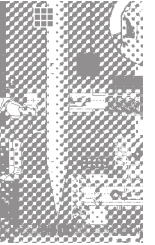


The book you have in your hands is a selection of works created for the last seven editions of Memefest – the International Festival of Radical Communication. Today, Memefest operates as a global network of committed individuals advocating social changes. Our purpose is to create, think, explore, educate and work at the intersection of the communication profession, science, design, art, theory and activism through the use of radical and sophisticated media and communication theory and practice.



We started Memefest because we realized that a fundamental change needed to be made to the communication practices in public space. Today, many people are aware that the predominating communication practices are based on a blind and misleading marketing and commercial paradigm. Thus, they greatly contribute to a society of inequality, exclusion, exploitation and the destruction of natural and social habitats. Some of us did not agree with such communication approaches, theories and practices. We believed that a different logic of communication could be established, which would be directed toward dialogue and would work in the direction of a more equal distribution of power in society. However, there was another perspective. As communication experts, we thought that ethics and the social responsibility of communication are an inherent part of the profession. That something that had objectively harmful effects on our common life could be called »good« and »professional« had always been quite absurd for us.

At first sight, the process of Memefest is simple. Each year, we publish festival guidelines in the form of a written and/or visual text with which we point out a certain problem and challenge participants. They respond to these starting points with their various contributions, ranging from media interventions and artistic multimedia projects to essays and scientific discussions. The international board of curators and editors looks at the submitted works, evaluates them and provides written comments

whose key purpose is pedagogical guidance for the possibility of even better work. The works are published on the website and presented to the public. In addition, Memefest organizes lectures, exhibitions, panel discussions and public interventions. However, since Memefest is not an ordinary festival of the revue type, the festival processes are more complex than they appear at first.

From the very beginning, Memefest understood the festival form as a medium, as a tactically educational, research and communication tool. We have always used this tool to establish different frameworks of the quality of communication. In 2001, when we started the first Memefest, this was still an international student festival of idea dissemination. The festival was organized by two undergraduate students and a postgraduate student from Ljubljana with the support and help of a few like-minded people from abroad. We spread Memefest's meme through various networks. We immediately focused on the Internet and used it to our advantage. The project quickly grew and soon transcended the student frameworks. The first year, we received works from five countries, the second year, from 26 and the third year, from 36 countries. In all the years, we received works from more than 60 countries around the world. Soon, we strengthened the global network with local centers that started realizing Memefest's philosophy in Brazil, Colombia and Serbia. For a short period, we also established local centers in Australia and Spain. It is also interesting that many Universities implemented Memefest within their curriculum where students worked on our guidelines within the formal educational process.

We attribute the strong response to Memefest especially to the need of creators in the field of media and communication to take part in a process that represents an alternative to the existing mainstream advertising, design and art festivals, university marketing communication and design studies and the institutionalized communication practices in public space. Among other things, we notice that today more and more creators are critical of the predominating communication practices and wish to work in the direction of social change. We are glad that some joined the project.

It is important to note that Memefest is completely independent. It operates on a voluntary basis and as an intermediary informal institution and platform connecting very different profiles of people – theoreticians, designers, artists, activists, scientists, creative professionals, researchers and pedagogues from various parts of the world. We depend on nobody but ourselves. It has been so from the very beginning in 2002, and it will remain so in the future. Being independent means that we do not work in the field of concessionary solutions, but are capable of working without market pressure and can follow high criteria of quality and independent communication practice, research activity, theoretical practice, critical thought and teaching.

The field of communication theory, practice and imagination built by Memefest is interdisciplinary. It connects especially sociology, design, art and communication studies, those social sciences and humanities programs that enable us to consider communication practices from more than one perspective. With inter-program connections and the multiplication of perspectives, we therefore establish numerous innovative research and theoretical approaches with which we deconstruct and reconstruct communication discourses. In the field of visual communication, for example, we encourage participants to send in with their work a description indicating what they think about the work's communication and social placement. In the field of critical writing, we encourage theoreticians to intervene in the field of visual communications and other communication fields and critically theoretically question and evaluate their practices. If you read the information accompanying the visual works and the theoretical contributions, you will see that this is not an easy task, for the ideology of a visual spectacle and the surface of the image stretch very far.

