

DEVIDAS ARTES

PAULA GUERRA E LÍGIA DABUL (EDS.)

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II.1. Art on the Streets: Past and present practices

II.1. Arte nas ruas: práticas do passado e do presente

Voica Puscasiu

Abstract

This paper explores just some of the many ways in which artistic practices have appeared on streets, and even though the focus will mainly be on the visual arts, the framework will also account for a much broader creative approach of the public space. A secondary theme of the research will be that of observing the ever-evolving relationship of the aforementioned practices with institutions, both established art ones and the ones pertaining to the city, and the policies in between. Seeing the changes on both sides, we analyze them from a social perspective. As radical art starts to find its way into museums and as 'vandalism' is co-opted and heralds gentrification, we can only wonder if the street has gone soft or whether the roughness just increasingly and comfortably out of sight, and how does this affect the right to the city?

Key words: public space, street art, artistic practices, gentrification, commodification.

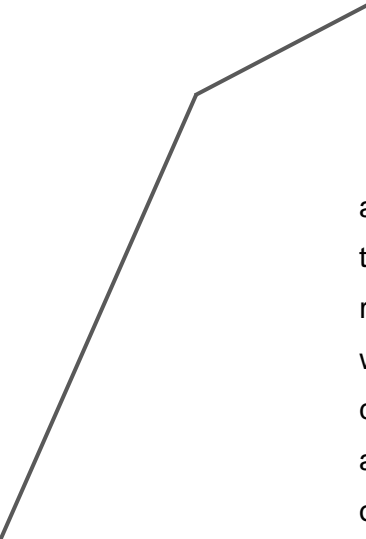
Resumo

Este artigo explora apenas algumas das muitas maneiras pelas quais as práticas artísticas surgiram nas ruas e, embora o foco esteja principalmente nas artes visuais, a estrutura também será responsável por uma abordagem criativa muito mais ampla do espaço público. Um tema secundário da pesquisa será a observação da relação em constante evolução das práticas acima mencionadas com as instituições, tanto das artes estabelecidas quanto das pertencentes à cidade, assim como as políticas intermediárias. Vendo as mudanças de ambos os lados, a nossa análise será feita a partir de uma perspectiva social. À medida que a arte radical começa a entrar nos museus e o "vandalismo" é cooptado e anuncia a gentrificação, podemos indagar se a rua foi suavizada ou se a aspereza está cada vez mais longe e fora de vista, e como isso afeta o direito à cidade..

Palavras-chave: espaço público, arte de rua, práticas artísticas, gentrificação, mercantilização.

1. A broad overview

There is a great many deal of places in which art lives, besides the obvious museum, gallery or collection. Some of these are more accessible than others, while some are truly surprising and unexpected, but what indeed is true for most of them is the fact that the art that usually inhabits them usually has a set of characteristics that sets it apart from the art inside. The difference usually lies within the artist's intention, but it can also come from medium, which is, as it often said – the message (McLuhan, 1964/1994), or even through sheer size



and immobility, thus being practically unable to be contained to the space of the museum. However, this does not necessarily mean it is also entirely removed from the art world nor is it completely out of the reach of institutions, which is precisely where the strain comes from; a strain which requires continuous negotiations and adaptations on behalf of both sides. As we move along the particular case of Street Art, we will also take into account various other artistic and creative practices that take place in the public space, in a more or less chronological arrangement, while also taking note of their beginnings, their reach, and their current place in the engulfing and ever-increasingly regulated institutions.

