

Post-autonomous art

Post-autonomous art describes a mode of making art at a time when the artist's presumed autonomy (established in modernism and still maintained in post-modernism) has become rather problematic. A post-autonomous mode of production is no longer concerned with creating singular works of art attributable to a particular artist or author. Instead, a post-autonomous art practice employs a collaborative or dialogical mode of production, for example, via face-to-face or online dialogues, conversations or events, wikis, salons, bulletin boards, chat rooms, or collaborative visual editing environments.

The German Conceptual artist Michael Lingner proposed the notion of Post Autonomy in the 1990s. The aim of post-autonomous artistic production is not (or not primarily) to create objects (electronic or physical) or to document the traces of the productive process. Rather, it is to support and embody a political transformation whereby the human participants subscribe to an open ended mutual learning process and define and activate a productive space outside capitalism and its competitive mode of production.

History of post-autonomous art

The history of post-autonomous art can be seen in various practices for which one or several of the criteria below hold true:

*Conscious control of the artefact / outcome is relinquished or weakened. The surrealists experimented with the unconscious in automatic writing; a number of conceptual artists used random events as input to the productive process; dialogical encounters contributed to the work (see, for example, some works of Stanley Brouwn or Douglas Huebler); choices of performers and improvisation influence the result, for example, in a (musical) performance where the players can chose which module of music to play.

*The process of production itself is considered as constituting the art, not any resulting products or documents. This was very common in various conceptual art practices in the Sixties. The role of documentation and of documents (e.g. of performances) as quasi artefacts undermined this somewhat as conceptual artists needed objects for the gallery system. For some artists such as Allan Kaprow, a dissolution of the boundary separating life and art led to the idea of an invisible art practice.

*Practices are considered open-ended, i.e., no pre-conceived result is intended. Instead, the initial boundaries or rules of some process are defined and the actual development is left to the interaction of participants. Censorship issues can become important in this context.

*There is no narrow focus on the aesthetic experience as in most other art forms. Rather, post-autonomous art explicitly deals with social, political and economic issues as well as with the communication, media, race and gender issues discussed in cultural studies. This also links to the practice of the Situationists who intended to abolish the notion of art as a separate, specialized activity and aimed to transform it so it became part of the fabric of everyday life.

Examples of post-autonomous art

Superflex is a Danish collective of three artists working together since 1993. Superflex describe their projects as tools, as proposals that invite people to actively participate in and communicate the development of experimental models that alter the prevailing economic production conditions. Assisted by experts who bring in their respective special interest, these tools can then be further utilized and modified by their users.

Fallen Fruit is an activist art collaboration (founded in 2003) on "public fruit" which investigates the interface of urban life and agriculture (in the form of fruit). It incorporates aspects of 'pataphysics and the Situationist International.

Temporary Services is an artist collective in Chicago founded in 1998. "We champion public projects that are temporary, ephemeral, or that operate outside of conventional or officially sanctioned categories of public expression."

LeisureArts is an infra-institutional practice engaged with various forms of ephemeral, convivial, and quotidian cultural production. LeisureArts is not only post-autonomous, but post-art.

Sal Randolph is a New York based artist engaged in participatory practices in real space and the internet.

The Netzkunstwoerterbuch (in German) is a wiki dictionary of terms relevant for a conversational / dialogical art practice. It may count as post-autonomous work of art.

Elsewhere Artist Collaborative see particularly its participatory simulation game called City, which recently produced a 51 min. docudrama premiered at the Power and Space Conference at Cambridge University