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Authorised Defacement: Lessons from Pasquino

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ABSTRACT. The advent of Social Practice in Art, under names such as New Genre Public Art, Relational Aesthetics, Socially-Engaged Art etc., marks a move toward a consideration of the productive and receptive terms on which art in the public sphere occurs. In this approach public art is no longer conceived as something to be delivered to the public. For theorists such as Phillips, Lacy, Gablik, Bourriaud etc., the concern for public art is social engagement, collaboration and participation under the motto 'Art in the public interest.' Where Social Practice emphasises the local; for fear of not having a clear focus, the temporal; for fear of being commercially co-opted, collaboration; for fear of losing control, and didacticism; for fear of not having a social and political impact, it delimits the potential of publicness. Such a limited account of public authorship is present where the public only get to participate in the curators work. Public is here conceived as simply that element which activates the work, and is not generative of the work, or new possibilities of publicness.

The concept and practice of public art and authorship is understood and contested in a variety of related ways, these include; ownership, access, usage, scale, authenticity, normativity, tradition etc. A long established example of public art that enables a public space of radicalism is the ambiguously authorised defacement of the "talking statues of Rome." Since 1501 citizens of Rome have used statues such as *Pasquino* as a forum for anonymous and critical discourse. The statues "talk" through the rhyming prose, often critical of church and state, that is routinely attached to them. These mute monuments enable the unspeakable to be spoken. *Pasquino*, I venture is a model (albeit, a limited one) for public art to enable a criticality (somewhat) free from the restrictions imposed by the curation often envisioned in social practice.

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1. Introduction: The Terms of Engagement for Public Art

Until I see love in statues [...] (Manic Street Preachers, 1991)

Under names such as New Genre Public Art, Relational Aesthetics, Socially-Engaged Art etc., recent theorists such as Phillips, Lacy, Gablik, Bourriaud etc., have conceived of public art in terms of social engagement, collaboration and participation under the motto 'Art in the public interest.' Bourriaud, for example, defined relational aesthetics as existing in works where "the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14) is central to its theoretical operation. Similarly Suzi Gablik (1991) sees the possibilities for a revitalisation of community in contemporary art practice while Terry Smith conceives of curators as the potential brokers of political activism and spectatorship (2012).

Defined by Suzanne Lacy as art with "a developed sensibility about audience, social strategy, and effectiveness..." (Lacy, 1995, p. 20), New Genre Public Art marked an explicit recognition, by the academy and the artworld, of increased consideration of the terms on which public art occurs. In these recent approaches, public art is rightly no longer conceived as something to simply be delivered to the public¹, rather it is increasingly understood in a much more discursive fashion.

The terms of this discourse, however, are still routinely restricted by curatorial oversight. Where Social Practice emphasises the local; for fear of not having a clear focus, the temporal; for fear of being commercially co-opted, collaboration; for fear of losing control, and didacticism; for fear of not having a social and political impact, it delimits the potential of publicness. Such a limited account of publicness is present where the public only get to participate in the curators work. Public is here conceived as simply that element which activates the work and is not generative of the work or new possibilities of publicness. Unsurprisingly the impact of socially engaged public art is often hollow. A truly radical and democratic

¹ New Genre Public Art is thus a term that describes a practice, disenchanted with artworld conventions, explicitly engaged in a process of social criticism. It is "...process-based, frequently ephemeral, often related to local rather than global narratives, and politicised." (Miles, 1997, p. 164)

public is where curatorial activity (authorship) is entirely divested in the public as opposed to a conducting curator.



FIGURE 1. *Pasquino*, Connell Vaughan, January 2014.

The discursive terms of public art are varied and they include the temporal², the spatial³, authorship etc. In this paper I focus on the terms of

² O'Neill and Doherty for example argue that "[D]urational approaches to public art involve a process of being together for a period of time with some common objectives, to constitute a new mode of relational, conversational and participatory practice." (O'Neill and Doherty, 2011, p. 10) Likewise, Phillips argues for a "commitment to the temporal" (Phillips, 1992, p. 297) in public art. The temporal in public art is undoubtedly valuable due to its ability to respond to, reflect, and explore the context which it inhabits.

