the bourgeois apparatus of production; the artists preoccupation with technical and formal concerns can fail to reveal the very existence of the apparatus and the class that owns it. In Benjamin’s view ‘this is a drastic example of what it means to pass on an apparatus of production without transforming it’ (Benjamin, 1970,
One of the most significant art historical critiques is Clement Greenberg’s 1939 essay ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, which took issue with the way that Social Realist art functioned for a particular political cause. He promotes the critical function of the avant-garde and compares it to what he calls the insidious function of ‘kitsch’ (Greenberg, [1939] 1989).

‘No significant fraction of the directing classes appeared able to resist the counterfeit culture, the “kitsch” that its (capital) economic machinery.’
(Crow, 1987, 5)

Thomas Crow’s account of Greenberg’s essay emphasizes the political intention in the dialectical account of avant-garde and kitsch (Crow, 1987); he describes Greenberg’s early project as a humanist rejection of modern capitalism and reminds us of his call for Socialism to maintain ‘a culture distinct from the debased products of the entertainment industries,’ (Crow, 1987, 5). Although useful in reminding us of Greenberg the partisan, Crow’s account does not unpick Greenberg’s understanding of the function of the avant-garde.

Avant-gardism has no social function in Greenberg’s eyes because it is rejected by society and rejects society in turn. Avant-gardism’s alienation seems, in fact, to be proof of art’s autonomy. The question of arts autonomy from the social sphere is a crucial consideration for a generation of artists occupied with the social function of art (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008).

06.6 The Artist’s Body
American minimalist and conceptual artists working in a climate of increasing cultural and political radicalism, (Wood, 2002, 7) rejected the seeming detachment of late modernist painting. Although abstraction was cast aside there

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19 For a more detailed account of Greenberg’s essay Avant-garde and Kitsch, see Freee’s (Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt, Mel Jordan) essay Functions, Functionalism and Functionlessness: on the social function of public art after modernism, in Section 1 of this thesis.
was no universal return to figuration and no going back to allegory as a technique to represent ideas and create meaning (not in its original formation anyway).

A particular set of artists (not necessarily classified as a group) engaged with the question of arts social function and sought to enquire into the relationship between art and the everyday. Allan Kaprow initiated informal events as part of everyday culture (Kaprow 1962), Morris explored the subject object relations of sculpture (Morris 1966). Adrian Piper and Mierle Laderman Ukeles considered their identity as artists through their gender resulting in a series of social interactions on the street.

Allan Kaprow initiated a series of events and performances called ‘Happenings’. Starting in 1956 and continuing through to late 1960’s Kaprow insisted that ‘Happenings’ were based on everyday life, ‘the line between art and life should be kept as fluid and perhaps as indistinct as possible’ (Kaprow, 1993, 62). A significant part of the ‘Happenings’ was a construction of an environment for which to immerse everybody; the viewer and spectator became the participant.

Robert Morris stressed the relationship between the physical body of the viewer and the space of sculpture in his notion of the ‘nonpersonal or public mode’. Morris was concerned with the context of the object, the situation of the object (environment) that also included the beholder (Harrison & Wood, 1992, 813).

Adrian Piper used her body, for example in the artworks, ‘Catalysis III’, ‘WET PAINT’ and ‘Mythic Being’, to extend the situation of sculpture to the street and to produce artworks which ‘decreased the separation between original conception and the final form of an idea; the immediacy of conception is retained in the process/product as much as possible’ (Piper, accessed 19 August 2014).

The significance of Mierle Laderman Ukeles 1969 ‘Maintenance Art Manifesto’, is not only the question of the difference between the lowly domestic work of women; what she calls ‘maintenance’, and that of the ‘development’ work of men (Wood, 2002, 63). The ‘Maintenance Art Manifesto’ in its material production
addresses the difference between the social and the representational in art practice.

An excerpt from The ‘Maintenance Art Manifesto’ states:

'I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife.
I am a mother. (Random order).
I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking,
renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also,
up to now separately I “do” Art.
Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things,
and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.’
(Laderman Ukeles, 1969, accessed 19 August 2014)

These practices literally take art out of the studio and the gallery and place the production and display of art into the public realm. Furthermore these artworks transform the pursuit of art from the arena of representation to the place of intervention. Although in the first instance these practices might appear to be engaged in extending the potential of what art can be as a formal or technical activity, the ‘Happening’, cleaning, etc. However these artists do not inquire into the limits of the concept of art but demonstrate through their practice exactly what they want art to do.

If Laderman Ukeles declares that she now does art, I want to inquire what does the artwork of Laderman Ukeles, and other artists whose practices are concerned with the body and action do?

06.7 Artists and Politics
A suspicion by citizens that the state was making decisions based on commercial interest, in particular The Civil Rights issue and Anti-Vietnam War movement (Harrison & Wood, 1992, 896), caused US artists to explore art’s relationship to political matters, thus The Art Workers Coalition was formed in 1969, in New York. These artists (and others) acknowledged the problems for art through its estrangement from the social world; the notion of arts autonomy, dominant
within Modernist art criticism and the apparatus of art’s bourgeois structures and hierarchies (the museum and gallery) had separated art from its publics.

In his book ‘The Function of Criticism’ Terry Eagleton indexes the inauguration of a specific literary public to the development of the bourgeois public sphere. ‘The periodicals of the early eighteenth century’, Eagleton writes, ‘were a primary constituent of the emergent bourgeois public sphere’ (Eagleton, 1984, 17).

‘In the eighteenth century public opinion could take shape in the public sphere whereas today, in the debased public sphere of the mass media, public opinion is administered, monitored, managed and manufactured by the private interests of big business, including the private interests of the owners of global media companies and the commercial interests of advertisers and sponsors. The very sphere which was meant to mediate between private interests and the state has been colonized by private interests. Thus, in Habermas’ social theory, contemporary politics is characterized by the struggle among groups to advance their own private interests in which citizens become spectators, via the media, of a political process with which they do not participate. Habermas’ social theory of the debased public sphere is a bleak account that, despite its limitations, depicts a persuasive historical trajectory of the emergence and degradation of an effective civic society, echoed by Richard Sennett in ‘The Fall of Public Man’. (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008, 117).

06.8 Public Art and Action

In 1975 artist Raivo Puusemp was elected mayor of Rosendale Village, New York. The artwork entitled ‘Rosendale, A Public Work’, was in one sense ‘made to superimpose a formal concept upon an essentially directionless political micro system and to effect that system permanently by doing so’. (e-flux press release, no author, last accessed 12 September 2014).

Puusemp believed that in politics, influence and concept could come together. Employing conceptual strategies to tackle the village’s issues, Puusemp viewed
the situation as an artwork in the form of a political problem (ibid). Kaprow enthusiastically advocates Puusemp’s project in his book ‘The Blurring of Art and Life’ however this was to be Puusemp's last art project; in a relatively short amount of time he succeeded in persuading the residents of Rosendale that the best resolution to their social and economic problems was to disband the village government.

In his 2011 essay ‘An Art Without Qualities: Raivo Puusemp’s Beyond Art -- Dissolution of Rosendale, N.Y.’ Stephen Wright suggests that what Puusemp did ‘stems neither from the scope nor the impact of the action but rather from the inseparability of the artistic gesture from the everyday act in terms of scale.’ (Wright, 2013, 2)

Whilst his project enables Puusemp to carry out day-to-day political duties moreover it shifts his engagement with politics from the realm of the symbolic to the here and now. Wright is not searching for a quantifiable amount of change affected by Pussamp's project but more importantly a challenge to the aesthetic role of the artwork as well as alternatives to arts autonomy.

