

Circostrada Network

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Arts in the Urban Space:
Contemporary Creation
as a Tool

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Summary

Presentation.....	p. 3
<i>Stéphane Simonin</i>	
Town Planning and Street Arts	p. 4
<i>Jean-Pierre Charbonneau</i>	
Spectator in fabula – What Street Theatre Does to Spectators	p. 6
<i>Anne Gonon</i>	
Public Art: between (street) spectacle and the spectacular.....	p. 9
<i>Christian Ruby</i>	
Nomadic Creations.....	p. 12
<i>Alix de Morant</i>	
From the Street Theatre to Theatre in the Public Space.....	p. 15
<i>Joanna Ostrowska</i>	
Artistic Interventions Affirm Public Space	p. 18
<i>Dragan Klaić</i>	
Arts Don't Have to Know How to Behave – A Commentary on Street arts in Contemporary Urban Surroundings.....	p. 21
<i>Corina Suteu & Cristian Neagoe</i>	
Art, Public Space and Creation Centres	p. 26
<i>Ramón Parramón</i>	

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Presentation

Stéphane Simonin

Since 2003, Stéphane Simonin has been Director of HorsLesMurs, the French national resource centre for the circus and street arts. HorsLesMurs is one of four French resources entirely dedicated to the performing arts (along with the National Theatre Centre, the National Dance Centre and the Information and Resource Centre for Contemporary Music). In 2003, HorsLesMurs created Circostrada Network, which includes 32 partners from throughout Europe. The Circostrada Network is a platform for information, research and professional exchange. The Network contributes to the development and structuring of the street and circus arts on the European level.

Throughout the 1970's, artists ventured out into public spaces in search of new performance ground and direct contact with the public. They surely did not imagine that by taking art out of its cultural institutions they would incite so many questions and meet with so many different dimensions of social life.

This is because public space is the physical and symbolic place where all the contradictions of a given society come to light. It is also the embodiment of all the solutions (or non-solutions) put into place by the political body. Social, economic, environmental and cultural issues come together at this exact spot where our common space and framework for living are created.

Artists can help us to understand the major issues of this complex reality, and can act as whistle-blowers to certain evils of modern society. Street artists tend to go much further than those who practice their art within identified cultural locations. Their physical presence in public spaces makes them not only privileged witnesses, but also direct actors within this public sphere.

Politicians, who are always looking for solutions to resolve these problems or relieve social tensions, quickly understood the potential usefulness of the artist's presence in underprivileged spaces. Politicians expect the artist to undergo more than just an artistic process, and hope that in his or her own way the artist will also contribute to the improvement of fellow citizens' lives through an artistic gesture, overall creativity and work as a mediator. Can the artist's intervention aspire to other objectives than that off the completion of his or her artistic performance? Should we worry about the possible exploitation of artistic creation towards political or social ends?

At a debate of professionals scheduled as part of the festival "Viva Cité" in Sotteville-lès-Rouen, an artist gave a surprising answer to this question: "I don't mind being exploited. Quite the contrary, as long as it opens up a free space for me where I can say what I want to say the way I want to say it." After all, if artistic creation is respected as such, could it not serve other interests as well and restore a sense of utility to the work of the artist within society?

The subject of this publication is to further question the effects of artistic intervention in public spaces. We have asked European researchers from varying fields (Cultural Policy, Theatre Studies, Philosophy, Urban Planning, Information and Communication Studies...) to analyse within their respective domains of competence the impact of artists' presence on the public space.

They have, each in their own way, revealed artistic and aesthetic issues as well as the different roles that contemporary creation can play as a tool of development and improvement for our modern societies. Jean-Pierre Charbonneau explains how street artists can contribute to urban transformation by questioning habitual usages, revealing new practices or giving meaning to places. Anne Gordon decodes the way in which street artists break the barrier between actors and spectators, and allow for the beginning of a process that makes the city theatrical. Philosopher Christian Ruby examines the artistic genre and its ability to offer an urban tale apt to encourage cohesion within the city, while Joanna Ostrowska reminds us that street theatre sets goals for itself that are more social than aesthetic in their interrogation. She also supports the creation of a consulting tribune within the urban space. From urban art's example, Corina Suteu and Christian Neagoe analyse the social function of the arts in contemporary society and Alix de Morant addresses the new forms of artistic nomadism, proving artists' desire to rediscover a pertinent usage of the modern world in order to become its geographers, cartographers, and at times even ethnographers. Finally, Ramón Parramón describes how art in public spaces is renewing traditional schemas of management and cultural organisation, and Dragan Klaic describes how the presence of artworks and artists in certain public spaces can contribute to making them visible, different, and alive

This publication shows us the wide range of possible approaches regarding this question. It is the first to bring together so many contributions from European researchers of varying disciplines on issues of art in public space. Through this initiative, the members of the Circostrada network wish to create a common research space on the European level for this theme, which has up until now gone largely unexplored. It does seem to us, however, to be fundamental in order to contribute to the knowledge and recognition of these artistic forms.

