

**Antony Gormley_ public conversation with Mario Cristiani,
San Gimignano 11.12.2016**

**Art in Public Space: Making SPace/Taking Place_ Intervention of Antony Gormley for
Arte All'Arte 2004, Poggibonsi**

It's wonderful to be here. It's miserable in London and it was amazing to arrive to blue skies and the last leaves of the oak trees looking like sprinkled gold dust across your hills. Mario asked me how the experience of working with Arte all'Arte was.

For me, this is not just about Arte all'Arte but also about the philosophy of the gallery. For us Northern Europeans Tuscany remains an astounding example of a place in which the stratification of history has left extraordinary cultural layers. The quality of cultural accumulation in Tuscany is unique and to find a contemporary, international art gallery in that context is also unique. It's almost as though because of the weight of historic cultural artefacts in the region the gallery had to think about continuity, about the furthering of those layers. For me, working here was an extraordinary invitation and opportunity.

The history of Modernism starts with those key figures of Mondrian, Brancusi and Giacometti, with each of them re-making the world on their own terms, in their own studios. In my view because of this withdrawal into the studio the twentieth century was not great in terms of any responsibility to add to collective space or to the collective body of a city or a village. The century saw the separation of art and life with the professionalisation of art and architecture.

So the challenge now as I see it is to try to offer back to the public those very same freedoms that artists took for themselves at the beginning of the twentieth century and to recognise the Duchampian transformation of the space of art into a conversation in which meaning, value and significance can arise through the co-creation of both viewer and the artist.

My project in Poggibonsi, Fai Spazio Prendi Posto, was an experiment in which we asked how we could realise a new form of collective, public participation in the space of art, both in the manner the work was made and in the way that it then became integrated with the town. The process had two distinct parts. One was to understand the site: Poggibonsi.

For me this was not simply a question of knowing the map but of getting to know the collective memory of Poggibonsi. So, we started a process of psychogeography in which we invited the inhabitants of the town to talk about particular, powerful experiences that they associated with specific places in the town. You could say it was a kind of psychoanalysis of the unconscious of the town.

To do this we started a drop-in centre where people could come and talk to the assistants and we had a map with little pins in it and we began to get concentrations of memories in particular places. This was one half of the collective participation in this project.

The second half was asking for people to come forward and volunteer to be moulded so that the living moment of the actual bodily life of seven citizens could be captured.

The final work was the association between sculptures that were based on the index of seven randomly chosen citizens, placed in the epicentres of those locations determined by collective memory.

The sculptures stand on common ground - they don't have plinths, they don't have any special framing, there is no plaque, there is no explanation and I think that this offers the possibility of art itself as an open space of interpretation.

In their stillness these objects become catalysers for a choreography of daily life, acting as a foil through which the citizens become more conscious of the energy of their hometown.

This project has opened key questions : Who can be represented in art? Who is art for? How can it be understood? has resulted in or is related to other experiments. You'll see a few examples later on in this presentation.

This for example, is an earlier and much more extreme example of the same sort of invitation to participate but is located in the middle of Australia.

It was a project made with 51 citizens of a tiny town in the very east of western Australia , concentrated into what I call "Insiders" and then placed into an extreme landscape, the dreaming of which belonged to the Wonga and Wongatha people. This project asked if it was possible to reinforce the identity of a community - especially a dispossessed community by placing works within landscape from which they had been

alienated through colonisation and subsequent agricultural use.

The effects of the conquest on the incredibly subtle and wide-ranging indigenous cultures of Australia is devastating. At the time of Cook's arrival in 1769 there were 1000 languages in Australia, each having its own song lines and identification with space and place. Now there are possibly 16. The project was reverse anthropology, similar to Fai Spazio but applied in a post-colonial time to a colonised region of the world.

Fai Spazio has become an important reference point in a continuing process of asking who art is for, where it can belong and how it can be made.

Another example might be this project made right at the centre of London : Trafalgar Square, where we have the column to Nelson, the victor at the battle of Trafalgar. The British might all be speaking French had that victory not happened.

Here in the square is a plinth, designed for the five times life-size equestrian statue of a king, but never occupied, that I invited 2400 selected people to stand on for one hour each over 24 hours through the course of 100 days. They could do whatever they liked.

This project made a collective portrait of us now. Some people invented complex performances but others just "were", like this girl who was a total agoraphobic and screwed herself into a tiny ball, hardly moving for the hour.

What's happened here? We have taken the citizen from the ground and put them in the place of idealisation and representation with everyone invited to interpret, to project and to interact with this moment. So there is a give and a take here, a process of reflection. There is misunderstanding, even a sense of disgust or a sense of "why is this happening in my space, in my town?" - but also a sense of freedom, a realisation that this is now possible, that art can question and change the way that things are.

We tried something a little bit different here in San Gimignano. This was 5 more or less identical corpographs or body indexes placed in different contexts around the town. Some were partially buried and some elevated. The relationship between a still object that has no explanation and the stream of daily life interests me.

A similar project was previously in New York, with twenty seven sculptures on the skyline and four on the ground, inviting both incomprehension and projection of the

viewer.

You can see there is one figure on the ground here but another on the skyline and another one up there, one here, one here. I think of this as a kind of acupuncture of the collective space of the city through which people are invited to look again at the environment that surrounds them and themselves.

We are all children of the Enlightenment. I believe profoundly that art has a part to play in achieving social justice. All of these projects are an attempt to democratise the space of art that in our time has become commodified and specialised.

The game that Associazione Arte Continua plays is the same game that I play; it's terrific to me that there is a market for my work and that I can sell pieces for large sums of money but my responsibility is to use that advantage to test out other ways in which art can provide and produce imaginative potential as it did in the middle ages here in Tuscany. It's very simple: the resources that come from the privatisation of art should then sponsor opportunities for it to become public again.

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