Art has graced the exterior and, in some degree, the public space throughout the ages, especially when we take into consideration the way statues have always populated gardens and parks, or the even the Roman forum. In modern times, this has been translated to the sculpture garden, an extension which sometimes accompanies a museum like the case of the Hirshorn and the National Gallery of Art, both in Washington DC, or occasionally stands on its own as an open-air gallery as is the case of Kröller-Müller Museum near Otterlo in the Netherlands. This is one of the largest of its kind, spanning 25ha (Dempsey, 2006: 41) and containing an ever-expanding art collection (Richardson, 2000: 55). However, it was only after the rise of postmodernism and the implicit shift in paradigm that art in the public space really came into its own. It is now that sculpture stops being the oversized modernist object simply extracted from the gallery space as Crimp so harshly judged it (1981: 77), but rather through site-specificity, and other means, that not just sculpture but also performances, and other interventions broke through the proverbial white cube and into the streets. At the same time, they interrupted and integrated into the rhythm of everyday life, blurring the boundaries between it and art, in a much more profound way that the classical and modernist monuments ever could.

The first steps towards a detachment of arts from the museum and gallery space came through what is now established as Land Art, with artists that were at once disillusioned with the prospects of modernist sculpture, and also influenced by the social turmoil of the 1960s in the United States, which prompted them to move as far away from established institutions as possible. Notably they took this departure from the system in a most literal sense, and by making art that was largely inaccessible they also wanted to gauge its

strength when it was isolated from the cosmopolite space of the art world (Kastner, 2005: 11-12).

Despite the fact that this is not public art *per se*, this movement is worth mentioning if only since it can be seen as a symptom of how boundaries are challenged though art and the growing gap between artistic visions and the institutions, which paved the way to numerous other endeavors in the same general direction. As seen by them the essence of sculpture, and by extension all art, was that of animating and making a space by giving it meaning, thus by transferring it to the untamed outdoors, they both removed it from the commercial environment of the gallery and demystified it by placing it in the uncomfortable and confrontational world (McEvilley, 1992, in Kastner, 2005: 207). This is also the first indication that not only the galleries were denied, but also the fact that commercialization should be part of the art-making process (Dibbets, 1972 In Kastner, 2005: 208), an ideology which will stand at the core of art in public places until rather recent times.

According to Owens, by employing tactics such as site-specificity, hybridization, and impermanence, Land Art belongs to the postmodern trend (Owens in Wallis & Godine, 1984: 209) but even if, conceptually land artist could be hailed as pioneering heroes, by introducing art to most unorthodox spaces, the realities of their art do not manage to carry through their promises at all times. Most notably the high costs of the terrain and those for the actual production of the artwork, as well as those associated to its maintenance are sometimes covered by various institutions, one such example being Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*. Thus, the break from the galleries was not as definitive as one might imagine from the discourse (De Maria, 1970 In Kastner, 2005: 232). At the same time, the gallery seems to desperately cling on to the property rights despite the fact that the resale value was limited as were the touristic venues due to the remote locations. Another compromise that comes by relatively early on is the fact that museums and galleries still managed to exhibit Land Art, or rather traces of it, mostly through photography and sometimes video.

This solution is wanted by both parties, the institutions acting as veritable hoarders, and the artists realizing that even though they were denying commercialization, they risked utter invisibility if they were not being shown – this also being the only possible way to enter the critics' radars (Sharp in Kastner, 2005: 199). Photography was not the ideal way to experience Land

Art (Waldman, 1971: 44-48 In Kastner, 2005: 210) as it effectively combated most of its sensorial characteristics, but it would have to suffice and it became increasingly important in the documentation of other impermanent art forms such as performance or even street art. At the same time this served the galleries well, since as most of these artworks would only ever be known through the means of photography, which meant that the print would eventually be highly coveted, especially since sometimes photographic documentations is in itself part of the artistic process. Overall the artworks' relationship to the museum remains ambiguous and largely symbolic even though, just like several anti-institutional gestures it still came within its grasp.