Town Planning and the Street Arts

Jean-Pierre Charbonneau

Jean-Pierre Charbonneau is town planner, urban and cultural policy advisor. He was nominated for the National Big Prize of Town Planning 2002. He is currently technical adviser of the cities of Saint-Etienne, Saint-Denis, Copenhagen, Lyon and Grand Lyon.

Author of numerous articles and books on public spaces and urban policies (*Espaces publics, espaces de vie, Les lumières de Lyon, Arts de Villes* Horwarth editions), he also participated in various conferences on those thematics in France and abroad. (www.jpcharbonneau-urbaniste.com)

It is revealing that although the same term, "street arts", is used in both town planning and the domain of theatrical creation in public spaces, the meaning of the term varies. In one case, it indicates the way in which a street, a public area, or its composing elements are laid out. In the other case, it indicates outdoor artistic activities, and especially those by theatre performers.

A single word with two distinct meanings for two different professional milieus: are the disciplines of the street arts and town planning so far removed from each other that there is no possible bridge between them? One is of a temporary nature and refers to the creation of celebrations and events for a wide audience. The other, however, aims for the long-term construction of a city, and is considered the austere, obscure matter of a specialist. But the apparent estrangement between these two different timeframes, sympathies and worlds actually hides several common points, revealing a paradox that surely merits further explanation.

Although town planning deals with the construction of new territories, it also essentially deals with the transformation of the existing city. For beyond the speculations as to what the city of the future might look like, one hardly makes the mistake of believing that it is already here, with its buildings, streets, public spaces, history, inhabitants, networks, lifestyles, culture and tensions.

So what change has taken place to allow the street arts and town planning to have points in common, and what are they?

It is precisely because city life is now, for a large part, an accepted fact. We are no longer in mourning for the rural lifestyle, and desire to live well and to live fully within our city-dweller experience, here and now. Town planning no longer has for its only role to develop the inner city, construct housing, encourage activity, or to create new infrastructure. People are now asking public authorities for new facilities and current answers to issues dealing with quality of life, dynamism, culture, hobbies, collective life experiences, and the expression of belonging to a local society. Town planning must be aware of certain sensitivities, life experiences, and feelings, and cannot hold on to the pretentious ideology according to which it is capable of planning the future. It must deal with atmospheres, and accompany urban life as it evolves, instead of obstinately clinging to its role of great, order-giving authority. This is more the sign of

earned relevance than that of a loss of power for a discipline that continues to discover its role daily within urban society.

Yet, one of the territories wherein the sensitive nature of urban life comes to play is the public space, that is, the theatre of activity for the street arts. If we aspire to find fairer, subtler, and more complex answers to this issue, we now have every interest in creating a fruitful level of complicity between this discipline and urban transformation. A few examples taken from policies carried out within different cities will illustrate the central points of this research.

The street arts allow us to experiment with sites, to test them, and to put them in movement before they are definitively converted. Thus, the Festival des Jardins de Rues in Lyon (2004, 2007) consisted of colonising what was the excessively wide refuse areas in favour of square gardens, all of the same dimension (5m x 5m), and lining them up along the sidewalks. For a moderate cost they allowed the quick creation of wide, comfortable promenades, making for a cheery and welcoming landscape, each garden having been conceived by a different creator (designer, artist, architect, graphic designer).

Conventional development is often a heavy, complex and long act in that its results must be permanent in relation to the harshness of the urban space and its usages. On the contrary, such provisory practices, which do not aim for long-term results, give way to a certain light-heartedness that is missing in urban development, where everything is discussed at length (legitimate as this may be) and everything is surveyed and calculated to endure (although this might be good as such). And in this way new and as of yet unused proposals (of material, management techniques, space creation...) can emerge, as can practices that are not simply the result of that which is known and has been long proven.

The street actors' message is, of course, an artistic one. It aims to bring poetry, a unique approach, and an out-of-the-ordinary form of expression. It also intends to confront creation with the public, in all of its diversity and contradictions, as well as its occasional tensions, and to confront it with the public space, as well as its complexity and richness. In this way, beyond the artistic message, the desire for an exchange between the artist and audience, and the sometimes expected educational message, all contribute to giving the place a meaning, bringing it to life in some other way, building a common history among the city dwellers and questioning old customs. "Is it normal to still see cars crossing this street when the theatre company has shown what a wonderful gathering place it can be for our city?" "Did you notice how, all of a sudden, you see our neighbourhood in another light, and you see how it can be lived in differently?"

