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## Towards common ground

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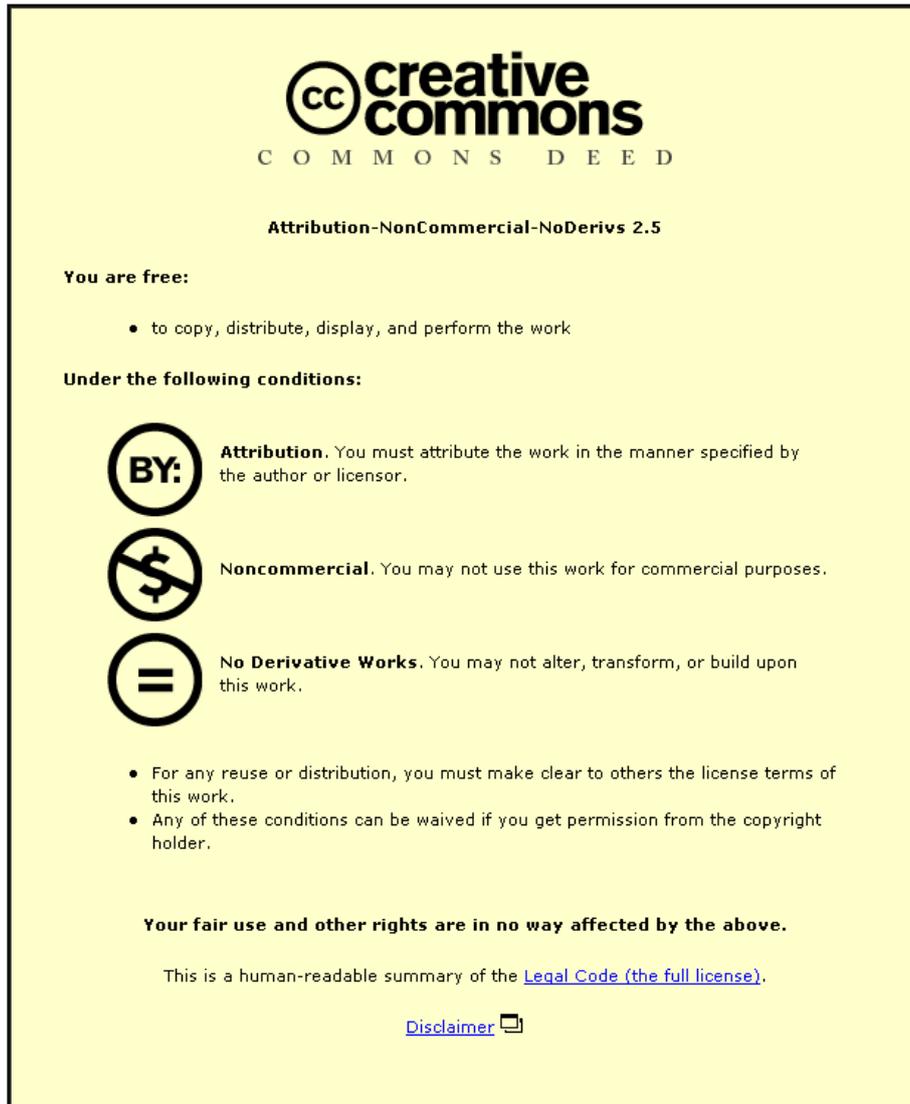
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Beech, Dave, Andy Hewitt, and Mel Jordan. 2019. "Towards Common Ground". figshare.  
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Free art collective

# The manifesto for a New Public

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FREE INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN A SPOKEN CHOIR OF THE  
MANIFESTO FOR A NEW PUBLIC. IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE YOU  
NEED TO PRINT THE PDF (HARD COPIES ARE ALSO BEING DISTRIBUTED)  
AND UNDERLINE EVERY SENTENCE THAT YOU AGREE WITH. BRING  
THE MANIFESTO TO THE EVENT AND READ OUT THOSE  
SECTIONS THAT YOU HAVE UNDER-LINED.

2nd Edition  
Published October  
2012 published by the  
Free art collective  
(Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt  
& Mel Jordan), on the  
occasion of the exhibition  
Adverse Collaborations,  
curated by inbetweenspaces  
at The Block, Brisbane  
Australia

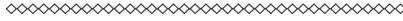
'Towards Common Ground' Clapham Common Bandstand  
2pm Saturday 28 April 2012

FOR DETAILS OF THE SPOKEN CHOIR [HTTP://WWW.STUDIOSTRIKE.COM/BANDSTAND/](http://www.studiostrike.com/bandstand/)

Manifesto for A NEW  
PUBLIC by the Freee art  
collective

*To be read aloud  
collaboratively in the form  
of a 'spoken choir' without  
an audience.*

# THESES



1. **I DECLARE:** The militant individual is the bearer of the force of the collective; the act of becoming a subject, of sticking your neck out and having an individual interpretation or holding an opinion, is always a social accomplishment; I owe my individuality to countless others: a socialist has more people to thank than a conservative because the conservative takes all the credit for the work of others!