‘Puusemp approached politics as a social medium. One which has to be worked with and learned. "Deliberate changes in political structure don’t just happen," he argued, "they are planned and occur because they seem inevitable. To make changes seem inevitable requires a clear structure and a systematic process." His tenure as mayor of Rosendale was part of a broader political shift in his conceptual practice: he went from observing physical relationships to observing and becoming engaged in social relationships, the function of the artist in both cases being, as he put it at the time, to define "structure where one was not evident before."'(Wright, 2013, 2).

06.9 Contemporary Art and the Public Sphere
In my view Mitchell’s articulation of art and the public sphere places emphasis upon the function of artworks to achieve a tangible reaction from audiences.
For sure different types of responses from viewers will get people talking about an artwork’s form and content, but this results in a description of the effects of art upon its audience not a theory of what the artworks do. This theory of art and the public sphere demonstrates that Mitchell is concerned with the formal (technical) aspects of public art as opposed to the political and materialist (content) conditions of art and the public sphere.

Let me explain, somehow we are under pressure to popularize art by inclining towards a social science way of validating an artwork; hence we might consider the effect or cause of an artwork upon a spectator and therefore assume that the way in which the artwork has affected the subject is what the artwork does. However I would prefer to reflect upon what it is that the artwork is arguing for, or what the consequence of the content of the artwork towards new understandings might be. For sure asking what an audience member gains through looking at the artwork tells us something, but I think it tells us more about the viewer than it does about the artwork.

If art is considered in conjunction with the public sphere, as in the book’s title ‘Art and the Public Sphere’, then it must be concerned with the formation of publics, collectives or groups not the representation of politics for publics.

‘The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as public’ (Habermas,[1962] 1989, 27).

What is more, a thorough understanding of the material means of art’s histories, theories and production must be employed in order for art to be more closely aligned to the methodology of the public sphere that Habermas describes in his book ‘The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere’, (Habermas, [1962] 1989).

Habermas’ theory of the bourgeois public sphere was translated into English in 1989 (Habermas, [1962] 1989) there was little available discussion of his
conceptual framework of the bourgeois public sphere until the early 1990’s. Certainly later theories of the public sphere (Fraser, 1990, Benhabib, 1992 and Warner, 2002) as well as accounts of representational democracy (Mouffe, 2000) have enabled a more thorough consideration of the potential of the public sphere and therefore (including contributions from social art practice) new potentialities of art and the public sphere.

No doubt this conference and book is a precursor to the continuing debates around the function of public art for society. And furthermore Mitchell anticipates the contemplation of public art in a broader context of social and political theory, as seen by art theorist Rosalyn Deutsche in her book *Evictions* (Deutsche, 2002).

Deutsche provides a close consideration of the political outcomes of public art via the gentrification process realized in New York City (Deutsche, 2002). Deutsche extends Sharon Zukin’s argument in her book ‘Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change’, (Zukin, 1989), by considering artworks that are antagonistic to the changing shape of the city; Deutsche cites Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *Homeless Projection project: A proposal for the city of New York*, 1986 as an example of critical art practice within the public realm; this project uncovers the tensions between disenfranchised publics and ’strong’ socially dominant publics (Deutsche, 2002, 6).

In her notable essay of 1996 ‘Agoraphobia’, Deutsche connects the rhetoric of ‘art in public places’ to the ‘principles of both direct and representative democracy’. Deutsche discusses art and the public sphere through a detailed engagement with political theory; she utilizes the theories of Habermas, Lefort, Laclau and Mouffe. This enables her to not only extend the understanding of space (Laclau) in the practice of public art but to question the role of political art practices within the public sphere(s) (Marchart, 1999, no pagination, accessed

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21 Also included in her book *Evictions* (2002)
15 July 2014). Through her thorough consideration of public sphere theory and engagement with art practice Deutsche shifts the question from W.J.T. Mitchell’s ‘what do artworks mean?’ to ‘what do artworks do?’

Section One: The Social Functions of Art

This section includes two published outcomes: 1. ‘Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness’, a book chapter; 2. ‘Futurology: Issues, contexts and conditions for contemporary art practice today’, 2004, curated curatorial project and edited book 2009. I explore a historical understanding of the function of art via the ideas of Adorno, Greenberg and Kosuth in order to examine the function for art in public for publics (outcome 1), this takes into account the role of the institution which is addressed through ‘Futurology’ art project and subsequent edited book (outcome 2).

I address two research questions: 1. What are the theorists Adorno, Greenberg and Kosuth interpretation of the social function of art? And 2. What is the function of art in public for publics?

1.1 ‘Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness’

This text was originally conceived as a lecture for the conference ‘Public Sphere: Between Contestation and Reconciliation’ National Association of Art Critics (NAAC) and I delivered it in Yerevan, Armenia in October 2005, it was published as conference proceedings by the (NAAC) in 2007. An extended version of the text became a chapter for the book ‘Art and Theory After Socialism’, Intellect 2008, which I co-edited with Malcolm Miles.

In this essay I utilize theorists Greenberg, Kosuth and Adorno in order to discuss three theories of art’s functionality including functionlessness as a function of art. I conclude that Greenberg promotes the idea of arts autonomy i.e. no function for art, Kosuth regards the function of art for art not allowing for a social function of art and Adorno argues that functionlessness of art in fact serves as a social function for art.
This published text also operates as, as a literature review for this research project providing an introduction to Jurgen Habermas’ theory of the bourgeois public sphere and an art historical context for the production of a series of artworks, which includes the public artworks entitled the ‘Functions of Art’ (outcome 3). This essay argues that art is a functioning part of society in contrast to the modernist belief that art is autonomous.

‘To talk about public art as having functions is to point out how it is connected to, complicit with and instrumental for wider social forces. Studying the function of a social practice or institution, according to Anthony Giddens, is to analyze the “contribution which that practice or institution makes to the continuation of the society as a whole”’ (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008, 115).

Even arts apparent ‘functionlessness’ can be put to task.

‘..it is because art is supposed to be entirely free from social functions that it can function efficiently for social policies that spread civic behaviour, self-improvement, local pride, de-criminalization and so on. When art’s autonomy is deployed as an instrument of the State then its functionlessness is both retained and rejected: functionlessness is functional ‘(Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008, 121).

1.1.1 Conclusion
This essay operates as a literature review taking into account art historical concepts of the social function of art and combining these ideas with theories of the public sphere (mainly Habermas here).

Greenberg argues that kitsch is deceptive but he does not admit that avant-garde autonomous art is deceptive too. Adorno disagrees, his book ‘Aesthetic Theory’ is shot through with anti-art and dissonance: art’s autonomy cannot be siphoned off from art’s alienation from society nor from art’s relentless critique of art.

Adorno’s conception of dissonance sheds light on anti-art’s immanent assault on
For Adorno, dissonance is what autonomous art needs in order to live with its functionless function.

Kosuth believes that ‘Arts only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art.’ (Kosuth, [1969], in Harrison and Wood, 1992, 849) Thus, while he speaks extensively about the function of art, this is not for him a social function. The purpose of talking about the function of art for Kosuth is to distinguish conceptualism from formalism, which he describes as ‘the vanguard of decoration’ (Kosuth, [1969], 1992, 844) and characterizes as functionless. Consequently, Kosuth fails to acknowledge how art functions beyond art - he doesn’t question or explore the politics of art’s autonomy – its social function. To speak of art’s functions is to attend to the political and social totality of art and not to be limited to discussions around the ideology of the aesthetic or the ontology of art that cuts art off from everything else. Adorno is keenly aware of ‘the interest inherent in disinterestedness’ and that ‘disinterestedness debases all art, turning it into a pleasant or useful plaything’. (Adorno, [1970] 1997, 18) 22

1.2 ‘Futurology: Issues, contexts and conditions for contemporary art practice today’.