³ This paper has developed from an earlier book chapter: 'Contemporary Curatorial

authorship at play in public art. A critical commitment to the notion of authorship (in addition to the temporal and the spatial) is required I argue to realise the goals of socially engaged practice. Axes on which to understand and contest public authorship include but are not limited to; ownership, access, usage, scale, authenticity, normativity, memory etc. (Other potential terms to measure the publicness of art, which I will not consider for reasons of brevity could include; autonomy, penetration and participation.)

2. *Pasquino*: Ambiguous Authorised Defacement

A long established and undeniably institutional from its outset, example of public art that enables and engages radical public authorship is the “talking statues of Rome.” Since the 15th century citizens of Rome have engaged six statues; *Pasquino* (or “*Pasquillo*”, in Latin), *Marforio*, *Il Babuino*, *Abbot Luigi*, *Il Facchino*, and *Madama Lucrezia* as a forum for pseudonymous comic and critical discourse. The statues, collectively known as the “congress of wits”, talk through the epigrams of rhyming prose (“pasquinades”), often satiric and critical of church⁴ and state, which is routinely attached to them. These mute monuments enable what is unspeakable to be spoken. An (unverifiable) early classic attacking Pope Urban VIII says: “*Quod non fecerunt Barbari, fecerunt Barberini.*”⁵

The most famous of this congress is *Pasquino*. *Pasquino* is a mutilated ancient statue, considered to be a Roman copy of a Greek original (See Reynolds, 1985), discovered in Rome in the late 15th century. Its Renaissance (as opposed to its ancient) patron, Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (1430–1511) had it placed on a pedestal, outside his palace, in 1501. It moved to its current location nearby in 1791. Under Cardinal Carafa’s patronage, an an-

Practice and the Politics of Public Space’ in *Radical Space: Exploring Politics & Practice* (Forthcoming, April 2016). In this chapter I argued that in addition to notions of temporality, public art raises issues such as pluralism of interpretation, interactivity and the conditions of labour. In sum the space of public art challenges us to consider the experiential environment of the work and the defined public. *Pasquino* is exemplary of public art that challenges inherited norms of public space offering a forum of agonistic *dissensus*.

⁴ Reynolds (1985, 1987) argues that pasquinades parody votive offering on church altars.

⁵ ‘What the Barbarians did not do, the Barberini did.’

nual celebration of *Pasquino* (Saint Mark's day, April 25th) was inaugurated. This initial act of authorisation in the sense of being sanctioned permitted further ambiguous acts of authorisation. The decoration of *Pasquino* while conferring prestige on its patron also opened a space of critical and civic engagement.

Reynolds has argued that the sixteenth century festival of *Pasquino* was a deliberate satiric absorbing of the Classical Roman ritual of Robigalia in early Renaissance Rome by the "humanists of the generation of Cardinal Oliviero Carafa" (see Reynolds, 1987, p. 289). Robigalia, which was maintained in the Christian tradition of Rogation Days, sought to secure harvests from wheat rust via the sacrifice of a dog. Robigalia was also celebrated on April 25th. Reynolds further connects the "literal connotation of mildew [...] of the word <<robigo>>, [...] to rust on metal, ulcerations on the skin and, further, to the general potential for decay and decline in the temporal world, a tendency towards imperfection which has obvious roots in the Fall" (*Ibid*, p. 293). From this perspective, the connection of the defaced statue with the tradition of *Pasquino* can be seen as Renaissance satire of the decay in agricultural broadcasts and harvests via the decaying broadcasts of pasquinades.

The ceremony of the Renaissance festival *unambiguously authorised* the *defacement* of the statue in dress (usually of ancient Gods) and with witticisms. This custom of transgression is thus one that has been institutionalised from its outset. It is important to avoid seeing pasquinades, at this stage at least, as some authentic voice of the public. They were a pursuit of an educated elite; literary subversion. Nonetheless, from this moment *Pasquino* ceased to be a public statue in a traditional sense. This activity transformed the statue into a "living public sculpture." As long as the tradition of pasquinades persists *Pasquino* will not be a dead remnant from the past. Instead *Pasquino* is active and not bound to a final dimension. *Pasquino's* dimension is the public space it continues to sculpt. While discrete and modest, *Pasquino* is nonetheless a concrete 'vocal Memnon.' In Roman times it was a statue valuable only for memetic reflection, but since 1501 it has been a "public sculpture."⁶ *Pasquino's* puzzling material consti-

⁶ In making this distinction between statue and sculpture I am following the lead of Rosalind Krauss. Krauss (1979) argues that in postmodern practice the field of sculpture

tution is derived from this tradition. The stone may constitute the statue but the defacing pasquinades constitute the artwork and the accompanying authored public space. *Pasquino's* material constitution derives not from the clay, but from this practice. Pasquinades, in short are *Pasquino's* conditions of persistence. *Pasquino's* integrity is now derived, through publicly authored defacement.