2. **WE DECLARE:** The courageous individual draws all their strength from the collective; just as the great actor is a careful observer, the great inventor is a studious consumer of the inventions of others; it takes a community to make a great artist, a city to make an art scene capable of sustaining even one great artist, and an artworld to sustain a generation of brilliant artistic talent; every great inventive artist is produced by and is the carrier of the creativity of the collective; the artist must reconnect with the vast creative public that is the source and purpose of its power.

3. **I SOLEMNLY DECLARE:** The collective should be given all the credit for every individual that it produces; the courage of each individual to stand alone in her or his personal conviction is not the negation of the collective but is its greatest expression; the public is neither the enemy of the individual, nor is it merely the aggregation of individuals, but is the force that charges the individual with individuality; I face you here as more of an individual than I am when I face my image in the mirror!

4. **WE COLLECTIVELY DECLARE:** The adventurous individual is the refraction point of the collective's demand for a new world; the vibrant collective gives rise to the energetic individual who, in turn, calls forth new collective possibilities; the initiative of individuals generates new ideas but only the collective body brings realization to these ideas.

## **5. I DECLARE TO THIS**

**PUBLIC:** Art is the dynamic unity of the individual and collective; art only appears to be a privileged culture when we fail to give all the credit for its achievements to the collective; art belongs to us all; and when art is connected with real social change in the political system (change of the consumer of democracy to producer of society, and transformation of the viewer into the collaborator of artistic production), the relationship between the individual and collective goes through an acute revolution. A revolution strengthens the impulse of invention by recharging the forces of the individual and the collective simultaneously, each as the condition for the other; that is why there is a flourishing of art following a revolution, when the interrelationship between the emancipated individual and the revitalized collective is forged anew!

## **6. WE DECLARE TO ONE**

**ANOTHER:** Invention is always the working out of tendencies and possibilities of the collective and not of the individual; YOU are the precondition for MY potential; WE are the precondition for YOUR potential; we do not gaze at the great individuals and say 'I could not do that!', we say, 'I made that possible!'

## **7. I DECLARE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE WHO HAVE NO VOICE TO MAKE**

**DECLARATIONS:** The world of militant individuals and revolutionary collectives has no other purpose than to give everyone a voice, to transfer power to all; the inventive powers of the masses has been repressed, as has their collective powers of organisation and self-management; we are for an art that anticipates and calls for the great surge of individual and collective vitality that only the democratization of everything can bring!



# PROGRAMME



Artists must abandon all pastoral responsibility for their 'flock'. **The artist is not a secular parson or a cultivated bureaucrat.** Artists who want to look after people should be rejected by society. **Likewise, any public of art that demands the artist to take care of them (or the people they represent) should be rejected by art and artists.** Art is not soft management. **Artists who willingly adopt the role of the social engineer, cultural do-gooder or aesthetic expert are the tools of power.** Art is not cool town planning. **The gallery is not nursery school for grown-ups.** Artists are not plain-clothes police officers. **Artworks are not cheap substitutes for the welfare state.**

Those studying in the art schools in **Chelsea, Loughborough, Wolverhampton** and elsewhere have mustered with local communities and the leaders of the Free art collective as a united dissensual public for problems of art in the public sphere without shutting themselves off from problems of architecture, the theatre, performance, montage etc. **The work of Free proceeds multilaterally: documentation is combined with graphic design, publishing is combined with the applied modeling of useful objects and sculpture is combined with sound.**

The work of Free is a montaging of people, things and ideas in a given place for a particular purpose. **No work is ever re-exhibited but some works have been reformatted for new contexts.** Free does not make site-specific works or community-specific projects. **Art that is suitable for a place or responds sensitively to a community absolves itself from the critical work of transformation.** Free prefers to cut and paste places and people. **Our definition of politics is splitting a room with a provocative remark.** We are for an art that doesn't belong here. **We are not for an art that wins universal assent.** We are for an art that provokes disagreement, debate and dissensus. **Art establishes its public not like a commodity establishes a market - by targeting those with a desire for it - but like a political movement establishes its constituency - by politicizing and recruiting its allies as well as turning away from its enemies.**

It has proved possible to unite eight techniques and nine theories in the production of our work. We make (1) **text art**, (2) **performance**, (3) **print**, (4) **sculpture**, (5) **installation**, (6) **video**, (7) **photography**, and (8) **montage**. We develop (1) **public sphere theory**, (2) **speech act theory**, (3) **Marxist political and economic analysis**, (4) **the theory of art in the age of mechanical and digital reproducibility**, (5) **theories of art's social turn**, (6) **theories of place and space from radical geography**, (7) **theories of hegemony and multitude**, (8) **the theory of the philistine**, and (9) **the political theory of parrhesia.**