The ‘Futurology’ project and subsequent book was developed and delivered in collaboration with artist Andy Hewitt. The project received funding from Creative Partnerships, Arts Council England, Black Country Consortium, University of Wolverhampton and New Art Gallery Walsall, (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009). 23

The aim of the ‘Futurology’ project was to establish a platform for artists to discuss the functions of art and for young people to gain an understanding of the changes that were being planned for their region through arts-led regeneration. I took the view that the school pupils would be the ultimate beneficiaries of the

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22 This discussion is extended in the published outcome the text ‘Functions, Functionality and Functionlessness.’

23 Although originally conceived as a Hewitt and Jordan project, Dave Beech was one of the five commissioned artists. Documentation of artworks by the Freee art collective is included in the ‘Futurology’ book.
long-term redevelopment schemes happening in the Black Country and therefore we supported them in understanding the impact that change can have on their day-to-day lives. To this end the ‘Futurology’ project addressed the function of art for the public within culture-led regeneration, (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

Artists, theorists and young people collaborated to examine the current social, economic and political conditions in the Black Country in order to imagine their futures. The premise of the research was to discuss the regeneration and redevelopment projects planned for the Black Country and those affected by the planning scheme; the project operated as a forum in which all stakeholders contributed and information was shared.

Five new commissions were produced in conjunction with five Black Country Schools and their students - each school was allocated an artist to work with - which resulted in one exhibition at the New Art Gallery Walsall in July 2004. The resulting artworks and the exhibition focused upon key issues for contemporary art production such as participation, collaboration, authorship, artist as educator and social and cultural division. A series of five public talks were staged at the gallery during the exhibition that focused on collaboration, citizenship, gentrification, the creative city as well as education. A book was produced following the project that contained documentation of the artworks, the exhibition, transcriptions of the public talks and five newly commissioned texts, which tackled culture-led regeneration, utopias, social division and the possible transformation of art, (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

In the essay ‘A transformative Art Gallery - Thoughts in Relation to Futurology’, (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009) I develop a short literature review on the conditions of culture-led regeneration and outline a series of problems for both art and arts publics, concluding that the problem with cultural development or the gentrification of an area is that it can force out low income residents (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

1.2.1 Conclusion
This project attempts to explore the function of art for publics in publics in order to examine why art may be of use to policy-makers. The project brought together key stake-holders in the redevelopment of the Black Country and questioned how art was being put to work in this setting. New artworks were made with local school children, which facilitated the dialogue around arts function for government policy as well as informed the groups about real pragmatic changes in the function of areas of the Black Country. Five essays were commissioned and a series of six public talks took place in the gallery.

Public arts institutions are usually funded by the state (town or city councils) or Arts Council England occasionally receiving funding from regional redevelopment agencies. The funding streams set out their aims and priorities, one of the goals for culture under New Labour was to increase the access to art, this was often achieved by galleries via the expansion of education activities alongside the main exhibition programme. Arts reformers aim to increase access to art in order to improve the new audiences their reformist desire is to help the working classes but mainly in fact to improve them via the traditional idea of civilizing through contact with cultural artefacts (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

The art gallery is tasked with upholding arts distinctiveness, which is usually achieved through asserting arts autonomy and demands for arts for arts sake by some of the art world, hence the constant challenge for the art gallery to address its rival publics. The public art gallery is divided. It is divided by two functions, either to support autonomy as a form of isolation in autonomous art, or to instrumentalize art to meet the demands of the state (Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).
Section Two: Art and Opinion Formation

In this section I utilize two published outcomes (two art projects) to address two research questions: What is the value of employing public sphere theory to public art in public? 2. What does a ‘public spherian’ art practice look like?


‘The Functions of Public Art’ is a series of four text-works that explore the various political and social functions of public art sited in the public realm.

2.1.1 ‘The Economic Function of Public Art is to Increase the Value of Private Property’, commissioned by Public Art Forum (now ixia) 2004; shown in the exhibition RISK, curated by Ele Carpenter for CCA, Glasgow, 26 March – 14 May 2005 and EAST International 06, Selected by Jeremy Deller, Norwich Gallery, UK.

The slogan, ‘The Economic Function of Public Art is to Increase the Value of Private Property’, commissioned by Public Art Forum for their annual conference, was displayed on a commercial billboard site in Sheffield, UK. This established a public of passers-by over a short period of time that would not amount to much of a public sphere of Habermasian ambitions. Although the text-work was presented on an advertising billboard on the street, it was not just intended for the passer-by, but purposely for a specific second ‘primary’ audience; the arts management industry which controls the systems by which public art is commissioned and sanctioned. And extending this, the photograph of the ‘Economic Function’ was also printed in Art Monthly (issue 277 June 2004), placing the debate within public art in the broader context of art per se.

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24 Public Art Forum is now called ixia.
Thus, from the start the photographic document of the text in a public space was essential to the work's function within a more substantive public sphere. From the outset the project was going to be featured in Public Art Forums’ annual journal ‘DESIRABLE PLACES: The contribution of artists to creating spaces for public life’ (Larkinson, 2004), consequently it was likely to be seen by delegates of the conference and other industry members – a second audience that in terms of the public sphere functioned as the primary audience of the work. (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008, 120)

2.1.2 ‘The Aesthetic Function of Public Art is to Codify Social Distinctions as Natural Ones’, was written and displayed for Strategic Questions curated by Gavin Wade for 51st Venice Biennale, 8 June – 6 November 2005.
'The Aesthetic Function of Public Art is to Codify Social Distinctions as Natural Ones', was both a banner on a Venetian bridge and 1000 edition poster distributed for free as part of the 51st Venice Biennale. We choose Venice as a site to publish the text as it provided the backdrop of the ultimate aesthetic city with a history of diplomatic relations based on cultural appreciation in the form of the Venice Biennale.

The banner was produced in both Italian and English and fixed to a bridge close to St Marks Square. The poster constituted a photograph of the banner in place and further information about the project. It was distributed both at the opening of the project on the bridge and at venues in Venice. The photograph of the Italian banner was also printed in a-n magazine (fig.3). The work establishes for itself as a miniature and temporary public sphere; the banner states an opinion becomes public signage and is published material.
2.1.3 ‘The Function of Public Art for Regeneration is to Sex-up the control of the Under-classes’, sited on Roding Road, Homerton High Street, London, Hackney E9, Commissioned by B+B (Sarah Carrington and Sophie Hope) for Real Estate Art in a Changing City, ICA, London. 23 – 28 August 2005.

‘The Function of Public Art for Regeneration is to Sex-up the Control of the Under-classes’, is a text work concerned with the way in which culture-led urban regeneration is advocated within regeneration strategies. Regeneration aims to change the ‘mindset’ and ‘behaviour’ (Landry, 2000) of residents, to improve their effectiveness in creating capital and growth in order to reduce what is seen as a dependency on state provision. Whereas the need for change in terms of social justice and parity is necessary, the work calls for methods and motivation of these cultural policies, particularly the roles assigned to art and culture within them to be examined.

