

MARIA MORGANTI

Notes for the talk at the “Institutes are spaces of discussion and thought” round table at the Forum for Contemporary Art, Prato 2015. Coordinator: Antonio Grulli. Participants: Luca Bertolo, Andrea Bruciati, Vittoria Ciolini, Flavio Favelli, Luca Lo Pinto, Maria Morganti, Francesca Pasini, Riccardo Previdi, Pierluigi Tazzi, Andrea Viliani.

THE ARTISTS' WEDNESDAYS

I am here to talk about a concrete experience we had in Venice with a group of artists over a period of around ten years. It was created independently of institutes and ended up in a foundation for contemporary art, though without ever losing its independent spirit.

In November 2002 a group of artists in Venice started meeting regularly to get to know one another through their work.

The 254 meetings took place every Wednesday at 6pm between December 2002 and November 2012. In the first few years, the meetings were held in my private studio. After a few years, when Angela Vettese became president of the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa she invited the artists to continue their meetings at Palazzetto Tito. We refused the invitation for ages as we were worried that institutionalisation could alter the nature of our experience, but then we decided to give it a go whilst always keeping open the possibility of returning to the private space if it didn't work out. In the end, our association with the institute worked extremely well, thanks to Angela Vettese, Marco Ferraris, Stefano Coletto and all the other staff at the Bevilacqua, who had enormous respect for our independent management and accepted the spirit of our initiative without any problem. We were given the keys to the palace and were guaranteed time and space for our privacy. Thus the meetings continued to be managed by the artists.

These were the rules:

- One artist at a time showed their work to their peers.
- No public allowed. Everybody was involved, presenting their work to the others.
- The meetings were reserved solely and exclusively to artists. Gallerists, curators, critics, etc., were not allowed to participate.

This was to ensure that the meetings remained entirely on a level of pure exchange between artists without promotional aims.

- No selection process. Anyone calling themselves an artist could participate.

The Wednesday meetings included both Venetian artists and visitors, Italian and foreign. Approximately 270 artists of all ages, both professionals and non-professionals, participated.

- Words such as exhibition, documentation, etc., were banned.

A SPACE FOR THE SILENT

I would like to imagine a space for the silent. I would like it if the public institute brought a symbolic space inside it that represents silence, shyness, reserve. I would like to try to imagine making something emerge that normally remains hidden and on the margins.

How can we bring the public closer to interiority? How can we bring out that which usually remains to one side or hidden, but which is at the basis of the final form of a process; the work? How can we keep open the possibility of a comparison between artists? How can we help artists to meet outside of their studios and private spaces? How can we keep alive a voice which is often just a stutter, a disconnected word, a rumination, a reflection, a reasoning which runs parallel to the relationship the artist has with her practice? How can we help to keep alive an open process in continual transformation? How can we help artistic research to move forward? How can we keep open the possibility of a comparison between artists and a contact between their practices and their thoughts?

I think that due to the very nature of this type of language made as it is of a hesitant, timid, reserved word, an intermediary passage is necessary; a halfway space between the private and the public. We need to try to imagine an intimate space within the public space. By intimate I mean a secluded moment which allows the interiority to express itself towards the external. A reserved corner which reunites people who see themselves in each other and which nurtures an understanding. A being with others, among ourselves.

I realise that it is not easy to think of a public space that has a private space inside it because it is a contradiction in terms; a space that actually excludes a part of itself but this "closed" form would actually open and would help free up thoughts and words which would otherwise remain unexpressed.

This way of selecting, of recognising ourselves among people who do the same thing in many different ways helps lead to a free expression that otherwise would not be possible.

It is only after this passage that we can imagine another, from an intimate space to a truly public space: a space which represents a multitude of individuals, of artists who each express their world with their meaning.