City life is a given fact, and celebrations and creation in the urban space are practices that a city must allow. Developments must therefore make them possible (with certain streets very apt for

hosting events, along with possible crowd evacuation toward the nearest metro...). In this regard, the example of the Saint-Denis city centre is an interesting one.

A memorable parade, "Carnavalcade", was organised for the 98 world Cup, and it went from the North to the South of the city, which was made all-pedestrian, and brought together thousands of people. When it was time to renovate the centre, and particularly its urban spaces, the memory of this event inspired authorities to decide that making the territory a large urban stage would be one of its goals, allowing a place for these kind of events in the future. Since the end of construction, a full-fledged seasonal programme has been put into place, giving a sense of coherence to the scheduled cultural and sporting events, and making a full facility out of the central spaces.

Most city councillors were aware of this, having made celebrations and street cultural events key moments in their neighbourhood's life, and they even included such events in the strategies of their political platforms.

The Parade for the Danse de Lyon biennial event is indicative of this joint existence since, every two years in September, it brings together, in the very heart of the city, dance schools trained by professionals and coming from different underprivileged neighbourhoods of the Rhône Alpes. For this, it is in perfect coherence with the town planning policies carried out for years in Greater Lyon, which aims to give these peripheral neighbourhoods the quality of life, the service and the dignity to which all neighbourhoods of the surrounding area are entitled.

So, why not have a peaceful, domestic relationship between creators and developers, as well as creators and politicians?

It is not a matter of that, but is rather about the necessity, in a democracy, of having the street serve as the theatre for public, protest, festive or creative expression. Furthermore, we must come to accept transgression and the seizure of space, which are also factors of a dynamic and lively society. Would it not also be a danger to show only an ethereal vision of urban society, and to erase its opposition? On the other hand, allowing for open expression, and bringing tensions and contradictions to light could actually be fruitful, healthy, and possibly a sign of true inventiveness. It is then up to the local society to regulate conflicts and to occasionally protect itself, according to the rules of democracy, against possible excesses reached during the practice of this legitimate, expressive custom in urban spaces. From this viewpoint, we can define actors of the street arts more as legitimate partners to the authorities than as instruments for the use of politicians and their platforms. This is so even if there may be a concordance of interests, which is not in and of itself a problem.

In Lyon there is also current research on the citywide level to have future developments aim to create, within a not-too-distant timeframe, territories that would be comfortable and welcoming to all. To accomplish this, heavy renovation has been planned as well as low-cost usage changes to quick-access spaces. Within this framework, the street arts could be solicited (the project is currently under review) as an experimental tool dealing with how a city of today could live within the city and its neighbourhoods, as opposed to being a city-museum, or a copy of 19th century urban life. Are we dealing with exploitation or a common search?

There are a certain number of similarities between the skill sets of urban and street art professionals. Thus, for example, places of

celebrations lay out a geography of use for a city and its practices that often intersects with town planners' analyses. We here find the central street, but also the hearts of neighbourhoods, riverbanks, special sites, pathways between neighbourhoods and main locations... A better understanding of the locations, tensions and ruptures is thus constructed. Also, urban development and the organisation of street events mobilise approaches and skills that deal with the same complexity involved in the use of public space. The location must remain accessible to firemen as well as deliveries to local businesses. Permission must be obtained from all who have their say over use of the space. There must be a guaranteed level of safety, and material must be used that can meet the many different needs of the public space. Distances travelled by foot must be crossed under good conditions. Public access by car or by public transportation must be organised on a much wider scale, involving the functioning of the entire city... We are dealing with the central complexity of the urban, and seeing it is enough to convince one of the large number of steps involved, as well as the multitude of obstacles to be overcome in order to bring about any temporary or definitive change.

The street arts can serve as one of a town planner's tools regarding the use of public space. We have started developing this approach in a more systematic way through anticipatory developments that consist of temporarily bringing to life places of movement (after buildings have been demolished, and while waiting for new facilities and new constructions...). It is a matter of constructing proposals of both urban usage and communal activities by relying on local figures (educational, cultural, social...) as a way to mobilise them to participate in the present state of their territory and anticipate its future. We do not immediately set anything, but we experiment and wait and see. However, we also mobilise people, and thus emphasise both the importance of the temporary and the decisions that should, in any case, be made.

This is not an intangible method, but rather a momentary practice in one territory and under certain circumstances. For there are less bridges to be built than there are to be imagined for the actors of each place. However, we thus see the creation of a nice offer of meaning for future projects, as well as exciting possibilities for the vitality of urban society.