In his essay ‘Public Art u need, Public Art for all, Public Art as boycott: directions in artists’ responses to the present state of public art in the UK’ Alberto Duman concedes that ‘The Functions of Art’ contribute to the debate on arts-led regeneration. He says,

‘The second item is part a body of work by the art collective FREEE, aka Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan, part of which was produced before their ‘merger’ as a collective, by Andy and Mel working together as a collaborative practice. Whilst in the direct context of the Art in Regeneration debate one specific poster produced by the collective is particular relevant, other items in FREEE’s activity in the last few years are equally important for this project, such as the ‘Three Functions’ series of posters, and the recently published ‘The Freee Art Collective Manifesto for a Counter-Hegemonic Art’, which particularly in the chapter ‘Culture-led Regeneration’ further expands the critical territory opened in the sentence of the poster above.’ (Duman, 2008)

In the publication ‘Art & Architecture Journal’ (B+B, 2005), The curatorial
partnership B+B utilize this slogan as a trigger in which to fulminate against the instrumentalizing tendency of arts policy in which artists projects are fostered as a cheap way to replace core social benefits.

Fig. 4 ‘Real Estate’ B+B Sarah Carrington & Sophie Hope, Art and Architecture Magazine, 2005


‘The Neo-Imperialist Function Of Public Art is to Clear a Path For Economic Expansion’ is a function devised for the Guangzhou Triennial that interrogates the function of public art in relations between Europe and China. The text is in Mandarin and the work is sequential, comprising of three phases in two cities over two months. The project began in Barford Street, Birmingham UK as a text
work presented on a billboard. A photograph of the billboard site was made into a poster and displayed in the city of Guangzhou. The Guangzhou poster in its new site was again photographed and exhibited at the Guangzhou Triennial this image was then returned to the original site in Birmingham UK. It is in this way that the work goes through the same mechanisms of production and consumption that occurs in the industrial, commercial and cultural relations between the UK and China. Birmingham and Guangzhou are twinned cities.

The function of public art in these relations is tied to commercial enterprise and the hope of establishing or maintaining an advantage in an economy shaped by global asymmetries. For this reason the text is meant to always be out of place – not fully at home and therefore not giving advantage clearly to one culture or another. And the sense of the work being out of place continues in its presence within the exhibition.

Fig. 5 ‘The Neo-Imperialist Function Of Public Art Is To Clear A Path For Economic Expansion’ in Malcolm Miles ‘Cities and Cultures’, Routledge 2007.
2.1.5 Conclusion

What these public artworks do is bring something of a Habermasian concept of the public (as an arena of collective intercourse) into the very fabric of the work of public art. Let me clarify what I mean, if the context and form that establishes these artworks as existing in the public realm, it is the content of the text works that singles them out as pointing towards a Habermasian public sphere. These text works are slogans of a particular kind. They do not read as advertising slogans or political soundbites; they are clearly the result of reflection and solicit considered responses; they express strongly held opinion and call for agreement, disagreement and dialogue as a response. The value of employing public sphere theory to public art in public is that; 1. These works operate to question fundamental aspects of the social structure of culture in which they sit by declaring statements about public art. 2. If contemporary art can be considered a living example of the bourgeois public sphere – despite the debasement of that arena – then these works simultaneously question the social basis of that public sphere and open up the possibility of new, fragmented, ephemeral public spheres (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008, 120).


‘Protest is Beautiful’ and ‘Protest Drives History’ are two artworks in a series of artworks that are concerned with the look and function of Freee art collective’s ‘public spherian’ art practice.

The ‘Sloganeering’ project departs from the ‘Functions of Art’ artworks in that we decide that we need to standby our words and beliefs so that we can be accountable for what we say, we wanted to move away from statements what were internal to art in their content. We introduce word props to the works as opposed to printed typography. ‘The Functions of Art’ were published anonymously and in this way the viewer was unsure of where they originated from – advertising or the state. So we found ourselves reluctantly appearing in the photographs of the works, utilizing our bodies to hold up our beliefs. In ‘Protest is Beautiful’ (the first work we appear in) we hold up funeral flowers across our faces maybe to just get used to the idea of being in the images, this is
done in modesty; we believe in what we say we are just unsure about our new
decision to be photographed with the text as a prop. In ‘Protest Drives History’
the scale of the banner is intentional in that we required a physical relationship
to the text in order to emphasize the importance of one’s bodies in the activity of
protest; i.e. it is not only rational discourse that enables change, but bodily
intervention.

As Ian Bruff states

‘What we see in post structuralist debates is an emphasis on the
discourses and the communications which constitute bodily practices and
actions. As a result, the materiality of the human body is neglected to the
point of ignorance. This means that there is an inability to acknowledge
how ‘reflexive, interrogative capacities morph out of corporeality, [and
nor is there] any conception of a situated body with active, agentic
capacities’. Thus, such scholarship ‘surrenders an investigation of or
engagement with experience to an analysis of discourse (or
representation).’ (Bruff, 2013)25

2.2.1 ‘Protest is Beautiful’, 2007
Originally produced for ‘Protest is Beautiful’, a solo exhibition, curated by Esther
Windsor 1000000mph Gallery, London, 2 June – 1 July 2007. ‘Protest is Beautiful’
(letters) for the exhibition V22 PRESENTS The Sculpture Show curated by Shahin
Afrassiabi, Sam Basu, Simon Bill, Cedric Christie, Fergal Stapleton. The Almond
shown at the exhibition ‘Rotate’ curated by The International 3 for
the Contemporary Art Society. London UK. 13 – 30 May 2008. Also shown at the
exhibition ‘Coalesce: Happenstance’, curated by Paul O’Neill, SMART Project
Space, Amsterdam, NL. 10 February – 22 February 2009. Also ‘How To Make A
Difference’, a solo exhibition, curated by Andrew Hunt International Project

Trade Gallery, July 2013

The history of Liberal Democracy promotes the value of consensus in order to arrive at agreement and collective decisions in a seemingly reasonable and rational way. A public sphere calls for debate and allows for dissensus but the right to dissensus needs to be managed and fought for. For those of us committed to the idea of the public sphere (be it a counter-public sphere as opposed to the ‘official’ public sphere) and the notion of disagreement as part of the process of open discussion, then we have to acknowledge, the first setback is that dissensus is not the opposite of consensus; it just doesn’t operate in the same privileged way.

Slogans ask for things to change. It is a common misconception today that slogans are authoritarian, illiberal and restrictive. Stokely Carmichael would have never used the slogan 'Black is Beautiful' if he thought it simply stated a fact that we could understand without first changing ourselves and the world. The feminist slogan 'The Personal is Political', likewise, would only make sense once feminism had transformed our understanding of each of its keywords. If black is already (universally understood as) beautiful then we do not need the slogan 'Black is Beautiful', and if the personal is already (secured as) political then we do not need the slogan 'The Personal is Political'. Slogans do not describe the world, they call up a new world to take its place. (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2008)

In order to address this context Freee developed the slogan, ‘Protest is Beautiful’. The slogan is made out of funeral letters, a floral tribute that are usually used to spell a name or word, the letters are held up by the artists in order to embody their meaning and to demonstrate the artists belief in the slogan that they are literally ‘standing by’.

2.2.2 ‘Protest Drives History’ 2008

‘Protest drives History’ for the exhibition, Vectors of the Possible, curated by Simon Sheikh for BAK, Utrecht, NL. 12 Sept – 28 Nov 2010. Also shown at the exhibition

‘Protest drives History’ is a twenty metre long banner held by the artists and photographed in a quarry in Shropshire. It is one of a series of artworks that utilize ‘the slogan’ to evoke a counter-public sphere 26. A billboard poster of the image was originally installed at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London whilst at the same time presented on three commercial billboard sites across London, UK.