Seeing as though the public space has always been somewhat dedicated to congregation, bringing people together sometimes in joy – as we will see later, but often in protest, there is little wonder that another artistic practice that found its place on the streets was the already transgressive performance art. Its utter dissolution of the artistic object, its renunciation of traditional mediums, and its intention of involving the audience often place performance acts in the street. The social unrest we have already mentioned earlier, of course still played a role and before Performance Art became a legitimate, recognized, and institutionalized practice, it was to be found in alternative spaces such as artists' studios, artist-run spaces, or even the streets. Sometimes it was downright bizarre and meant to confound the audiences, while sometimes obviously more pragmatic, meant to confront the public and the establishment (Goldberg, 2004: 134), the gestures also often double as a reminder that the public space which should stand at the forefront of freedom of expression, is in fact, one of exclusion as they are highly legislated. From the poetic and nonsensical actions of Ben Vautier (Warr & Jones, 2006: 72), to the political ones of the Art Workers' Coalition (Lippard, 1970), art steps into the street, and while museums were initially taken aback and even invaded by such actions in performances like that of Yayoi Kusama (Pilling, 2012). Despite such rocky beginnings Performance Art too started to slowly be accepted and 'swallowed up' by museums in their continuous attempt to be thorough and remain relevant. The strategies through this which was accomplished were very similar to those used in the case of Land art – photography and video, but later on, more forward thinking museums, were actually designed with performance art in mind (Varnedoe, Antonelli & Siegel, 2001: 13), thus completing its transition towards an institutionalized art form.

This broad overview and brief notations are meant to show that even though when we think of art in public spaces we most likely envision graffiti and street art – it is in the name after all, it is not by far the only practice that chose to express itself in less than common spaces, nor is it the first to decidedly fight against the established *status quo* in the form of the city authorities or the art world itself. It is also true, that like other artistic practices before it, it has eventually succumbed to being co-opted by the same means it fought against. And eventually even in its most despised form, that of Graffiti, it has gone through the process of artification (Shapiro & Heinich, 2012). This brings us to the focus of this paper in which we will acknowledge how the streets, at least from an artistic point of view, are less and less of a battleground and more of an outdoors gallery.

Although in the second part of this paper we will shift focus towards the mechanisms that have apparently ‘perverted’ the spirit of graffiti and street art and the consequences this brings on the streets, it is very important to underline that the above mentioned currents both suffered the same transformations up to one degree or another. The institution of the museum does not seem to accept defeat. It refuses to become obsolete and through the compromises it accepts it may even become stronger since it became the sole keeper of archival material. This has of course changed with the development of new technologies especially the accessible photography and the presence of the Internet. But if considering that “Street Art is truly the first global art movement fueled by the Internet” (Schiller In Irvine, 2011: 8), this also means that the museum loses this particular advantage, coupled with the accessibility of Street Art pieces, unlike those of Land Art for example, the museum’s interest in this artistic practice is not yet quite so extensive.

However, since street art is proving to be very popular, some museums that like to keep up with the trends have also started to showcase street artists on their walls. The very first such case took place at in 2008 at London’s TATE Modern where famed street artists such as Blu, JR, and Os Gemelos were invited to showcase their work (TATE, 2008), but there have since been many more such collaborations. One notable new method that is being used by small galleries and mammoth institutions alike is that of involving the artist a great deal more in the curatorship and overall organization of such shows (Waclawek, 2011: 174), bringing them closer to the freedom they have on the streets. There are undoubtedly advantages for everyone involved, especially

since some larger, more spectacular projects could only be financed by major institutional players, but the it is good publicity for the museum, for the artist who also gets to fulfill a grand vision, and a real treat for the viewers; a recent and relevant example in this sense is the way JR made the Grand Pyramid of the Louvre 'disappear'(), returning the museum's courtyard to its pre-modernistic look.

2. The paradox of commodification

There is no question that Street Art and to some extent even graffiti-like fonts and writing is popular, even viral in today's slang, and as in this consumerist society, popularity goes hand in hand with commercialization (Encheva, Driessens & Verstraeten, 2013: 10), there is little wonder that both art forms have a tendency towards commodification; that is the process through which something deemed unsalable acquires monetary worth and becomes salable. This is regarded as worrisome by certain scholars and artists alike, but at the same time both movements are considered to adhere to this process and the discourses on this matter tend to be filled with negativity and moral panic (Light et al., 2012: 343). We will try to take on a more factual approach and notice why and how this is happening in the first place.