Spectator in fabula

What Street Theater Does to Spectators

Anne Gonon

"Why am I in the street? It is because I like people and I want to speak to as many of them as I can, without any restriction."¹

After having worked with French theatre companies, in 2007 Anne Gonon defended a doctoral thesis in Information and Communication Sciences on the function of the spectator in street theatre. She oversaw the editorial co-ordination of the publication *La Relation au public dans les arts de la rue*, which appeared in the *Carnets de rue* collection, published by L'Entretemps in 2006. She regularly publishes articles for the scientific and lay community on her research subject (<http://agonon.free.fr>).

The omnipresence of the audience in artists' discourse is the tip of an iceberg. This iceberg is the complex relationship they maintain with the audience. Two crucial tendencies form it: on one hand, there is the attempt to renew the means of distribution. This takes place out of a desire to meet the other, and especially to meet those who are denied access to art and culture. On the other hand, there is the desire to include the spectator as a central part of scenic authorship. This initial integration of the audience is one of the pre-eminent motors of the artistic act, and translates the altruistic ethic that characterises the field. Through a multitude of devices (scenic, fictional, interactive), the street theatre² generates new forms of theatrical relationships, which must be examined along with their effect on spectators. Such a reflection must be placed in the wider context of contemporary creation, which is strongly marked by the "question of the audience"³. Indeed, we abundantly evoke, and not without some occasional confusion, the relational aesthetic, contextual, or even contactual art⁵, interactive proposals or the participative theatre, etc., all the while maintaining a simplified dichotomy between the seated spectator – passive, and the spectator in movement – active. The analysis of the audience's role in street theatre allows us to examine these questions and, in doing so, provide some perspective for the audience crisis currently experienced throughout the artistic and cultural sectors.

The theatrical irruption hic et nunc

The street theatre performance is a foray by the theatre into the everyday life of urban space, or into a space that is not intended for performance use⁶. Its appearance brings to life a range of different possibilities: the theatre suddenly becomes conceivable here and now, hic et nunc, and therefore everywhere else. This elusive situation temporarily undermines the rules associated with the public space. We sit on the side of the road, we climb the bus shelter, we flock together, we get closer, we look at each other... The spectators' placement and displacement strategies as passers by attest to a practice that is dissonant to their living space⁷. This seizure of physical freedom engenders a shift of perspective with regards to the invested environment. Denis Guénon calls this revelatory process the principle of the "double view": "Through a technique of superimposition, the spectator simultaneously sees two things:

that which is fictitious superimposed on that which is real, that which changes and varies against that which is held in place."⁸ This reality fracture provokes a disruptive effect; the space suddenly seems open. Jean-Jacques Delfour remarks that "The act of opening consists (...) of taking possession of a place that is not intended for the theatrical effect, and creating theatre there through the use of tools, signs and techniques which are not fundamentally foreign to normal theatre."⁹ As such, artists begin a process of theatricalisation of the city and allow for "a multi-level enjoyment of place"¹⁰. This is precisely what Hervé de Lafond and Jacques Livchine, the co-Artistic Directors of the Théâtre de l'Unité, were looking to do when they ran Montbéliard's Centre d'art de plaisanterie¹¹: "The idea is not to simply fill the theatre of Montbéliard, but to fill Montbéliard with theatre."

This act of seizure of the public space and the establishment of a theatrical situation ex nihilo requires the audience's complicity. That is where we find one of the principal variations of the relationship to the street theatre audience. Performances, including those taking place in a theatre, are only made possible through a convention between those who watch and those who are watched. There is an agreement tacitly governing all behaviour considered to be fitting for this ephemeral situation. This contract is constantly being renewed in theatrical street performances, where the terms of the encounter are repeatedly reinvented. Emmanuel Wallon thus points out that "the revision and suspension of the contract are at play within a permanent negotiation. Amendments, additions, improvements, codicils, post-scriptum: on the subject of deciding what is fiction and what is reality, the performers and assistants seem to be like the duettists of a comedy of notables, such as those of Corneille and his contemporaries were able to throw together endlessly."¹² The freedom of movement and of the audience's reaction, the possibility of leaving the site where the show is taking place, or even to disturb it, all make the encounter's fragility palpable. Actors and spectators find themselves in play in the theatrical sense of the term, but also in the mechanical sense when the performance designates the interval between two plays allowing them to move about freely.

A multi-parameter play...

The street theatre has broken through the border between actor and spectator, and has thus abolished that fourth wall which was so characteristic of the theatrical configuration and nearly came to be a scenographic imperative. This systematism tends to alleviate the transgressive impact of the juxtaposition, or of the fusion, of the now-classic spheres of those watching and those watched. Despite the critique put forth by some regarding the structural layout of so-called "conventional" theatres (with all the pejorative connotation this term carries in their mind), street artists themselves do not escape from a certain number of codes. The code, which is intrinsic to performance, allows one to establish the rules of a

contract, a condition sine qua non of the theatrical invitation. The street theatre makes use of many of them and thus shows that, far from being ossifying, these codes generate a geometrically variable theatrical performance. The relationship with the public and the proposition's reception by the spectator are, in all logic, directly influenced by these codes, here compiled and named parameters under simplified forms.