The slogan-as-artwork ‘Protest Drives History’ reverses the conventional view of protest by proposing it is a factor in the production of new social conditions thus overturning dominant beliefs on the function of dissent, in this case the work states that protest drives history contrary to the normative idea that protest interrupts social progress.

One of the functions of the slogan-as-artwork, ‘Protest Drives History’ is to consider the spectatorship of an artwork through the notion of publishing. The ‘subject matter’ of protest within the slogan-as-artwork relates to the formation of opinion which is a key principle of public sphere theory thus the content of the slogan, the method of its display and the fact that it has to be read rather than viewed combine to propose a new formation of a ‘published artwork’. There was no passer-bys of this act in the quarry, so the first audience of this work is through the photograph. The choice of media, processes and technology must accommodate the circulation of the slogan. Therefore the sloganeering artworks are reproduced and distributed via posters, postcards, web mail, essays and lectures, hence the artworks are outside the economy of rarefied, unique art objects and studio production.

26 Nancy Fraser writes about marginalized publics developing their own public spheres, which she terms as ‘subaltern counter-public spheres’, (Fraser, in Calhoun, 1992). These are the public that are excluded from the dominant public sphere, historically this were the non-propertied and women.
One of the ways that debate within a counter-public sphere leads to action is through political slogans. There is a history to be written of the slogan’s descent from radical political agitation to advertising that would, no doubt, correspond to the trajectory of Jurgen Habermas’ debasement of the public sphere. Still, the slogan has always been a potent element of the counter public sphere. Whether chanted during a march or printed onto handheld banners, slogans mobilize groups and ritualize their communal bonds by publicizing their common interests, motives and beliefs. From the banners carried by the French Revolutionary army (eg. ‘Live Free or Die’), to the slogans of the Suffragette movement (eg. ‘Votes for Women’), and the campaigning slogans used today (eg. ‘No Blood for Oil’, ‘Make Poverty History’), slogans call for individual action for collective goods. Slogans state collectively sanctioned actions, but in addition they are also performative acts that play a vital part in the formation and maintenance of protest and political action (Beech, Hewitt and Jordan, 2008).

2.2.3 Conclusion
What does a ‘public spherian’ art practice look like? The Sloganeering works appear in the public realm, produced and distributed within the context of existing art systems, be it a public art conference or an art biennial. Although the work does not resemble mainstream public art (monumental sculpture), it is nonetheless designed for the public of public art.

The ‘Sloganeering’ works act like public spherian art by overturning the conventional spatial understanding of public and private in relation to presentation and display of artworks. In ‘Protest Drives History’ we purposefully seek out a private outside space to declare our belief in protest in the first instance we in fact announce it privately, between ourselves. However it is by employing methods of reproduction and republishing that we publish the work more ‘publicly’ the significance of thinking about publishing as in public sphere theory enables us to rethink notions of what is public.
Also through the transformative potential of the slogan, i.e. slogans can propose alternative realities (utilizing the notion of the slogan and the idea of opinion formation through politics). These slogans request the viewer to consider if they agree or disagree and the debate that ensues from the statements enables an alternative public sphere. I think it is in this way these slogan artworks begin to act like a ‘public spherian’ art practice.
Section Three: Art, Co-producers and Publics

This section includes four published outcomes, two art projects and two journal articles that engage with the question of public collectivity in the production of artworks. The published outcomes are: 1. A series of artworks entitled ‘Spin[freee]noza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’ commissioned by SMART Project Space, Amsterdam, 9 May – 28 June 2009. 2. ‘The New Futurist Manifesto (Revised, Expanded and Updated)’ is both an artefact and written text (‘The Freee Manifesto for Guerrilla Advertising’), spoken choir and journal article originally performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on the 100th anniversary of the Futurist Manifesto, January 28 2009. And published as a journal article in Third Text Special (100 issue) Volume 23, issue 5, 587-592, 2009. 3. ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ was commissioned by Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, UK in 2009 as part of the exhibition ‘Generosity Is the New Political’ 4 September - 1 November 2009. And 4. A journal article ‘The Freee Collective Don’t Want You!’, PUBLIC: art, culture, ideas. ‘Civic spectacle’, Spring 2012, Vol: 23 issue 45, 139 – 145.

Via employing tactics and strategies to attempt to make collective artworks, the outputs address the two questions, 1. ‘What does a public spherian approach to art reveal about the significance of public collectivity in art practice? 2. What does a public spherian approach reveal about the consequences of art being public in public? The artworks play out ideas of collective authorship in particular through the concept of the slogan whilst the journal article, Freee collective don’t want you!, provides a short literature review on theories of participation and reflects upon art and co-production as a concept within art practice.

3.1 ‘Spin[Freee]oza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’

‘Spin[Freee]oza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’ is a project commissioned by SMART Project Space as part of the exhibition ‘On Joy, Sadness and Desire’ which took place within the framework of the project ‘My Name is Spinoza’, organized by the Amsterdam Spinoza Circle and SKOR (Foundation Art and Public Space),
commissioned by Foundation Spinoza Centre Amsterdam, to mark 400 years of Spinoza's philosophy.

Updated quotes from the philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677) were installed on the outside of shop windows in the vicinity of SMART Project Space. The slogans also appear on 1000 coloured balloons that were available for gallery visitors to choose the slogan that they agreed with and take it away with them out of the gallery back onto the street (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan, 2009).

The shop windows were photographed and billboard poster were produced and installed in the exhibition space. In each billboard poster the artists are shown visiting the retail outlets that have become temporary hosts for their slogans. Shopkeepers who had agreed to participate in the project were asked to choose one slogan for their shop window. Each has their own reason for choosing the slogan, some because they agree with it but others because it alludes to something more personal. The shopkeepers also designed their slogan choosing the typeface, colour, scale and positioning of the text.

The slogan balloons are intended to address people in the same way: some may take a balloon because the slogan expresses something they agree with, while others may make their selection according to colour or just to be part of the event. Thus, the billboard images are the culmination of a series of negotiations, exchanges and context shifts that might not always be visible but are always essential to their logic. The images are therefore a product of the preceding discussions and activity.

The slogans based on Spinoza’s philosophy address the current state of democratic thinking and therefore do not exist in a vacuum; I am interested in how philosophical arguments enter the world of work, commerce, consumption and everyday life. 'Spin[Free]oza’ uses philosophically constructed sentences to raise issues about democracy, consensus and power. In fact, Marxist historian Perry Anderson has argued that,
'the systematic induction of Spinoza into historical materialism by
Althusser and his pupils was intellectually the most ambitious attempt to
construct a prior philosophical descent for Marx.' (Anderson, 1976,65)

For philosopher Etienne Balibar, one of the key points of Spinoza’s philosophy is
to demonstrate that,

‘the difference between those who rule and those who are ruled finally
comes to focus on a monopoly of knowledge at the level of the State, in
whose name obedience is demanded. This intrinsically ambivalent
situation can easily be reversed, for the insecurity of the State is bound up
with individuals’ ignorance of who they themselves are, and of how they
are affected by their mutual dependency’. (Balibar [1985], 2008, 123)

3.1.1 Conclusion
Freee present slogans but we are not the authors of our slogans; a slogan results
from the shared state of conditions and a collective decision to use it. Slogans
are always adopted collectively even if they are written individually this is what
makes them different to literature or prose. Therefore we do not need to
collaborate with others to write slogans but we do need to publish them in public
in order to make them collective. We constructed the ‘Spin[Freee]oza’ project as a
way of presenting the slogan as a form of public collectivity.