Pasquino is a composite. It comprises mutilated portions of two figures, a head and torso and a section of a second torso. At the time of Carafa it was thought to be Hercules, but it was later understood to represent the Mycenaean king Menelaus holding the body of Patroclus.⁷ In a city renowned for republican traditions the instrumentalising of a broken king, reworked as a local citizen, to criticise and protest has its own poignancy. The cartoon-like construction of *Pasquino* and the ambiguity over the monarch's identity is vital to permitting subversive ideas on a large scale.

In addition to the materiality and longevity of the statue, the name and the location are fundamental to the value of the icon. The ambiguity, Bakhtin would say "ambivalence," of *Pasquino* is reinforced in its name. Many competing myths and legends abound as to the origin of this name. Maestro Pasquino is thought to be a local who composed some of the earliest pasquinades. He is variously described as a local schoolmaster, a cobbler, an anti-establishment tailor etc. Crucially Maestro Pasquino is always described as a concerned citizen, and this adds to pasquinades authority. Pasquinades, despite their essential ambiguity, are presented *ex cathedra*.

Pasquino is a model for public art to enable critical public authorship partially free from the restrictions imposed by traditional notions of curation. Those who curate are seen to be those who care in keeping with the verb from which the term derives; *curare*. Traditionally this activity is understood in terms of the preservation, organisation and presentation of artworks. In Rome, perhaps the largest open-air museum in the world, the public authored by *Pasquino* resists the attempt to categorise the monument as only an artefact from the past. Although it is physically modest as an example of public art, the scale of the criticality of *Pasquino* is ambigu-

has expanded from monument to landscape and architecture.

⁷ This is a scene from *Iliad*, Book XVII. A more complete version stands in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Piazza della Signoria, Florence.

ously unrestricted⁸. Ideally the pseudonymous commentary of *Pasquino* is not limited to a specific public (practicalities such as competence in Italian aside). Its comments are from and for the public. The populist scale of the critical authorship opened up by *Pasquino* is potentially unrestricted.

In practice however numerous attempts have been made to silence, to unauthorise the defacement of *Pasquino*. Pope Adrian VI, for example, wished to have *Pasquino* thrown in the Tiber. Pope Sixtus V tried to pay to silence *Pasquino* (See Hughes, 2011, pp. 294-295). Pope Leo X banned the festival for a year in 1519. While the tradition of pasquinades persists, the festival inaugurated by Carafa cannot be said to have survived the Sixteenth Century. When we regard classical images of *Pasquino*, the statue is overwhelmingly depicted as another statue from the past; while pasquinades are often depicted the accompanying festival is not. Just as the Madman when faced with the death of god in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* asks; "What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?" (Nietzsche, 1882, § 125) we too, when faced with *Pasquino* must ask; what new traditions of public art shall we have to invent?

The five other talking statues developed as a result of attempts to restrict and monitor *Pasquino*. These are now in museums or subject to anti-graffiti paint. It is a work of art which was originally displayed for its artistic value and for the self-promotion of its patron, then used during an annual religious feast reviving the classical custom of pinning poems to statues; it went on to become the mouthpiece of Papal propaganda, and finally, it established itself as the place for expressing biting pseudonymous comments on the pope and his court.

As a space of authorial exception *Pasquino* enables public authenticity in a perverse, yet not unusual, way. Authenticity is achieved via a pseudonym. Authenticity here is broadly conceived. It can refer to the authenticity of the agent who is free to make any declaration he or she wishes. Be it pseudonymous graffiti or not. Equally, it refers to the validity of the democratic decision. In sum, pseudonymity is counterintuitively enabling of an authorship of public political engagement rather than a shirking from public life.

⁸ It could be countered that the scale of public issues to be addressed is so large that pasquinades can literally only scratch the surface.