Of course this process may come as a surprise or a paradox since these works were supposed to be free, a gift for the city, but if one considers art to be a commodity it then makes sense that the practices and products which have gone through artification will eventually come to be commodified. The negative view on commodification comes mainly from the taking into consideration the apparent promise of these illegal art practices whose greatest achievement, in the minds of the critics, was their ability to function as a separate system (CHD, 2013: 42), outside the Foucaultian power relationship, as the streets had no curators nor did the critic's opinion matter in that space. However, if one is to properly analyze the characteristics of these movements in further detail, it will be immediately apparent that things are not as straightforward as they seem. Yet another well-known master of the stencil, Blek le Rat (in Waclawek, 2011: 70), places the issues somewhat differently, yet with the same disapproving tone:

The problem is that 99% of urban artists use Street Art as a means of entering the gallery. This is a fatal error since in a gallery they will be seen by 40 people, in a museum by 10, while on the streets they are seen by 100.000 people. And therein lays the integrity of the artist, to be seen. Selling does not matter, being recognized in a museum does not matter – visibility is what counts.

This may be true and it really does sound quite noble, but it could also be argued that the integrity of artists could stand in them being able to make a living off their craft, if they are to be considered as such, or even come to the attention of art critics, both of which are eased or made possible by showing in galleries. Besides the obvious desire for notoriety, 'selling out' was the main goal of early graffiti writers, especially since illegal work after a certain age implied much more serious consequences. Not even in the early days did authenticity mean doing solely illegal work, instead they were just as willing to paint a commissioned mural or even do their tags on canvases and showing them in a gallery. Often the reason given is that the works could be more intricate in their permanence, but also that the viewers were awarded with a much more intimate and thus intense experience by seeing the works up close (MISS VAN in Waclawek, 2011: 175). The works were often accompanied by photographs of their illegal works, which did function as a selling point, but only from the buyer's perspective, because it was them who sought 'authenticity' in order to justify their purchase. Ever since the late 1970s there were galleries dedicated specifically to this outsider and 'primitive' art, the interesting thing is the fact that as graffiti writers were already used to the self-promoting mechanisms, they became much more actively involved in the selling their own works. This constitutes a very specific attitude, completely uncommon for the contemporary artists of the times (Thompson, 2009: 26), but what is perhaps more important is that by doing so they did not receive any negative reception within their writing community, and they did not lose any street credibility.

The line was drawn when the legal works became obviously different when compared to the illegal ones. This was considered to be inconsistent at best, but more often than that it was seen as a betrayal of their inner creativity and artistic self (Thompson, 2009: 90) by bending your craft and applying your skill in a way which certain buyer or gallery director might desire or expect. This condemnable fake of those times is now compared to when large companies use their art directors to come up with a Graffiti-style advertising piece, as opposed to hiring a real graffiti artist to showcase their product, the latter being a desirable attitude through which artists can profit while still representing the culture (Lombard, 2013: 95,99). This goes to show that for the people in this community commodification is mostly seen as a success, both on a personal level by which they are able to make a living through their

art, but also on a larger level that comes from bringing fame to the artistic movement itself.

The consistent argument is that it is quite clear that commissioned work is not essentially endangering the truthfulness of the practice especially when it's still done on the streets. This can even be shown through the fact that just like many subcultures, graffiti and street art have appropriated characters from the mainstream popular culture since their very beginnings. Seeing as it was influenced more by commercial imagery than by canonical art movements (Waclawek, 2011: 13), it does make perfect sense that Graffiti as a conceptually simple but visually complex practice was fit to be adopted as an image by fashion and advertising, especially by companies catering to a younger audience. More so this is documented to have happened to other youth cultures before it (Manco, 2011: 101). However, as opposed to those cultures that just became fashionable and thus diluted, graffiti is different in the way it seemed to have always hoped for this particular type of inclusion. It was a culture on the fringes, which dreamed of being one of the big actors in the public space. It is in this key that one can read Graffiti's and Street Art's claims to the public space as it wanted to have the power to change and shape their city, and to make it their own.