If today the key question about democracy is how to stop it from becoming the
professional activity of a small minority, Spin[Freee]oza’s model of utopia is of
people discussing democracy while doing their shopping, having a coffee or
walking down the street. Sharing and contesting opinion through acts of
publishing is central to my research. Displaying ideas in the public realm by
printing them on shop windows or on balloons carried by passers-by is intended
to trigger thought and debate.

Questions of dissemination are central to Habermas’ conception of the public
sphere, the founding moment of which is the publication and distribution of
journals such as *Tatler*. The public sphere is brought to life with the flow of information and exchange of cultural opinion. In this way the slogans for the ‘Spin[Freee]oza’ project confirm that we can make artworks public in public space.

The vinyl texts on the street in Amsterdam are not the original artworks neither are the billboard-sized posters that appear in the exhibition space a document of these texts. Outside the economy of the production of unique art objects, it is possible for these public works to be disseminated via posters, postcards, web mail, essays and lectures without loss. (Beech, Hewitt and Jordan 2008)

3.2. *The New Futurist Manifesto (Revised, Expanded and Updated)*. is a text / artefact (*The Freee Manifesto for Guerrilla Advertising*), that revisits the potential of the manifesto for art and politics. The work is concerned with developing a collective method in the form of spoken choirs in which to engage with a public that attempts to advance a notion of collaboration through to a ‘collective’ process of production.

Manifesto writing although considered as a call for political change has been an important strategy for the 20th century avant-garde artist (Danchev, 2011). The manifesto has been a method in which artists can bring art and politics together. The manifesto is a way in which to engage with a public, declare an opinion and act upon shared ideas. Taking this as a starting point the project developed a method in which to both revise (respond to the content of the original manifesto) and collectively ‘read’ the manifestos.

Freee utilizes the manifesto as a way of exceeding the representational in art, i.e. as a way of rejecting a picture of art and politics. By adopting the notion of ‘performatve speech acts’ (Austin, 1975) the manifesto acts in the world and on the world. *The New Futurist Manifesto (Revised, Expanded and Updated)* also departs from an historical account of the manifesto (Danchev, 2011) as we advance it from a typical historical account of the original Futurist Manifesto by revising, expanding and updating the content of it.
The project includes the production of manifestos and the organisation of group readings of the manifestos; for the action of agreeing or disagreeing, we called these readings ‘spoken choirs’. Before the ‘spoken choir’ takes place participants are requested to read the given text and make their own minds up about what part of it they subscribe to. At the group reading, the participants’ read aloud the words of the manifesto that they agree with; it is in this way that the group reading becomes a collective process. By reading aloud the parts that they subscribe to, individuals publicly agree with the text - by keeping silent when they hold opposing views, persons publicly disagree with the text – within the context of a choir the silence turns out to be a form of public disagreement. While the use of a specific text is a given, the text itself can be used and reworked by those who read it to formulate their own opinions.

The manifesto pamphlets are disseminated through projects, events and exhibitions – they can also be ordered from the Freee art collective web-site. (www.freee.org.uk)

3.2.1 Conclusion
In so far as prominent forms of participation in recent practice have sought to hand over various capacities and privileges of the artist to the participant, the apparatus of art has simply resulted in a new division of labour and responsibility, i.e. the participant is transformed into a producer, and there is still an onlooker. Manifestos and manifesto readings set out places for participants to occupy that are dependent upon what those participants bring to the work both personally and imaginatively. The manifesto readings are a way of using manifestos to generate agreement or disagreement on specific issues relating to, amongst other themes, the role of art in the contemporary public sphere, the impact of globalization on society, and the effects of market forces on art production. Each event sees the formation of a unique ‘spoken choir’ in which individuals listen to each other rather than perform for the benefit of an audience. A public spherian approach to co-authorship recognizes the social act of collectively adopting an opinion through a phrase or slogan. The reading then becomes a collective, and potentially antagonistic, process in which individuals
publicly declare their commitment to, or rejection of the opinions declared within manifesto.

3.3 ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’

‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ consisted of a walking tour of Cambridge town in which the participants wore bright costumes (including ‘Liberty bonnets’ as worn by Jacobins, and performed scripted ceremonies.

The script and the new names for the streets were derived from the book, ‘The Making of the English Working Class’, by E.P. Thompson a work that outlines the key figures, events and institutions within English Jacobinism immediately after the French Revolution. The scripted ceremony included detailed expositions of the historical significance of each newly named street. The scripted dialogue produced performative speech acts27 in which the artists were ‘chalk-holders’ and participants ‘witnesses’. Renaming the streets was an alibi for renaming the social relations of the actants, a process of transforming the world by renaming it.

This dialogue was scripted by the artists and took place as a call-and-response dialogue between the artists and the participants, the script which renamed the streets also recast the individuals in the ceremony: the artists were referred to as ‘the chalkholders’ and the participants as the ‘witnesses’. This second, explicit, but inconspicuous, renaming reconfigured the relationship between artists and participants as an encounter between actants in the process of transforming the world by renaming it.

The ‘witnesses’ of the work were neither its audience nor its participants in the usual sense, they were more like witnesses at a court hearing or godparents at a christening holding a semi-legal status, without which the performance would be a mere rehearsal or a sham. The witnesses played a vital role within the performative act of renaming the streets of Cambridge. Since there was no permanent physical alteration to the streets—no monument, no vandalism, no

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27 Based on J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts, ‘How to do things with words’, 1969
replacement of the existing signs with new ones—the act must be remembered, documented, vouched for, and authorized. Just like at a wedding, the event was documented by photographers in both still and video format. Rather than treating the documentation of the work as external to it, this project cast the photographers as technologically-enhanced witnesses.

3.3.1 Conclusion
One of the key elements in the work ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ is the precise configuration of its social relations. Freee invited a small group of Wysing staff, artists and trustees to participate in an event. This was not an attempt, pace Miwon Kwon’s category of ‘community-specific’ art, ‘to foster social assimilation’ (Kwon, 2004, 154). The aim is to subvert the hierarchy of participation. Not only did these people know the area, know each other and have experience in working with and alongside a vast range of artists, they were already a group, which meant that the initial dynamic of the social experience of the artwork would be structurally divided. The real division within the social configuration of the invitation underlined the places, which the work orchestrated. The real individuals were converted into actants. Public sphere theory in this case enables us to consider the different type of categories of participant and to expand the typology for participants of art projects.

3.4 ‘The Freee Collective Don’t Want You!’
In this text I (along with Beech and Hewitt) propose a new conception of participation for art. By utilizing a literature review and an example of an artwork, the article addresses current debates on art and participation through practice-based research and in particular to expand upon the theories participation as theorized by of Grant Kester (Kester, 1998) and Claire Bishop (Bishop, 2006). These two positions set up a polarized debate between a social and collaborative ethic in art, and the shock tactics of an avant-garde art.

The aim of this article is to address the limits of the current articulation of art and participation; in particular those relations produced in existing institutional, economic circuits where participation in art provides an ethical solution to art’s
crisis of legitimation. If the question of arts function is left unattended then the instrumentalisation of art for social inclusion purposes remains unchallenged, and paradoxically participatory artworks then act as an instrument of institutional power rather than a process of emancipation. In this project, Freee propose a new conception of participation for art.