Defacement by pasquinades is the *modus vivendi* of *Pasquino* emphasising the voice of the sculpture. Like preservation, commemoration in the context of *Pasquino* is flipped. Instead of a fixed dedication it is a permanent rededication. *Pasquino* demands preservation in terms of use instead of physical maintenance. *Pasquino's* power lies in its scars. Use, thus, is a type of preservation. Use in this case is defacement. Defacement disfigures but in this case disfigurement is not to be mourned in itself. Counterintuitively, restrictions to the defacement of *Pasquino* in the name of supposed restoration/preservation/regeneration are comparable to the cultural terrorism of iconoclastic vandalism.

Recent restoration and cleaning works (2010) have defaced the sculpture in this traditional sense. It has been cordoned. Its scars are regarded as stains to be erased. This curatorial vandalism under the name of conservation sought to reduce *Pasquino* to a community noticeboard. Pasquinades were to be placed on a separate wooden plank, though this no longer remains.⁹ This aesthetic sanitising of *Pasquino* undermines the *dissensus*¹⁰ of publicness as new pasquinades are the only route to *Pasquino's* regeneration. Presently the notion of preservation is swamped by the contemporary vogue for conservation which is, in the case of *Pasquino*, the latest manifestation of attempts to shut the sculpture up, fetishise its flaws, and pacify its radical edge. Sanitised conservation of *Pasquino* is nothing less than desecration of publicness as it seeks to remove sculpture from the space of everyday life.

Furthermore, since 2010 there is a website (<http://www.pasquinate.it/>) that aims to both document daily pasquinades and function as a digital network for lampoons, in verse or prose, in Italian or in Roman dialect. While this site does not edit or reveal the authors of pasquinades, this digital documentation marks a new era of control and selection. This website was initially proposed as a site for all new pasquinades.¹¹ Diverting the future scars of *Pasquino* to a digital realm effectively kills *Pasquino* as a living statue. Aesthetic fidelity in the case of *Pasquino* derives not from material preservation; it is located in the traditional act of defacing via pasquinades. *Pasquino* requires the pollution of the public's touch and with

⁹ Pasquinades, however, rarely go above the plinth any more.

¹⁰ See Rancière, 2010.

¹¹ See Lorenzi, 2009.

admirable persistence new pasquinades appear daily.

However, pasquinades will no longer be allowed to fade in the rain but they will remain archived online. The amnesia required for *Pasquino* to continue talking is regrettably being slowly eroded. Richard Shusterman, argued that “absence may be an essential structural principle of city aesthetics in general” (Shusterman, 1997, p. 742), noting that some marks are “[M]ore powerfully present, paradoxically, by their invisibility” (Shusterman, 1997, p. 741). These documented and preserved pasquinades are on life-support, never permitted death, and, as such, never really living. Following Shusterman, I regard amnesia as a vital component to the potent authorial ambiguity offered by pasquinades.



FIGURE 2. *Pasquino*, Antonio Lafreri, 1540.

3. Theorising ‘Living Statues’

You, too, as living stones, are building yourselves up into a spiritual house [...] (1 Peter, 2:5)

The term living statue commonly refers to a street artist who poses like a statue or mannequin, usually with realistic statue-like makeup, sometimes for hours at a time. *Pasquino*, while clearly not a living statue in this sense as a performance sculpture it has its own particular vivaciousness.

Unlike Schiller’s description of the ennobling “charm” and “dignity” of the statue *Juno Ludovici* (1795), *Pasquino* is not “self-contained” or dwelling in itself. *Pasquino*’s diligence springs from a public duty. Where *Juno Ludovici*, like other statues, is indifferent to the free play of potential ideas about it, free from its creator and its setting the same cannot be said for *Pasquino*. We do not revisit the ancient original narrative of the statue *Pasquino*, we rework it. Like the Renaissance Romans we rediscover it anew.

Juno Ludovici belongs for Jacques Rancière in the “aesthetic regime of art” (2009, p. 29); its idleness promoting an equality of represented subjects. Rancière also sees this aesthetic regime in Rousseau’s and Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s accounts of the *Torso* of the Belvedere.

