Interventionist Art and Public Space: A Question of Change?

*Katrin Sten
Cerum, Umeå University, Sweden

The purpose of the project is to investigate the historical traces of interventionist art and problematize the concept in relation to the public and public space. The last decades the emphasis on public space has been a common feature globally as well as locally. The cityscape is often looked upon as an open arena for cultural events bringing people together, and this has led to designing of new public spaces as well as redesigning of already existing ones. Public space matters in the contemporary city, often as a symbol of social or cultural sustainability. Art has since historic times been part of the public space for various reasons: as decoration, as manifestation, as memorial, but also as an artistic practice aiming for change in the existing conditions – in other words, as interventionist art. The intentions vary from a wish to highlight existing conditions or raise awareness of a certain problem to promoting actual permanent change. How has this artistic practice developed over time? What are the long term effects and consequences? How is the relation with the public established and, possibly, maintained? The investigation will be made by employing discourse analysis and art analysis, especially by using the perspective and terminology proposed in the field of relational art, whereby one is able to find the gaps or overlaps between the actual "art piece" (object, happening etc.) and the rhetoric (discourse) related to the actual event, site and artist. Two case studies will be presented and analyzed: one local case from Umeå, Sweden; and one international case.

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