The context of distribution

> The festival / The season / The one-time event

The temporalities

> The non-convocation / The convocation / The residence

The theatricalisation of the spectator

> The containment – the opening / mobility – immobility / The actor relationship – attendance / Local areas

The dramatisation of the spectator

> Hidden fiction / Speaking to the spectator / The spectator's involvement

Each parameter comes in smaller variables¹³. A show often combines several of them, giving birth to a scenographic, symbolic, and at times original place laid out for the spectator. Throughout the course of a single performance, the parameters and synergy between them can vary, shifting the spectator from one role to another, thus dramatically increasing the postures and receptive effects for the spectator. The 26000 couverts company's show, *Le Sens de la visite*¹⁴, which was created in 1996, constitutes an illustrative case study. The inhabitants of a residential neighbourhood are invited to attend a street show offered by an elected official running for office in the next municipal elections. In alternation with phases of wandering, the set sequences follow one after the other, along house façades, or in the middle of a crossroads, and then on to the neighbourhood square for the finale. At any moment, two facets are open to view: the show and its backstage area. This show, which is offered for several hundred spectators, can be performed in festivals, as part of a programmed season, or distributed as a one-time event. From the perspective of the theatricalisation of the spectator, it offers a wide array of variations, which are often simultaneous. The show is in a state of openness, and is permeable to the flow of the street. It is characterised by an explosion of performance hubs in that actors develop, along with the central action, small scenes for one or several spectators.

All forms of relation between the actors and the attendees are explored, from being side to side with the wandering mass, to the more classical frontal approach in a half-circle, and to the fusion between areas of play and of reception. In terms of proxemics all variants are used, from the close proximity of an interaction between an actor and a spectator, to the farthest distance from the group of actors facing the audience. The spectators, seen as neighbourhood residents who have come to see the show (which is, in fact, true!), find themselves integrated dramatically. There are several kinds of interaction with the spectator: speaking directly without expecting any kind of response, actor-spectator dialogue, solicitation, interactions, etc. This results in a profound involvement from the spectator, who must play along and sometimes help an actor in a certain action, or answer a question, etc., and thereby ensures the continuation of the show.

... play as a team

Le Sens de la visite represents a paragon of street artists' ability to take hold of all parameters inherent to a street performance. The performance contract is negotiated in situ and in vivo, and the performers expose themselves to the behaviour of spectators, who will more or less play along with the game. In this case, we witness a particularly harmonious "association"¹⁵ between actors and the audience. This association further establishes the tangible role of the spectator in scenic authorship. The spectator is the missing piece that completes the puzzle in this elusive time for performance. Here we find an explanation of "the process-making that (...) is proper [to the theatre] and its unpredictable nature"¹⁶. This spectator function, which could be considered incomplete, brings about a feeling of added value to the presence of the audience. The spectators sense this strongly, as a female spectator states herself: "Perhaps it materialises... something that is true for the theatre... which is that you have to be there. Even if it's a presence through our imagination or... that isn't concrete. Perhaps that materialises the participation from the spectator, which is necessary in order to have a show."¹⁷

The co-presence finds itself all the more intensified seeing as the street theatre acts like an observatory prism, a magnifying glass revealing part of the mystery behind the theatrical relationship. By giving the audience an involved function, street artists are suggesting that they create a team, in the Goffmanian sense of the term. Erving Goffman defines the concept of a "team" as "a group of people whose very close co-operation is essential to the maintaining of a given definition to a situation"¹⁸. The members of a team behave in such a way as to insure the stability of the interaction that unites them in a given time and place. Through this point of view, the theatrical performance constitutes an interactive situation, governed by existing codes that are decreed by the director (whether or not the audience can move around, speak, or converse with the actors). At the time of performance, adjustments are constantly made between the proposed rules and the behaviour of the spectators, who either accept them or break them. One of the street theatre's particularities is that it offers the spectators behavioural rules that go against those governing daily social interaction, as well as those governing the indoor theatrical performances considered by spectators to be conventional. A level of complicity must therefore arise between the actors and spectators in order for the performance to, like a force field, find its balance. The theatre is therefore more of a "shared experience" than a "transmitted experience"¹⁹, this intense feeling of participation expressed by the spectators is therefore clearly explained, as is the recurring reference to a fully-lived experience.