By taking the vandalism out of graffiti, this gains even more acceptance from audiences that are bound to take it into consideration for its aesthetic qualities. However while it is a fact that gallery-owners, collectors, and to some degree even critics were indeed honestly fascinated by the phenomenon, they appear to be so on a rather superficial level, as they are not overly interested in a more detailed approach nor in completely accepting it as an art form, but instead as an eccentricity, and this is something that is thoroughly felt by the artists (LEE In Hess, 1987: 41). One exception is that of Goldstein (In Thompson, 2009: 49) who first senses, while watching graffiti writers, that art, truly can be anywhere. This shows that one of the less fortunate consequences of Graffiti being in the galleries comes from the foundations of the art world itself.

One of the most negative reactions to the process of commodification came on behalf of the art critics, which argued that graffiti loses a certain 'something' when transferred to a legal environment and is exchanged for money. In their opinion the art form now lacked originality and spontaneity, and the transfer to a legal environment stripped graffiti of its very "spirit" (Danto

In Riggle, 2010: 248), and many were quick to identify this as the demise of the movement. While their arguments might be valid from a certain point of view, one can't help noticing the irony in the act of someone criticizing a culture he does not fully understand, or is part of, especially since it was only through a degree of commodification that they came across the said culture. Many scholars have started to mourn the softening of an artistic practice that still faces serious issues with being recognized as art in the first place. But perhaps it is precisely this softening is just another tactic used by graffiti in order to be able to survive on the streets, and it is much more reasonable to view commodification not necessarily as a corruption of ideals, but as a conscious collaborative process (Lombard, 2013: 92). This is best seen in the modified aesthetics that comes from the commercial incorporation of Graffiti that have evolved from illegible pieces to ones that are readable (Lombard, 2013: 98.) and thus much more relatable for the larger audiences. Again, this difficult to be considered as an actual renunciation of their artistic standards since they continue to create their more intricate pieces, which are directed towards their peer community (Masilamani, 2008: 8) aside from their commissioned works.

For the insiders of the graffiti community the fight against commodification takes on an entirely different dimension. While the appropriation of their own practice by advertising is tolerated, treated as a non-issue or even downright denied (CHD, 2013: 42), the institutional affiliation of street art is seen as immoral. Through the cultural appropriation during which radical ideas are absorbed and diffused into mass-media it is considered that Street Art can no longer be regarded as a counter-culture and that it betrays the very do-it-yourself principles that made it interesting in the first place (Manco, 2011: 101). This biased reaction in the condemnation of street art could be more easily explained through a certain rivalry between the two practices than through ideological arguments. The tone of these writings denotes a certain jealousy or frustration disguised as concern for truthfulness, and this comes as no surprise when considering that there are several objective factors that classify Street Art as the more successful of the two.

First, there is the fact that graffiti had a relatively short life as a gallery art, and it quickly fell out of fashion while street art pieces are currently one the rise and fetching record sums, this alone constitutes a serious blow for the fame-oriented writers. The second and rather more serious reason is the public's acceptance rate towards street art, which is undeniably higher than

that of graffiti. Some iconic pieces are even protected even though they were done illegally (CHD, 2013: 43), while Graffiti-style aesthetics is frowned upon and sometimes still taken down even when done legally, for being “too Graffiti” (Turco, 2014.). There are also more street art commissions when it comes to entertaining an audience or beautifying an area than there are of Graffiti. Thus, graffiti writers have largely stuck to the more comfortable explanation, which is to regard street art as an extension of the system. This is however untruthful, and the people’s preference of street art over graffiti can be explained through the fact that the latter is a much harder culture to penetrate and understand, and that drives people away, while Street Art manages to draw people in through a variety of methods. In this case the situation might be resolved by graffiti living up to the fact that in the democratized public space, street art is simply more successful.