3.3.1 Conclusion
Freee contest the idea of interpretation so for us, artwork + site = meaning is a simplification of the agency of art within politics and action. Therefore we put the politics in the slogans and the politics are the way in which participants collectivize. Through agreeing with some and disagreeing with others alternative public spheres emerge.
Employing a public spherian framework to understand the function of art being public in public leads to the transformation of viewers and participants into ‘performative actants’, i.e. witnesses, signatories and advocates in the public realm. A public spherian approach to art reveals that publics are not reducible to the individuals found in the marketplace or the political and cultural encounters of the spectacle (consumers, fans, viewers, customers, etc.).
Section Four: Conclusion

4.1 Summary of Key Arguments
This research specifically addresses the issues of publicness and attempts to understand what a public spherian art might be and do. By examining Mitchell’s texts in ‘Art and the Public Sphere’, (Mitchell, 1992) I attempt to extend his theory of art and the public sphere. I not only update it (in light of further debates by leading academics of public sphere theory) but in addition I recognize the role that social and political art practices play in affecting a public sphere.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that the simplified spatial use of the term public within the idiom ‘public art’ can be further explained through the deployment of a theoretical approach based on the work of Jürgen Habermas\(^{28}\). In so doing, it has presented a case for the value of bringing a public spherian approach, to the study and production of contemporary art and its publics.

In answer to this project’s primary research question – *‘To what extent can public sphere theory contribute to the understanding of art its function and its publics in the practice of the Freee art collective 2004-2010?’* - this thesis has made three interlocking arguments through three distinct sections. First of all discourses derived from Habermas’ theory of the bourgeois public sphere which include the ‘public’, ‘publicness’, ‘making public’ and ‘publishing’ enables us to articulate a more ‘socialized’ version of the term public. The consequence of this conception of the public when applied to public art is the explosion of the understanding of the word public; in short theoretical engagement with public sphere theory means that the term ‘public’ in ‘Public Art’ is not spatial, not social, but political.

No longer is one lone subject who is stood (or sat) contemplating an artwork in a particular ‘type’ of space be understood as experiencing Public Art. Public sphere theory unlocks the cul-de-sac of thinking about Public Art and enables us to rethink the encounter between a subject and an artwork.

\(^{28}\)This should not be understood simply as a Habermasian set of interests. Questions about the public have been raised across a range of fields and positions in recent years as a result of developments in political theory.
An articulation of what we understand by the term public is crucial for the understanding of art and its publics. Oliver Marchart warns us about the function of public art for private welfare and thus the misuse of the term public sphere, he says,

‘For the concept of the “public sphere” is relegated to the realm of social affairs - and yet the public sphere really only deserves this name if what it denotes is the political public sphere.’ (Marchart, last accessed 7 October 2014, no date, no pagination).

Freee have endeavoured to discuss the distinctive differences between the concepts of ‘public space’, ‘public realm’, and ‘the public sphere’, see Fig.1 in this thesis, ‘The concept of the public space, public realm, and the public sphere’, script from the video, for 1,000,000mph Gallery, London, 2007 and produced as a text for the ‘One Mile’ Newspaper, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh. Freee, 2007.

Secondly this thesis has demonstrated that by making artworks in the public realm the Freee art collective contribute to the discourse around the concept of the public, public art and art and its publics. I employ techniques, formats and content that have been devised through my engagement with public sphere theory to make artworks. The artworks ‘look like’ a public spherian art because they are designed to activate questions and facilitate discussion.

In section one I explore arts social function and its functionality insisting that art functions even through it functionnessless. I explore how theorists Adorno, Greenberg and Kosuth conceptualize art as well as speculate on their interpretation of the social function of art. This enables me to consider the function of art from a perspective of art theory as well as setting out a trajectory for what we might think the social function of art is today.

The ‘Futurology’ project (Hewitt & Jordan 2004), calls forth a number of invested groups to facilitate an examination of culture-led regeneration. Through delivering a practical project in the public realm we were able to engage various
people in the process of considering the future planning initiatives for the Black Country, thereby supporting opinion formation and assembling new publics. This art project questions the function of art in public for publics. Having considered arts social function through literature reviews I explore the problems that exist within the relationship of art institutions and their users.

It could be said that the ‘Futurology’ project utilizes the space of the gallery as a public sphere. The opening up of publicly funded art institutions as spaces for discussion on the condition of the public sphere appears timely in order to attempt the further democratization of arts institutions. Whilst many of the public sites of debate are in private hands or subject to the private interests of big business, the public sphere has to be built anew, creating little pockets for private spheres to flourish, if only fleetingly.

Critic and curator Simon Sheikh has suggested a new function for the institution, one that encourages dissonance. Sheikh calls for a need to ‘unhinge stable categories of the public sphere’ (Sheikh, in Montmann, 2006, 149). He proposes that the art institution becomes a producer of instability, flux and negotiation, offering a conflictual rather than consensual notion of democracy. He claims that this might offer a new and much needed function for the public art gallery.

In section two, I consider both what the value of employing public sphere theory to public art in public could be and I demonstrate what an art devised from the theories of the public sphere could be.

‘The Functions of Public Art’ bring a Habermasian concept of the public into public art. These slogan artworks are designed to generate discussion and to lead to opinion formation. The artworks are specifically articulated as statements in order to enable us (the Freee art collective) to declare our opinion, in this way demanding the spectators to themselves assume a view – to request the onlooker to agree or disagree. Unlike a question didactic statements of opinion do not conceal the speaker’s belief; when reading a question the viewer presumes there is a correct answer and might aim to find the answer rather than
state their opinion.

If the ‘The Functions of Public Art’ are viewed as controversial, this is simply a result of them being triggers of debate – they are not shocking or sensational. That is to say, they are attempts to open the cultural, commercial and political practices of public art to the kind of discussions and scrutiny typical of a counter public sphere. Public art is no longer capable of participating in a Habermasian public sphere but the critique of public art (as public art) does not hanker for that impossible bourgeois public space, it calls up a critical counter public debate on the nature of the public and the politics of the public of public art (Beech, Hewitt and Jordan, 2008, 121).

The ‘Sloganeering’ project; ‘Protest is Beautiful’ and ‘Protest Drives History’ supports our investigation into art as opinion formation and art as publishing. We appear in these works in order to be identified beside our views and beliefs we use text as props in order that our bodies endure a physical relationship to the weight of our opinions thus confirming that resistance is as much too with our bodies as it is with discourse. These works also demonstrate what a public spherian artwork looks like when it is concerned with questions of content and context; we take the text props to particular generic places to connect the content of the slogan with the context of the site in which the works are photographed. The republishing of the text works to secondary audiences adheres to Habermas’ concept of publishing. Habermas’ conception of the public sphere is predicated on publishing; the public sphere is brought to life with the flow of information and exchange of cultural opinion.

Finally in section three in order to address the concluding research questions, which enquires as to what a public spherian approach reveals about the significance of public collectivity in art practice, I cite four research projects. My aim with these projects is to discuss co-production and participation. These artworks are produced collectively as opposed to co-authored in that they call for agreement or disagreement, like a slogan they are only collective if others
adopt them. Our goal is to engage participants in collective opinion formation not collaborative authorship.

In the project ‘Spin[Freee]oza (Shop Windows and Balloons)’ we negotiate with shopkeepers to publish our slogans on their shop windows. The consequences of these acts are that 1. We engage with Dutch shopkeepers in choosing the slogan that they agree with / like / identify with\(^{29}\), 2. By placing the slogans on the front of the shop windows we overturn the idea of public discourse only taking place in state owned places like public squares etc., 3. We publish photographs of the shop windows with ourselves standing by the slogans in the gallery. By repeating the slogans in the gallery we are trying to suggest that the spaces of the art gallery are not any less public (in a public spherian sense) than the street. 4. By publishing the slogans on balloons that can be taken away from the gallery we are asking others to agree or disagree with the slogans and at the same time take the slogans (back) into the public realm.