...the statue as deprived of all that which, in representational logic, makes it possible to define bodily expressions and anticipate the effects of their viewing. The statue has no mouth enabling it to deliver messages, no face to express emotions, no limbs to command or carry out action. The statue of which Winckelmann and Schiller speak is no longer an element in a religious or civic ritual; no longer does it stand to depict belief, refer to a social distinction, imply moral improvement, or the mobilization of individual or collective bodies. No specific audience is addressed by it, instead the statue dwells before anonymous and indeterminate museum spectators... (2009, p. 138)

This description cannot be applied to *Pasquino*. *Pasquino* is not a “free appearance” as Rancière describes in his analysis of Schiller. *Pasquino* is not a promise of a politics. It is a practice of public authorship. By lacking “self-sufficiency” it does not seek out autonomy from its maker; instead the public is articulated through pasquinades defacing the sculpture. *Pasquino*

has a mouth enabling it to deliver determinate and pointed messages. This interactive and communicative ability of statues need not take the form of vandalistic defacement. It is, I believe, present in other cases such as Jeff Koons' *Gazing Ball (Belvedere Torso)*, 2013 which explicitly implicates the beholder.

Pasquino is better seen as a critique of what Rancière calls the "ethical regime of art" insofar as it restlessly picks at the supposed truth of the distributions of occupations in the community. In its graffiti we read words pointing toward an alternative pedagogy of public *authority*.

Pasquino offers a degree of resistance to the museumification of its surroundings. Rome may be a museum of ancient, classical and medieval ornament, yet amidst this collection *Pasquino* speaks as both an ambiguous subject and actor in the city. Pseudonymity comes not only from the messages but is enabled by the unclear identity of the figure of *Pasquino* itself. In this sense the perpetual defacing of the sculpture is its strongest resource.

Pasquino is nonetheless not immune from museumification. It too has a history of co-option for tourist lira dating back to at least 1540. For example, Antonio Lafreri's, *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae* ("Mirror of Rome Magnificence"), a collection of prints of Rome, designed to appeal to the Renaissance craze for antiquities, included an engraving by Antonio Salamanca of *Pasquino*. It has been argued elsewhere (San Juan, 2001, pp. 1- 21) that the depiction of *Pasquino* in printed medieval guidebooks and printed collections (*Carmina*) of edited pasquinades¹² served to present the voice of the local in the eternal city.

Beyond tourism, *Pasquino* has always had to negotiate a relationship with more formal intuitions such as the church and the state. Its literary subversion is only possible where permitted by such institutions as a sort of pressure valve. From a cynical perspective the literati of the pasquinades are like idealists retreating into the academy when faced with the difficulty of enacting real change. But then usefulness is a limited measure of aesthetic value.

Pasquino can be an unenclosed commons. Its value does not come primarily from its age. Instead, its value comes from its continued de-

¹² The first known collection dates to 1509.

facement and I argue, from the ambiguous nature of this authorship. It is not simply a site of memorialisation or commemoration, its usage, while rich with centuries, if not millennia, of tradition, is always yet to be fully determined.¹³ Its value remains in flux centuries after its installation.

Ownership of the critical authorship opened up by *Pasquino* is unrestricted by formal curation. Its words are but graffiti, ready to be written over by ever more graffiti. Access to the critical words of *Pasquino* is unrestricted; it is not closed at night. On the contrary pasquinades are often products of the night. *Pasquino* is a rare sign of citizens, ancient or modern, possessing classical culture and authoring contemporary publicness.

Pasquino is close to being an example of what Bakhtin would describe as the Rabelaisian tropes of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body. Gilbert (2015), for example, argues that the pasquinade tradition is the rhetorical and transgressive performance of embodying disgust. Like the carnival and carnivalesque, *Pasquino* offers a transgressive authorship of brief, licenced liberation. Yet, where the grotesque is the satiric presentation of a “body in the act of becoming” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 317), “cosmic and universal” (*Ibid*, p. 318) as a celebration of life, *Pasquino* is slightly different. It is not grotesque *per se* but rather damaged, defaced.

With *Pasquino* we can see a distinction between disfiguring and disablement. Pasquinades disfigure, without disabling. *Pasquino* disfigure and literally combat public disablement. Stone is an authentic material and where we ask certain statues, such as Marc Quinn’s *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2007); to represent disability nobly we ask something different of *Pasquino*. We ask this statue to make a christlike bodily sacrifice. As such the tactility of *Pasquino* and the public are in tandem. *Pasquino* retains the best progressive qualities of public art precisely because of its continued defacement which publicly champions the power of the disabled and disenfranchised.