Lombard identifies three main avenues through which these illegal practices have been incorporated into the mainstream: commercial culture, the art world, and governmental institutions (Lombard, 2013: 99). However is important to realize that before getting into any of those situations, the Internet had a huge influence in the popularization of both practices, so it could be appreciated that after all, the spread of the World Wide Web basically managed to save an art form that had not been fully understood. If one only considers the photo archives of old-school graffiti rarely seen outside the United States which ignited the imagination of an entirely new generation who did not grow up with this imagery. It also helped spreading an almost forgotten phenomenon to all the corners of the world, which would have been infinitely harder to do through books, and we can appreciate its positive effect. The growing demand spurred by the Internet was also beneficial for older graffiti writers to practice their art in a secure way. And last, but not least, if we are to revise its devices once again, we’ll see that instead of abandoning its goal to function as a parallel system, Street Art does just that using the Internet. They market themselves much more than other contemporary artists (Daichendt, 2013: 10), they grow a global audience and through it all offer an alternative method of becoming a successful artist in today’s society. street art continues to be responsible for re-imagining what a career in the artistic field looks like, and that is nothing if not a continuing revolt against the power system

3. Notes on current practices and their consequences

The current creative areas have been established as a result of revitalization of post-industrial zones and subsequent gentrification, but what of the locals? How will they get to enjoy this creative city, and what precisely is the role of (street) art in all of this? Gentrification does not happen all at once and there are discernable phases to it (Rogowska, 2014: 226), however once started there rarely is a going back. Researchers and journalists have identified a possible link between Street Art and gentrification, and some are even accusing the artists of influencing and accelerating its appearance in many western metropolises. However this is a much more complex process to be pinned down by only one factor such as Street Art, nonetheless a certain connection exists and the matter should be studied further if only to clarify the circumstances through which this art form has become such a major presence in gentrified areas, and possibly discard some prejudice regarding Street Art practices.

Rafael Schacter has written one of the most pertinent texts on Street Art's connection to this phenomenon (2015), and although it raises some important issues the response from the artistic community has been of general disagreement. The thought process was solid, but where the text failed was in dangerously generalizing Street Art practices and aesthetics, this only managed to over-simplify things and offer a misguided picture that could cause damage to the reception of these artworks. In order to better understand the connection between art, in general, and gentrified areas it is important to start off from the undisputed fact that low-interest areas came to be preferred by artists who not only could afford them, but also had the time and the means and knowledge to refurbish the sites (Bolton, 2013). After the area would gain an artistic and bohemian feel, it started to present a greater interest for the real estate developers which in turn caused a huge incommodity for the local population who could no longer afford to pay their rents or to renew their leases due to prices skyrocketing. This could explain why it is considered that wherever artists go, low-level ethnic cleanse also arrives (Bolton, 2013), but an argument can be made that it happens against the artists will and simply through their presence (Arlandis, 2013).

When discussing gentrification, the distinction between Graffiti and Street Art should once again be made, simply because graffiti has never been accused in participating in it. On the contrary, it is considered that it is still

contained to poorer neighborhoods where it maintains a certain grittiness and the appearance of low of safety levels, lack of law-enforcement, and possibly gang-related activities on the streets. This is itself a prejudice, but it has come to stick, nevertheless. Street Art's more obvious aesthetics on the other hand, opens the way to opinions about its role in gentrification, this shows once more how generalized the idea is, because Street Art comes in so many shapes and sizes and is not at all limited to pretty, colorful, non-confrontational imagery.