Benefits of mediation as a means of thwarting some expedients

The street theatre grounds itself in the basic values of the theatre: the encounter, the sharing, and the exchange²⁰. In doing this, it participates in the reactivation of a cultural democratisation that has been judged as being "out of breath"²¹. Although it is certainly naïve to think that the convocation of the theatre in the public space is enough to fix problems of access to art and culture, the distribution of outdoor artistic proposals, a fortiori for free, definitely allows us to reach new audiences that are reactive to the new relational forms offered²². Although the threshold effect is greatly reduced by this easy accessibility, the unhesitant practise of street

shows does not take place without some expedients. Zapping, low attention spans, browsing, partial listening, etc., the state of the street theatre spectator is often characterised by a certain amateurishness. Accessibility tends to demystify the performance and the actors, and might then lessen the feeling of apprehension generated by the theatre, especially for sections of the population that do not engage in cultural practises. It can, however, work as a trap, weakening the established relationship with the performance. By choosing to work in the public space, artists take on a heavy responsibility, which is to take up the challenge of a faultless artistic standard, all the while respecting the ethical imperative they had originally set for themselves – constant openness toward new territories of art and public gathering, and new audiences. Programmers are not exempt from an equally crucial responsibility. They must remain ambitious in their programming choices and imagine new and innovative means of mediation. If street creations, by investing in the public space, have for a long time been considered artworks that integrate their own mediation, it is time to rehabilitate the virtues of profound, community-based work carried out alongside the populations. This work alone, pursued in the long-term, allows us to reap what has been sown at the local street corner, the fruits of the ephemeral.

- 1 "La Vie, c'est simple comme Courcoult". Entretien avec Jean-Luc Courcoult." *Le Bulletin de HorsLesMurs*, 2005, n°30, p.4.
- 2 This article is on the street theatre, but the thoughts expressed here apply to the entirety of the street arts field in as much as most of its artistic proposals, including those that are not directly rooted in the theatre (dance, music, etc.), organise a performance time, that is to say, a moment of confrontation between those who are watched (the performers) and those who are watching (a passerby, a spectator, a resident at his or her window, etc.). This performance layout, which is convoked almost systematically (with extremely diverse formats), allows us to affirm that the street arts are, in fact, rooted in the theatre.
- 3 On the emergence of the audience as a "question" within the theatrical field, see Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux's work, *Figurations du spectateur. Une réflexion par l'image sur le théâtre et sur sa théorie*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.
- 4 cf. Nicolas Bourriaud, *L'Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 1998.
- 5 cf. Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel: création artistique en milieu urbain, en situation, d'intervention, de participation*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002.
- 6 We know that the street arts are a difficult field to delineate. What do we mean by "street", or "urban space"? Companies work in confined spaces (from a school to a supermarket, from the backstage of a theatre to a fairground stall) while others perform in country villages, or even in the countryside (fields, beaches, etc.). We suggest using the broad and non-limiting working definition referring to the smallest common element to all of them: the space is not intended for performance use.
- 7 On this point, see Catherine Aventin, *Les Espaces publics urbains à l'épreuve des actions artistiques*. A doctoral thesis in Engineering Sciences, with a concentration in architecture, directed by Jean-François Augoyard, Ecole Polytechnique de Nantes, 2005.
- 8 Denis Guénoun, "Scènes d'extérieur", conference-debate n°1 of the conference-debate cycle on the street arts, *Scènes Invisibles*, Théâtre Paris-Villette, Paris, 30 January 2006.
- 9 Jean-Jacques Delfour, "Rues et théâtre de rue. Habitation de l'espace urbain et spectacle théâtral", *Espaces et Sociétés*, Les langages de la rue, 1997, n°90-91, p.154.
- 10 Idem, p.155.
- 11 The Théâtre de l'Unité managed the Scène nationale de Montbéliard, renamed then Le Centre d'art et de plaisanterie, from 1991 to 2000. The company is now implanted in Audincourt (www.theatredelunite.com).
- 12 Emmanuel Wallon, "La mobilité du spectateur", *Études Théâtrales*, n°41-42/2008, pp.205-206.
- 13 For several details, see the typology developed in our doctoral thesis in Information and Communication Sciences, *Ethnographie du spectateur. Le théâtre de rue, un dispositif communicationnel analyseur des formes et récits de la réception*. Directed by Serge Chaumier, Université de Bourgogne, 2007.
- 14 The 26000 couverts company, directed by Philippe Nicolle, is based in Dijon. The show *Le Sens de la visite* is no longer in their current repertory (www.26000couverts.org).
- 15 With regards to the public's unique role in the Théâtre du Soleil's 1789, Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux suggests the image of association rather than that of participation, which to her seems incorrect. See Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux's, *L'Assise du théâtre. Pour une étude du spectateur*, Paris, CNRS, 1998, p.94.
- 16 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre post-dramatique*, Paris, L'Arche, 2002, p.92.
- 17 Excerpt of an interview held with a spectator as a part of our thesis.
- 18 Erving Goffman, *La Mise en scène de la vie quotidienne. Volume I – La présentation de soi*, Paris, Minuit, 1973, p.102.
- 19 Hans-Thies Lehmann, op.cit., p.134.
- 20 For more on this subject, see "Le Théâtre de rue, Un théâtre du partage", *Études Théâtrales*, n°41-42/2008.
- 21 See Jean Caune's, *La Démocratisation culturelle. Une médiation à bout de souffle*, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2006.
- 22 This has been demonstrated by the handful of statistic studies available. See: *Les Publics des arts de la rue en Europe*, Cahiers HorsLesMurs, n°30, 2005 or *National Street Arts Audience*, Independent Street Arts Network (ISAN), summer 2003 (www.streetartsnetwork.org.uk).