In our manifesto spoken choirs, ‘The Freee Manifesto for Guerrilla Advertising’, for example, we affect a type of participation that is about agreeing or disagreeing. There are no audiences of the spoken choirs -we ask members of the choir to underline the phrases that they agree with and to read these aloud as we get to these points in the text. If you only agree with one phrase in the entire manifesto you are still participating by remaining silent for the rest of the reading.

In ‘Revolution Road: Rename the Streets!’ we transform participants into witnesses in order to extend the idea of participation beyond co-authorship.

‘One does not respond to the invitation to be a guest at a wedding by admonishing the happy couple for failing to invite you to participate more fully: “If I’m not getting married too, then I don’t see the point in going!”’ (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan 2010, 140)

\(^{29}\) For example, one of the shopkeepers was getting married so he asked his girlfriend to choose what slogan she thought most described how they wanted to live their life together.
For us, publics are not consumers, fans, viewers, customers, taxpayers, citizens, identities, communities, clients, markets, voters, readers, victims. We prefer Witnesses, Signatories, Advocates, Spokespersons, Publishers, Badge-wearers, Distributors, Marchers, Recruits, Promise-makers, Co-conspirators, Accomplices. These alt-publics are not necessarily more active, productive or democratic than the preferred publics of public galleries, public policy and public relations. What they share is that they are performatively inscribed into processes of publishing. We call for the re-organization of the grammar of art’s social relations—an affirmative call to all to redistribute the places that they occupy (Beech, Hewitt & Jordan 2010, 142).

4.2 Results from art projects

The use of public sphere theory in the formulation of artworks results in:

i. Making known that a public sphere is not a spatial idea and demonstrating through artworks that the traditionally accepted polarity between the street (public realm, open access) and the gallery (private, exclusive) is superseded by understanding the concept of the public through a political paradigm of public sphere theory.

ii. Artworks are published as opposed to exhibited; although I acknowledge that an exhibition is a moment of publishing it is typically seen as the end point of publishing rather than the beginning of the process.

iii. Understanding the spatial differences between primary and secondary audiences for public art and recognizing the significance of this for the proposal of ‘art as opinion formation’.

iv. The potential of ‘art as opinion formation’; hitherto art has failed to be considered as an important part of opinion formation so therefore has continued to assume an autonomous state (even by accepting that it is not a popular mode of publishing we retain some of its autonomous nature) And although artists have called for art to have a far greater engagement with the social and everyday culture art is still not accepted as
contributing to the construction of society in a similar way to other 'public' information.

v. Working with participants as ‘public spherian publics’. Engaged agents of opinion formation - neither passive passerbys in the classical public art scenario, or consumers in the outdoor advertising and leisure sense.

vi. Collective practice as opposed to co-authorship. Proposing the slogan as collectively adopted not jointly produced; a slogan results from the shared state of conditions and a collective decision to use it. The co-production of a slogan is through its collective use not through its co-authoring.

4.3 Further work and critical reflections on the field of art and its publics

Finally I acknowledge that questions about the public have been raised across a range of fields and positions in recent years as a result of developments in political theory and developments in social media.

Freee utilize theories of the public emerging from Jürgen Habermas to make three multifaceted contributions to art practice and its articulation: 1. We employ the notion of the public sphere as a social tool, which incorporates the contingency of the people, time and space. For us this recognizes the complexity of art and the public and replaces the formal idea of the public as is intended in the term public space. I (with Hewitt) have just written a chapter called ‘Politicizing Publics: A Social Framework for Public Artworks’ (for the forthcoming book, ‘The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space and Social Inclusion’ edited by Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki) - which develops this more fully than I had space for in this PhD thesis. In this text I develop three variations on how artists utilize the notion of the public in their artworks, I have titled these picturing publics, educating publics and benefiting publics. I use Doreen Massey and Jürgen Habermas to establish a framework that acknowledges artist's political potential of engaging with the public. 2. The collapsing of primary and secondary audience through various iterations of an artwork - the undoing of the difference between artwork and document of the artwork. In a forthcoming issue of ‘Strike’ magazine we layer both existing primary and secondary material
with a new text entitled ‘The advice of three onlookers’ in order to establish a social archive of past projects. We have committed to no longer publishing a single image to represent one event or action from the artwork. And 3. The consideration of art as one aspect of opinion formation, art that can contribute to how people understand the world, I do not mean this in a literal sense that might be attributed to information or communication. I think this shift in thinking about art as part of opinion formation begins to address both issues of autonomy and agency for art. These are both fundamental to Freee’s practice, from working and acting collectively, to considering publics, to rejecting one authentic version of an artwork - this is demonstrated through the practice more significantly than it is argued out through competing theories within art history or the public sphere. I accept Habermas’ has his limitations, especially in respect of the absence of action (which Freee address through practice) but my study is more concerned with problematizing public art and art and its relations to publics than overhauling the actual concept of the bourgeois public sphere.

While in this thesis I decided to omit a specific discussion of the internet as a potential public sphere it does not mean that it has not been part of Freee’s considerations. In a recent small-scale project funded by the EPSRC, myself and former Loughborough University colleague Ian Bruff, initiated a series of workshops to discuss the relationship between technology and the public sphere. In the project entitled Public Communications: Art, Technology and the Public Sphere, a number of academics were invited to discuss this issue from the broad position of their discipline.

The workshops focused upon the possibilities for advances of technology over the past two decades to enable and support the construction of new and participatory social spaces. In particular, we discussed the potential for the development of social media and related forms of digital/electronic interaction to promote dialogic understanding and the resolution of differences between different communities. We concluded, in part, that the construction of a public sphere was not predicated on the technical developments of social interaction.
but more on the ability for the social exchange to enable political discussion and political opinion.

Moreover we would like to explore these issues further through the development of an artwork. In May 2014 we were invited by Jenny Gillam and Eugene Hansen (Gilliam & Hansen, 2014) to develop a new work for testpattern.tv. The aim of the testpattern.tv project is

‘to explore the changing nature of Fine Art presentation in the 21st century examining the growing role of the democratised, networked, prosumer community as both new cultural site and a mechanism for production and distribution of new forms of art practice.’ (ibid)

This future project will allow us not only to utilize the technical conditions of internet tv to publish our slogans and subsequent artworks but it will enable us to explore the potential of internet TV towards a politicized public sphere.

There is a growing body of contemporary art practice and theory that overturns the constraints of the traditional definitions of public art, the public sector and the public realm in order to explore how art intersects with its publics not only via public spaces and public institutions, but through a whole range of techniques and technologies of social engagement.

As Jorinde Seijdel in her editorial for Open 14: Art as a Public Issue. How Art and Its Institutions Can Reinvent the Public Dimension, describes it,

‘public space has once more become an urgent topic in the debate on liberal democracy, a debate which, supported by radical-leftist philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben or Alain Badiou’. (Seijdel, 2008, 5)

Questions about participation, collaboration and collective action are more central and more contested within contemporary art. At the same time developments in art such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998), social
engaged art practice and new genre public art (Lacy, 1994) are raising these very same issues. Thomas Crow, for instance, has written about art’s relations to its publics at different historical moments including, pertinently, an account of the difference between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ site-specific art (Crow, 1998). Miwon Kwon (Kwon, 2002) has also developed three versions of site-specificity that are developed from the practice of public art, which she calls ‘a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics’ (Kwon 2002, 2).  

By proposing to utilize the notion of action and the social in art practice I argue that art does not only comment on and enter into the public sphere but can facilitate the development of various public spheres – I propose art as opinion formation, art as deliberation and therefore art as politics.

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30 This idea was developed by Beech and Jordan as part of the initial rationale for Art and the Public Sphere Journal in 2009
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