The abundance of street art festivals, which is indeed unprecedented, was identified by Schacter as proof of how connected to the establishment and diluted this art form has become (Schacter, 2015). However, we must keep in mind that, as stated above, that not selling out was not exactly the goal of most of the artists involved. Also, this large number of festivals can be indicative of something else as well and that is the sheer popularity and the way society has embraced street art, it is therefore normal that with an increase in production not all the works can be on the same conceptual and/or technical level. It is largely viewed that a sudden rise in quantity is almost always congruent with a decline in quality, but this does not mean quality no longer exists altogether, and to say the decline is intentionally instrumented would not be quite realistic. It is thus important to note that many if not most street art festivals do tend to incorporate the history and culture of the area where they take place, as well as the preferences of the local population. These aspects are not taken lightly especially since it is common sense that the higher the integration level of the works, the more successful and iconic they become, so of course this is considered a priority, and condemnable exceptions should not be viewed as the rule. The one downfall of this particular attitude is the fact that the embracement of local specificities could be rather superficial since invited artists are not from that area (van Helten, in Seetharamam, 2018), and their immersion time in the cultural sphere tends to be limited. This unfortunately leads once again to beautification and an embracing of stereotypes, which might render the works bland and ultimately irrelevant in the long run.

The reasons street artists chose to participate in these types of festivals are manifold and go well beyond the already mentioned desire for recognition or even the financial gain this brings, although both of these feature highly on the list. Just like in the case of touring musicians, street artists usually get the "rockstar" treatment wherever they are invited (Winters In Wickstrom, 2018:

36), but other than that there is also the opportunity to refine one's craft. This is done by meeting several other artists during the festival, watching everybody else work, and by receiving feedback. Of course, another advantage comes from the fact that murals during festivals are done with the full permission of the property owners, so artists can take all the time they need in order to complete a more ambitious project. It could be argued that this diminishes the spontaneity of illicit pieces, but at the same time it is still part of the artist's vision that would not have come to pass otherwise. Yet another positive aspect that artists seem to notice in the festival atmosphere is the fact that since it all happens in broad daylight they get to interact with the passersby (Kulavoor In Seetharamam, 2018). This brings a whole new closeness to their audiences and an entirely different setting the solitary one that is to be found in the studio. It may not seem like much, but it is actually quite a big deal since, as this art is directly dedicated to the city and its inhabitants, their presence and occasional influence during the art-making process is, different than what would normally happen during any other artistic practice as it is specific for art that takes place in the public sphere.

Some festivals even aim towards an improvement of the touristic statute of the region through witty works. One of the most impressive examples is the Tunisian Project *Djerbahood* (Harmel, 2015: 34) that posed issues for the artists in trying to harmonize the murals with the very specific architecture of the village. Another successful initiative is the *L.I.S.A. Project* (Little Italy Street Art) in New York (Turco, 2015), which aims to create Manhattan's only Mural District since Street Art guided tours have already been successfully implemented in some of the city's other boroughs (Betts in Imam, 2012). One could say that this is gentrification at its finest, but the difference lies in the fact that these projects were desired by the locals who decided to capitalize on the popularity of street art for their own benefit. This was not done out of ignorance towards gentrification but simply because that neither of these areas were proper grounds for gentrification to begin with, albeit for different reasons. In the case of *Djerbahood*, located in a remote Tunisian village the process is unattainable since it is characteristic of large urban areas, while Little Italy is not in itself fit for major real estate development, seeing as though it's not exactly a post-industrial wasteland on the fringes of the city. The implementation of these projects could just as well be seen as the local

population exercising their right to shape their habitat using what they think is best, the risk of displacement is low, but the possibility of financial gain is not.

The act of raising the existing standards of life through aesthetics and public art is not in a novel idea in any way and it has also been happening during the initial graffiti surge of the 60s and 70s. Commissioned murals done by Graffiti artists being the most efficient way to stop illegal graffiti production as they occupied the otherwise empty walls and due to the code of the streets writers did not usually cover them up (Lombard, 2013: 99). The landlords were using this method long before street art became the highly popular art form it is today, and before the city's administration could become involved in these dynamics. In other neighborhoods like Paris' 13th arrondissement, the local authorities have employed street art, but once again not necessarily in the sense of pushing for gentrification and creating a new artistic hotspot, but more in towards cleaning up and beautifying the area which is another issue onto itself. More and more studies are starting to research the way public art influences the residents to the point where they could get to identify with their neighborhood or town (Smedley, 2013). This is particularly important for an area filled with social housing buildings populated by immigrants, the residents got to vote what goes on their walls so even if they do create the artworks themselves, they can still feel like they participated. This brought street art even closer to establishing a positive connection and possibly saving what would otherwise be a bland, grey, and impersonal region.