Public Art:

Between (Street) Spectacle and the Spectacular

Christian Ruby

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After 30 years of practice, it is now an established fact, and a part of public custom. It is widely appreciated by the public. The municipalities, the regions and the State are promoting street shows along with an increasing number of shows expanding into urban spaces. The audience assumes a relaxed form, and is excited by the illuminating and convivial discoveries.

This is precisely why this re-occurring and constantly renewed fact calls for a political questioning, outside of the quality of these shows (which is often undeniable), but we must also examine their unique way of engaging the difference between artistic genres:

- 1 – What hopes, be they aesthetic (aggregation or ascent) and/or civic (formation of a political body) do the political authorities have for the resulting public wandering?
- 2 – As far as the public arts are concerned, can we compare the possible effects of street shows with those of public contemporary art?¹

The motivation behind this double-sided question, which is not artistic but rather aesthetic and political, is less rooted in the problems posed by the content of these shows than it is in the layouts they impose on the street and crowd in its relationship with politics, as well as in the confrontation between the different forms of public art, as of now unequally valued by the political authorities. So this is a two-sided question in that it calls for the following reflection: on one hand urban performances, by the very wandering they impose, refute the classical ideal of a receptor audience, both static and attentive in front of the work of public art, approving in silence the benefits of the communal values celebrated. On the other hand, although public contemporary art may not carry out a critique of classical public art, it does affirm that the shows of our time tend to separate us from ourselves². From this point, it simultaneously stands as the critique of street performances, which often comes against this trap, surely mixing the structuring capacities of society and momentary aggregation.

The confrontation between these two artistic practices can be explained as such: contemporary art offers the audience the chance to exile themselves from the spectacular in order to arrive

at the confrontation of the spectators (interference, interpretive cooperation) amongst themselves in order to better critic the spectacle, or show, while the street spectacle adds spectacle to the show all the while believing that it can be contained? For lack of a solution, we here find the wording of a problem.

So let us address street performances (for example, Royal de Luxe, Transe Express, Pied en Sol, Retouramont³, for those that we know well) from the aesthetic point of view, that is to say the point of view of that which is or that which designates a thing as "public" in these arts (being placed in public, acting in public, holding a public discourse, and being supported by public funds⁴). These are arts in movement within public places, and they pose aesthetic problems differently than how we may examine the street arts, those which maintain only an immobile presence on the sidewalk in fixed locations, so much so that they fill them instead of mobilising them and the crowd of spectators/listeners. These performances do, in fact, imply a momentary modification of the joining (urbanistic) destination of the street, and a modification of the relation between the crowd and the street⁵, as it is now less about spectators standing in place, and in front of whom is performed (theatre or stage) or laid out (procession) the show. It is more about crowds moving with the show, and whose mobility is a central element of the show.

The first question is that of our classification. Which category best allows us to consider these arts? Although they are presented in public places, before a less restrained and more varied audience than in the stage arts, they are not simply crowd arts. These are also arts of the route, of open spaces and potentially pre-political public events. Let us not discuss here the act of street-spectacle which is directly political and activist (regarding a neighbourhood or a cause), or artist-activists (urban interventions intended to disturb public order with humour and vivacity, as we find with *Les Voix de Belleville* or *Reclaim the Streets*, which practice urban activism, a desire to reclaim the streets from its official demonstrations, an unauthorised hijacking and occupation), the tribute paid to the neighbourhood is pre-political in that it keeps to the question: "Who is entitled to the street, after all? Who has the right to exhibit themselves there in front of an audience, in even just a festive way?"