We are **nostalgic**, funny, naive, **conservative**, elitist, **not warm**, not caring, not **addressing the key issues**, wasting valuable time, **just making art**, too focused on advertising, **not international enough**, too old for a commercial gallery, **the most difficult artists ever**, the kind of Stalinists that '68 rejected, **very privileged**, too political for a political art exhibition, **the writers of publicity for exhibitions of other artists' work**, not a female artist, **not shortlisted**, not shortlisted again, **not in the show but in the book**.

We are not protest artists. **We do not make activist art**. We do not make participatory art. **We are not public artists**. We are not the debunkers of art. **We do not advertise political ideas**. We are not graffiti artists. **We are not provocateurs**. We are not commodity producers. **We will not brand your conference**. We do not contribute to regeneration projects. **We do not gentrify the post-industrial city**. We do not use marketing for progressive ends. **We do not deconstruct power**. We are not the R&D department for the protest movement.

**We do not oppose big oil sponsorship of the arts because we oppose all sponsorship of the arts**. We do not take part in the gossip politics of pointing fingers at the rich and powerful. **We do not name and shame the bad capitalists because we do not believe that there are any good capitalists**.

We say what we mean and mean what we say. **We stand by what we say and stick our necks out**. We don't ask questions. **We do not treat political slogans as ready-mades**. We are not the anthropologists of political speech. **We do not show a mirror up to ideology**. We don't play 'Devil's advocate'. **We don't speak ironically**. What we say is not open to interpretation. **We form opinions and publish them**. We are committed to fearless speaking and fearless listening. **We are the authors of what we say**. We divide the room. **We back up our beliefs with actions**. We connect our words to our bodies. **We take our opinions into the world with us**. We give our ideas physical form. **We publish**. We occupy the spaces monopolized by advertising and marketing. **We decolonize the public sphere**. We montage reality. **We do not ask you to interpret our works**. We invite you to agree, disagree, join in or join the opposition.

**When will we be able to create a new dialogical world of collective opinion formation that will come to shape art as an integral factor of social life made anew?**

**Now!**

**When will we be able to shed the constraints on art that make it appear extraneous, decorative, aesthetic, poetic, alien and courteous?**

**Now!**

**When will we be able to refunction the gallery so that it is no longer the apparatus of tasteful spectacle?**

**Now!**

**When will we be able to divorce art once and for all from the art market of idiot collectors, dull investors, waxy speculators, half-dead asset managers and guilt-ridden corporations?**

**Now!**

**When will we be able to take art seriously again without having to entertain tourists, educate new audiences, promote big business, implement state policy, and please the taste of collectors?**

**NOW! NOW!**

**NOW!**

**NOW!**

The **possessive individualism** of **shattered personalities** within the **artworld** is **not in accordance with the times** (occupy the arts!) and is one of the forces (**like privatized utilities, austerity economics, kettling, the decimation of the welfare state, the attack on workers' rights, workfare programmes, etc**) that attempt to drag us back into the Victorian age. These **artists who distinguish themselves** from the collective are the **landlords and owners of their personalities**, styles and trademarks. This is a distorted version of the **vital individual**. **Possessive individualism** and the **celebrity culture** that it dishes out **must be set aside** by a new economic **and cultural system of the commons**, for the sake of the **common good**, within commonism, that is to say, communism. The **new economic, social and cultural apparatus for art** must take this **new road of the commons** and enlist **the individual** in the united **collective programme of action** in the gallery, **at school**, in the workplace, in business and commerce, **in production and consumption**, in debate and **public life**, in pleasure and knowledge, **in the family and among strangers**, and **online and in our pockets**. Creating the **new apparatus for art** will achieve a **definite programme corresponding to or fulfilling the movement of' the collective**. Every step forward in **economic, social, political and cultural life** comes about because a **new form of life** is structured by **new democratic social relations** that produce the individual and **the collective simultaneously**. **New art needs new methods** and it is these methods that we apply in the Free art collective **and it has yielded positive results**. In devising the programme **we cannot restrict ourselves to developing new methods for art** but must develop **new social situations for the new art to occupy**. **New art alone does not contribute to the new society of the commons** but the **new apparatuses of art must contribute to the creation of a new system of collective being** in which **individuals are formed from a dynamic collective body**. This is **the only kind of democracy worthy of the name**. It is also known as **socialism, communism and utopia**.

*Based on Vladimir Tatlin, "The Initiative Individual in the Creativity of the Collective" (1919) and the UNOVIS, Program for the Academy at Vitebsk (1920)*