The reverse side of this comes from the fact that just as Richard Florida's initial theory about creativity in cities was not adapted by taking into consideration the distinctive circumstances of each place (Comunian, 2011: 1157), but rather it was seen as a "how-to guide" (Comunian, 2011: 1159), by inviting and embracing the same artists the abundance of festivals further develops a globalized look. Cities from all over the world tend to copy the mural examples of London, Melbourne, or Los Angeles (Seetharamam, 2018) and thus the very specificity they strive for in discourse is diluted and no longer applied.

While festivals of all sorts have been part of city life for a very long time, especially when taking carnivals into consideration (Stilwell, 2017: 122), and they have often included some sort of visual artistic practice like the Madonnari of old, drawing in public in search for a more permanent commission (Rix, 2013: 33). However it is very important to acknowledge that their

environmental negatives are largely outdone by being short-lived (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 328), and it can even be considered that that is even the key to their being accepted, much like a welcomed short-term deviation, after which life can resume its regular course. In a study dedicated to what they call "mixed public goods", namely something which brings positive effects for some members of a community while negatively influencing others from the same community, Cordes and Goldfarb identify public art as one of those types of goods (2007: 159). They also identify several ways through which the downsides can be reduced, and one of them is specifically the fact that they are not permanent (Cordes & Goldfarb, 2007: 165; Phillips, 1989: 335). This can also be said of festivals, however in the case of Street Art festivals this tends to get more complicated, because while the event itself is short-lived, the works have less of an ephemeral nature, as they are not taken down, nor painted over. Thus, in order to try to maintain their positive effect their subject and appearance goes under careful consideration, again straying away from the controversial and rough, towards milder, prettier works.

Even though the multiplication of street art initiatives may hint in a different direction, the authorities' relationship with this art form is not all that tight seeing as though there have been several serious mismanagements of important artistic sites, ironically in the very same areas that have become gentrified. Since this has been happening in recent years the authorities have either failed to recognize the potential of these sites or they were simply not that interested to capitalize on them in this particular sense. One of the most controversial situations was the demolition of *5Pointz*, the co-called "Graffiti Mecca" in New York in order to make room for a luxurious real estate development project (Marks, 2015: 282), but unfortunately this was only one of many such decisions (Arlandis, 2013). Another surprising attitude came from the organizers of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London in their utter failure to acknowledge and incorporate the fantastic Street Art tradition that East London is famous for showed an antiquated attitude towards culture and a grave lack of vision (Howard-Griffin, 2012.). These occasions further demonstrate that there is little substance to the idea that Street Art is the messenger of the system and festivals are its means of delivery. It is also noteworthy that the livability policies discussed in the first chapter of this research rarely, if ever choose to employ street art, but rather stick to sculpture for fear it will encourage illegal practices. The situation is of course fluid, but

for now it seems much more plausible that the connection between Street Art and gentrification lies elsewhere. This is also confirmed by the artists' opinions on Schacter's text which while recognizing some of his points they deny the existence of a conspiracy (Buff Monster In Rushmore, 2015).

Because street art is so varied it would be unrealistic to assume the complete absence of simply decorative pieces, however it must be considered that artists are not the sole culprits in the proliferation of this style, but rather their audiences. While an artist might choose to create a controversial or even offensive work, there is no guarantee that it will get to stay up on the streets, even if it is legally done, much less otherwise. The fact that pretty pieces survive longer speaks to the taste of the people, which is a force to be reckoned with especially in the public space or when working on commission. This is a similar compromise to the one discussed earlier when graffiti artists do more readable pieces for the audience, which does not mean they have stopped producing their more cryptic ones, or that this compromise has somehow driven to extinction the critical side of street art. Rather if we want this situation to change, like in the case of commissioned public art, the only real solution is in raising the standards of the public.

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