To bridge the divide between theory and practice, we – in our work – insist on their intertwinement, on the connection of theoretical knowledge to practical skill. We believe that only such an approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary communication ideology and practice as well as a reflective establishment of a critical discursive mindset and communication practices. The position of criticalness is Memefest's strong point and its distinguishing feature, manifested also at the level of theoretical production. For us, too, Memefest represented a theoretical research field and, to a large extent, the research results contributed to the definition of *socially responsive communication* (Vodeb, 2008), which today is the project's coherent theoretical basis. Our passion for theoretical production is not to be understood merely as an epistemological need for articulating practice; rather, the theory we have in mind should be thought of as a concrete theoretical practice of searching for alternative models, concepts and theoretical solutions for communication practice. Our love for communication practice should be understood as active participation in socio-cultural processes, as a responsive action that constantly searches for the optimal connection between communication efficiency and social responsibility and is directed toward communication as a process, not as a product.

All of us who followed Memefest learned from it. Based on our guidelines we received written and communication works marked by innovativeness, experimentation and conceptual accomplishment. At the same time, culture based on the rough imperfection of the DIY approach established those incisions that proved crucial. Today, they enable us to reveal and subvert the blind spots of contemporary mainstream aesthetic and theoretical paradigms.

The difficulty we quickly detected regarding the predominating communication practices and their comprehension in the production process itself – in practice as well as within the study processes at universities – is hermetic decontextualization. The creation and evaluation of communication works do not take into account the processes of production, distribution, reception and legitimization, nor do they take into consideration the social, cultural and political effects. Evaluation and understanding take place at the surface level of the image. In most cases, they take place without – in our opinion very important – interdisciplinary communication knowledge connecting theory and practice.

Over time, Memefest developed a methodology that enables a highly professional and a more comprehensive consideration of communication theories and practices, establishing a specific social tool with which we connect participants to a collective process of researching and creating knowledge about good communication. Proceeding from the concepts of critical pedagogy, we connected participants who entered their works with the jury by enabling their communication and the transparency of the written comments of each jury member. Based on various comments by editors and curators, the participants can get a broader picture of the manifold perspectives of assessing their work. This is one of the important pedagogic moments that the participants, according to their feedback, do not encounter within university studies. Because of the festival's openness and susceptibility to interdisciplinarity and the heterogeneous perspectives of ratiocination, Memefest succeeded, among other things, in establishing a platform that together with the festival interventions enables a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity and nuances of communication works. An important aspect of Memefest is also its multicultural perspective. The same festival guidelines elicit responses from creators from such different environments as Slovenia, Colombia, Brazil, the United Arab Emirates, Serbia and North America.

As an educational process, Memefest is more formative than selective. The entire process is open, inclusive rather than exclusive. We do not produce stars, but we do foreground those creators we consider to be excellent and innovative. We wish to encourage cooperation, not competition. We believe that cooperation produces the best results. Throughout the years, we have endeavored to cooperate with experts who possess, not only expert knowledge, practical experience and theoretical virtuosity but, above all, integrity. We are glad that we can cooperate with some of the greatest minds of the broad field of critical, radical, socially responsive communication.

One of the results of this long-time cooperation is this book, a collection of selected texts and visual works. Editing this compendium, we wanted to present Memefest

as a coherent whole and at the same time organize and order the content in a logical sequence to provide the reader a detailed and chronological insight into the genesis of the festival's process.

Following the initial discussions by Oliver Vodeb and Bruno Latour, the works are grouped into sections according to festival editions. Within them, the works are organized according to various fields: sociology, communication studies and visual communications. These three categories were intended for students. Undergraduate and postgraduate contributions are published separately. At the beginning of every section, we published the starting points on which the selected works were created as a response and a reflection. At the end, there is a selection of works from the »Beyond...« experimental category. In it, we encouraged works classified under participatory communication, but the category was open; everyone could participate.

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Every visual work is accompanied by basic data about the author, his or her country and a description of the idea, while all the texts include an abstract and key words. We decided to publish the contributions in their original languages – as the works were sent to Memefest. Some are therefore in Slovene and some in English. We did not foreground the award-winning works and leave the reflection, evaluation and contemplation wholly to the reader. All practical communication works do not necessarily meet all the criteria of socially responsive communication. They are published because they are an important and interesting part of the research process on the path of its conceptualization. At the very end, there are short conversations with some of the collaborators and members of the Memefest team and some photos taken on various occasions.

With the survey of Memefest's work, this book offers an insight into the various levels of socially responsive communication. At the same time, this work shows what can be done if we employ such a modus operandi and connect with other committed individuals, how capital modes, institutional frameworks, academic careerism, artisanal populism and artistic elitism can be avoided. Such a way of working, such a position of operation, causes specific social effects and theoretical and practical reflection.

We immensely enjoyed the Memefest processes; we were inspired and enriched. Thanks to all who cooperated with us. To many other ventures!

Oliver Vodeb and Nikola Janović
Ljubljana, November 2010