Pasquinades are not exactly celebrations of life. Rather, they mourn. In this sense *Pasquino* is better seen as a yet to be fully specified memorial. Where Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington DC, for example, has developed a tradition of a performance of rubbing and

¹³ For example, in recent times *Pasquino* has inspired a Turin satirical newspaper from 1856 until 1921, a collection of Filipino essays in 1993, at least two films (1969, 2003) and the tradition of Orthodox and Haredi Jews of postering public space with messages prescribing appropriate behaviour called the *pashkevil*.

the Wailing Wall attracts prayer notes, *Pasquino* is ambiguous insofar as it is not so tied to particular events or beliefs. Equally the performance of defacing *Pasquino* is different to the experimental and mechanical performance sculptures characteristic of the work of Chris Burden. This ancient Roman/Christian sacrificial tradition remains productively unclear.

Pasquino's continued ritual; traditions and customs counter the Hegelian perspective of ancient statues as objects of past life: "The statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone." (Hegel, 1977, p. 455) An example of this approach is maintained in Giorgio Agamben's articulation of *Homo Sacer* as a former "living statue" that made the journey from living to statue. But *Pasquino* is entirely a "living statue" in this sense. Its existence is not past; rather it made the opposite journey from statue to living sculpture. It is not outside society, it is never entirely stripped of citizenship, (*zoe*) as befalls *Homo Sacer*. Instead of being regarded as a state of exception (within *bios*), *Pasquino* is better seen as productive of society. Rather than a former "living statue," *Pasquino* is what I would call a "living ruin." It is a "living ruin" insofar as its fertility still commands a certain faith and this is achieved, in part, via its ruinous condition. However, *Pasquino*'s flaws are not to be fetishised for their own sake. Its fidelity derives not from these material marks but its commitment to the public; a commitment visible in its continued scaring.

4. Lessons from *Pasquino*

Scars became the lessons that we gave to our children after the war. (Adams, 2005)

In light of the contemporary curatorial rage for interactivity, the challenge when considering the curation of public authorship is to consider the conditions of freedom enhanced or restricted by aesthetic activity. "Public space is that which is ultimately within the ownership of and *care* of the people as defined in democratic politics" (Goulding, 1998, p. 19, *emphasis added*). It is only when the public assume the curators role of authorship that public art can provide a democratic space of exception. Johnathan Meades is correct when he says that "[A]ccessibility means nothing more than being comprehensible to morons" (Meades, 2013), but a challenge of

public art is to consider those morons to be fellow citizens for as Johnathan Herrera clarifies “inaccessibility is counter-revolutionary” (2015).

Thus a crucial question in this case is: Are the content of pasquinades the concerns of the poor and disenfranchised, aristocratic power struggles, academic nit-picking or something else? In short; the crucial question when determining the aesthetic value of *Pasquino's* speech is inseparable from an assessment of the politics produced by *Pasquino*. Even if pasquinades are concerned only with trivial matters they are of political and aesthetic importance. This importance derives from the fact that they do more than simply exist, they live, they mark and they author via defacement the political and aesthetic space.

There is in the anonymous authorship of *Pasquino* something revolutionary. Pasquinades offer scope for authorship in the space of politics. At its best, *Pasquino* challenges the citizen to reassess their authorship of the public realm. To author something in public space is to reshape the public sphere, its use and future. Habermas (1962), for example, articulates the deliberative public sphere as distinct from public space. For him the public sphere is a conceptual way of grasping and expressing responsible discursive practice. This sphere is present where the affairs of the public are openly debated and performed is a spirit aiming at consensus.

A potential challenge for contemporary curatorial practice is to foster the Habermasian public sphere of idealised consensus. While Hannah Arendt (1954) saw scope for the arts to enhance the consensual public sphere and nurture public space, Habermas is suspicious of the arts for potentially undermining and distorting rational engagement. *Pasquino's* ambiguous words certainly exclude it from meeting the Habermasian consensual ideal.

Consensus, *sua sponte*, is however a problematic goal. As Rancière (2010) and Mouffe (2006) argue, the singular goal of consensus serves to collapse the political. Both philosophers value the aesthetic for its capacity to resist the co-opting of public space and foster aesthetic and political pluralism. Thus, a different challenge for contemporary curatorial practice is to enable the conflict essential to publicness. The ambiguously authored words of *Pasquino* certainly enable and even foster this practice of *disensus*.

That pasquinades are written, instead of spoken, emphasises their pseudonymity. That *Pasquino* is in congress means it does not have to risk

speaking directly to power but rather other statues. “Despite their particular grievances, pasquinades grieve together. The statue [*Pasquino*] is quite literally a palimpsest, erasing any chance of hierarchical messaging through the bits of paper that appear and disappear, cover up and get covered up, and muddle the figural composition of the satire as much as they mar their subjects of abuse” (Gilbert, 2015 p. 97). *Pasquino* is thus in dialogue with the city.

