



Marinella
Senatore

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Tracing Circles: Enabling Artistic Praxis through Par- ticipation (Not the Other Way Around)

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To begin with, let's not write a descriptive piece about the artist's works, but rather, let her practice lead us in directions that help us to understand what's at stake in her approach, along with wider questions touching on the processes of participation and what unfolds around them.

Marinella Senatore's films, performance and photography involve the participation of many people, most of whom have not been involved in such productions before. They have been realized on large scales, in the case of *Speak Easy* (P.140-141), involving up to 1200 people from one neighborhood in Madrid in all aspects of the film's production, including stage design, set building, technical aspects, writing and acting. The crux of her interest is not in the final outcome – in this case, an almost seamless musical production – but in the exchanges that occur during the making of it, which steer the works away from singular authorship. While film is an inherently collaborative medium – being almost always made by more than one person – it remains a

highly hierarchical industry. In contrast, this mode of participatory practice relies on personal investment and individual enthusiasm, the participants of this particular work even investing financially in the production by contributing two euros each.

One could say that at the heart of participatory work (and perhaps any other work) is not what it represents but what it transforms. Thus it is not in representation, but in 'aggregation' that the core matter lies – catalyzing certain instances rather than others, and setting elements in motion to shift perspectives, to move feelings, thoughts or bodies from one point to another in time and space. If we imagine doing so not only with one life, but with many, over and over again, we have a work that slowly knits a whole fabric of relations that may result in a meaningful experience for those participating, the instigators, the mediators, and ultimately, everyone who comes into contact with this sort of 'movement'.

In order to think through the nature of collaborative work, one has to take into consideration the way in which a project must encompass a whole variety of relations, be they harmonious or conflictual. This is something that involves negotiations between the agendas of the instigator or mediator, the participants, and the geopolitical context or social fabric in which the project takes place. In a way, the outcome is not an endpoint, but one part



of a much bigger picture, a set of social and political dynamics that have been adopted by the community for a given time.

For the hundreds or even thousands of people who have generated one of Senatore's works, this might be a nice way to spend the morning; or it may be seen as a commitment that implies a political gesture. The aesthetic data of the cinematography, photography, script, installation, drawing – or whatever route has been explored to materialize this work – becomes the zero point for the coordinates of that piece of society. It may want to reinvent itself or continue to preserve a certain image, but it will not shy away from the context in which it is formed.

In the case of Senatore's most recent work, *Nui Simu* (P.132-139) – which featured the participation of over 180 non-professional actors and extras, was written in collaboration with 25 retired miners from the town of Enna, Sicily, and involved them and students from the Academy of Fine Arts in all areas of the production – it has been a matter of reviving a social consciousness. The basis of the project is in the way participants have reconstructed collective memories of place and time. Sometimes manipulated and rewritten, spontaneous or incited, these memories have generated social systems through aggregation and the concept of group or membership.

In activating processes such as

these, the artist (or better, the instigator) cuts across politics, gender relations, and class divides, intermingling them with secondary facts from people's lives, half-forgotten stories, documents and fictional narratives, to gradually create a sort of communal archive of 'intensities'. These are moments, places or situations are constructed, resurrected or recorded by a community because that seems to be the thing to do, perhaps an urgent need that is lingering in the air but hasn't yet crystallized. The process and its temporary result, open to being re-shuffled and, as in this case, re-constituted by miners, bakers, students, local seamstresses, retired carpenters, neighbours associations, villagers, amateur dancers, urban rappers or others, offers the perfect excuse.

This is working from the middle; the participative work, in this sense, presents something that was not there before, and traces the anecdotes that ultimately shape the collective imagery and temporary memory of the place, time, community and situation. In turn, this collective memory is revisited and passed on by each of the protagonists via local and micro-local media, such as door-to-door communication, neighborhood papers, fliers, local radio; but also global media channels such as the Internet and the global art scene, through its exhibitions, forums, books (like this one), residencies, and so on.

These histories and chronicles, facts and fictions, first gathered

and then developed in other directions, are the same kind we employ in our life to recognize, assess and structure our own stories within the influxes of fragmentary information we receive every day: part words, part songs, part archive material (personal or collective, physical or intellectual), and part ideas we use to sew together our existence.

To create this sense of belonging and becoming through shared narratives is an important, ambitious undertaking; not in thematic terms, but as praxis. Inhabiting a space and a time and asking questions through the people living in it, perhaps even finding answers, helps to shape a form of public sphere that is both physical (through the participative work) and psychological (through the cultural consequences that will be generated).

Anyone who has worked with participation will know that it is no mean feat to get the commitment and keep the engagement of the numbers of people that Senatore is used to working with on her films. The skill required of the artist in these kinds of processes is to create situations that are open enough for others to be able to contribute and shape the work as it is in progress, and at the same time, maintain a framework that is strong enough not to collapse or fade out into compromise. The sparks that are produced through encounters of difference and processes of negotiation, as well as enjoyment, create a kind of energy that can be a strong driving

force. Ultimately, what is arrived at through the involvement of many people is a form of complexity, and a picture of a world that is not straightforward or easy, but where new collective experiences and forms of production are possible and immensely rewarding, if someone is bold enough to take the initiative and start the process.









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