Turning to an example of contemporary curatorial and social practice, *Pasquino* offers a revealing comparison to a 2014/2015 commission by Sing London called *Talking Statues*. Here we can hear some clear differences in the way different statues can talk. *Talking Statues* engaged famous actors and writers to “animate public statues in Chicago, London, Manchester and Berlin” (talkingstatues.co.uk/#about) claiming to “breathe new life into the statues” with the slogan “every statue tells a story.” This project works by scanning your phone on a tag and receiving a call supposedly from the statue.

These statues are not in congress with each other, nor are they in conversation with the existing spatial politics. Their words, like the lyrics in Gilbert and George’s *Singing Sculpture* (1970) are unlike *Pasquino*. They are curator determined, directed and reinforcing of official memory. Instead *Pasquino*’s slogan could be “the sculpture that tells many stories.” *Pasquino* is, after all, a pen name with a location. The closest the public can get to authorship in the case of *Talking Statues* is a shallow digital activation.

Like Rossi’s idea of the “urban artefact” *Pasquino* is a changeable fragment. Rossi defines an “urban artefact” as a “spatial” and “conditioning” “aspect” of the totality of the city which, like the city, develops over time yet retaining a certain stable individuality (Rossi, 1989, pp. 29–41). Its accretion of layers of rich historic meanings can stand for paradoxical experiences and memories, individual and collective. Unlike other artefacts *Pasquino* has successfully resisted the usual persistence that transforms “urban artefacts” into stiff monuments or souvenirs over time; it retains its catalysing ability to broadcast the unspeakable.

Furthermore, its composite and ambiguous nature enables *Pasquino* to represent the public authorship in a more authentic and inclusive way. *Pasquino* is conservative in the sense that it conserves public authority and not vice versa. Where most other statues literally “stand up” for clear

identifiable (religious, civic, imperial, commercial) institutions, *Pasquino* is only clearly identifiable as citizen. So far this year alone, statues of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (Laing, 2015) and Lenin *et al* in Ukraine (Shevchenko, 2015), have been deemed unacceptable for various reasons and have been removed. *Pasquino*, however, does not stand for any narrow identifiable ideal.

Instead, each new defacement is also a *refacement*. In continually re-facing *Pasquino*, new pasquinades are not remaking *Pasquino*. Pasquinades do not perpetuate what is finished. They do not constitute a remaking of the same. They are better understood as a creation of *Pasquino*. In a contemporary context *Pasquino* can be seen to stand as a vehicle for the right of free expression.¹⁴

Ambiguities free *Pasquino* from strict narratives of commemoration. Like the legends behind the name, former pasquinades occupy and foster unofficial memory. For example, when Hitler visited Rome for seven days in May 1938, Mussolini had the city transformed into a stage of sanitised ancient ruins from which the success of international Fascism was imagined to rise. In response to the spectacle of urban cleansing, disembowelment and Fascist corruption of classical culture an apocryphal pasquinade became legendary:

*Roma, de travertino
vestita de cartone,
saluta l'imbianchino
suo prossimo padrone!*

Rome, from marble
converted to paper,
greet the house-painter,
her future master!

*Povera Roma mia de travertino,
te sei vestita tutta de cartone
pe' fatte rimira' da 'n imbianchino
venuto da padrone!*

My poor Rome, made of travertine,
You've dressed up in cardboard,
To show off for a dauber,
Who thinks he owns you!

¹⁴ Article 19 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

*Povera Roma mia de travertino!
T'hanno vestita tutta de cartone
pe' fatte rimirà da 'n'imbianchino.*

Oh my poor Rome made with
travertine marble!
They dressed you with cardboard
To let a painter admire you.

These various versions of unofficial memory demonstrate a commendable resistance to finality. The literal words of the *Pasquino* remain ambiguous. *Pasquino's* words are always still yet to be fully determined. Curators can set the terms of access and thus limit the possibility of any public aesthetic authorship yet access to the critical authorship of *Pasquino* remains unrestricted; unlike most museums, it is not closed at night. Here lies one of *Pasquino's* lessons: only public art lacking formal curation can challenge the way art is used to promote orthodoxy.

5. Conclusion

By investing this icon with a civic tradition of remarkable longevity pasquinades hold an authority and pseudonymity akin to graffiti. Graffiti, as I have argued elsewhere (2010, 2013), is loosely institutionalised as political commentary and firmly institutionalised in the global economy of the art-world as street art, to such a degree that one is now suspicious of each graffiti 'tag' being anything more than a 'hashtag' for a viral marketing campaign. Pasquinades, while yet to offer an established route to contemporary¹⁵ artworld recognition, hold no special immunity from such a fate. Classical pasquinades and contemporary graffiti must be viewed within the same creative continuum.

Despite the revolutionary claims that can be made for *Pasquino*, it is nonetheless *authorised defacement*; a five century old designated graffiti wall. Like a comedy roast, pasquinades are framed satiric messages. Like a Socratic dialogue they are governed by rules of engagement. They are like

¹⁵ Writers and poets such as Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) have and Giambattista Marino (1569-1625) furthered their careers via "publishing" their work as pasquindes (see Waddington, 2004). Equally, pasquinades gained a certain credibility by copying the style of the satiric epigram of the Roman poet Martial (circa 38-41-circa 102-104) (see Spaeth, 1939).

the marquee outside the church in *The Simpsons*; ever-changing and ephemeral signs of truth. Yet the church remains. *Pasquino* can be reduced to a placid house pet, a court jester.

It is worth considering who authorises *Pasquino*'s defacement. While Carafa can be seen to provide the initial permit and others can be seen to attempt to revoke this permission it is the public through each new pasquinade that continue to *authorise* *Pasquino*'s defacement. The mythic confusion that comes with the passage of centuries has contributed to this ambiguously authorised defacement.

The challenge for contemporary social practice in art is to be sensitive to the spatial politics of public art. Only when issues such as ownership, access, usage, scale, authenticity, etc. are approached is radical public authorship possible. Our existing inherited notions of public authorship are thus ripe for analysis, critique and rejuvenation. At all times the curation of public art must ask: What kind of public authorship is possible?

In short, what may be required in the act of curation is recognition that cartographers often find so difficult to make — namely recognition that there can be no definitive version of geo-cultures. The challenge is to resist a determined and pre-managed account and articulation of public authorship. With this, there must come a resistance to an account of the curator as a leader of public authorship. Public collaboration with curatorial interests ensures that the authorship of public art will not be a radical exception. Such art may still be desirable, yet it maintains a hierarchal curatorial practice or to use Lacy's terms "*carefully moderated*" (Lacy, 2008, p. 30 *emphasis added*). To contest such control and guidance and produce sculptural spaces of exception must be a goal of at least some public art. *Pasquino* is not an exemplar of freedom. I do not propose it as *the* model to follow. Rather, it is a lesson that even where a statue talks it remains "a potent symbol of the power of patronage to direct and control cultural activity" (Reynolds, 1985, p. 192). Each scar is a lesson.

Pasquino may be silent, the last pasquinades may be but a memory but as long as it is not simply an adornment to the city it will be productive of publicness. It may only be six minutes' walk from the Pantheon but still resists total absorption into the institution of the artworld and the heritage industry.

It has been a billboard for political campaigning and a stage for the

expression of dissent. It teaches us that true public authorship is subject to domination and appropriation. *Pasquino* is not a monument *per se*. It is a collective pen name whose strength comes from being belligerently and permanently out there in the real, unclean world. While the vogue for conservation threatens the power of *Pasquino* to co-produce publicness *Pasquino* is a surviving trans-historical work of dissent and co-option.

Pasquino does not defeat but it still combats shallow civic engagement. “Pasquinades do not so much topple and destroy as they vivify via defilement.” (Gilbert, 2015, p. 92) Like every other statue, *Pasquino* cannot say no to its defacement nor resist recruitment. But unlike other statues *Pasquino* defaced by fresh pasquinades can mourn its corruption, co-option and censorship. It demonstrates and actively mourns. The continued ritual of *Pasquino* as a Stakhanovite occupier of public space and time maintains a certain public and political faith in this mutilated sculpture. The key lesson is that a shortcut to aesthetic radicalism is available by cutting a Gordian knot and allowing the statues to speak via ambiguously authorised de/refacement. Contemporary practice can learn from this curious ritual of formal curatorial abdication that does not venerate the sacred but embraces the profane. But it can only do so where its scars remain to teach.

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