The second question is that of the suitable verb to characterise the mobilisation. Are we talking about an art of wandering? But to wander is to walk without any precise goal, or according to one's whims (almost to stroll). This, however, is not the case. The crowd is linked to the show, and the wandering has a goal and few whims (aside from affability, the press, or movements provided by the show itself). So is this an art of the route? We must also recognise other arts as arts of the route. But can this art form be physically static (which would be the case for *Méridien de Paris*, by Jan Dibbets, this work that only totalises through the

course of the walk) or dynamic in time⁶ (as would be the case most notably with *Stalker*, in Rome, with its way of approaching the urban "which is all that remains when all the landmarks have disappeared and nothing is certain", but which risks a certain uniqueness in its wandering). So, which verb would emphasise the originality of these street arts?

The third question is regarding the status of the crowd, which is, let us insist, integrated in itself as a crowd. First, there is its concrete status. To employ the categories of Jean-Paul Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reasoning*⁷, is it a serial crowd (accomplishing the passive synthesis of a simple sum), a group (expressing a collective liberty), or an organised mass (responding to the double layout of a internalised serial form and a direction towards movement)? We will, of course, lean more towards a passage, through the course of the show, from the first category to the second. This is also what makes it acceptable for several organisers to insist on producing anti-individualist shows. However, we must examine which end is therein reached. Let us note that certain politicians are not displeased with the idea of attracting these shows to the territory of their activity in order to encourage the creation of a tale for the city, for example.

This tale would be communal to the inhabitants and favour a show open to the lack of differentiation of the audiences, a memorial tale, and also an urban tale, good for favouring cohesion within the city, which, according to its need (or to the best of its ability) may rely on intersecting tales to create a consensual urban atmosphere. In this case, the tale of the manifestation is expected to federate locally (the city, territory, or region), because it institutes an identity narrative that can confer meaning to what is urban, or participate in the redefining of a territory, which is often neutralised or trivialised by architectural paucity.

In this way, art can pass for the symbol of local renewal. It is attracted in proportion to the implicit work of mediation carried out within the local population that is meant to operate it. It hangs this abstract mode of cohesion, with its elements of exploitation, over "the people".

For this reason, a fourth question then becomes central, even though the answer has already been implied. How do you make something "public" when it follows patterns of flux? The justification that these arts stand out in front of the inhabitants is not an adequate response. It is also limiting to simply add that they are performing for "all", especially if the argument is to somewhat vainly oppose the street arts and contemporary art around the common-elite couple. More deeply, these arts alter our understanding of the public-attendee. This implies taking into account other forms of sociability than that of the public as seen in the 18th century. The question is, therefore, what is the conceivable relationship between the crowd and the public, and what is the means of structuring carried out by the urban performance within the differential relationships of the world of the performing arts? And to come back to an essential given of classical aesthetics: where is the communal aesthetic, where is the collective, what is the role of the audience in these artistic forms?

Let us now remember that classical aesthetics correlates to the work an audience, which fervently communes around it. The audience, and this is easily justified by the aesthetic judgement⁸,

therefore puts to work a cognitive and physical structure of the common, by collective internalisation of its values: expected wait for the communal celebration of the worthy-artwork, aura of the work and experience of the ceremony. We now are quite familiar with the function of the figure of common meaning in the relationship with the unique, static work. It calls for fascinations, excitement, and acclamations during the ceremonies, or applause... The rites of commemoration or inauguration are moments of collective emotional awakening. They are more or less intense and contagious, and extremely standardised. In them unfurls a feeling of integration, at least momentarily, to the group that is physically present.

However, the aesthetics of the street performance relies on an audience spread out in space, not too condensed and otherwise preoccupied, and it does not immediately call to mind the consciousness or image of a whole to be formed⁹. Although it is not a passive audience, and it even has a mass critical potential, it nonetheless remains invisible since it crosses over habitual boundaries by the reality of works sometimes putting the festive before the artistic throughout its route, and not always managing to invent a new sensibility or new exchanges of the sensible. Or, when they do, they take on all the same mastery of social codes in order to make them effective.

Eventually, the elements, thus condensed, bring us to another problem. On one side there is that of contemporary art, where there unfurls a visible gesture, attempting to question a potentially political community for lack of coming into being. On the other side there is a dispersion that is seemingly euphoric, which is reunited against another formal separation (individualism) but that maintains its separations within the very context of the crowd. Of course, certain performances avoid this, those taking the collective cause, while certain public artworks let themselves go into this decoration¹⁰. But the most important thing is to come back to our central question. If, in its history, public art within the Republic (or at least in that of France) had the vocation of forming a lively communal sense within public space (an identity, a national sentiment¹¹); if, in the last part of its history, contemporary public art were submitted to a progressive exploitation to benefit a renewal of the form of communal unity, for times of crisis, by juxtaposition of "differences"¹² (manufacturer of collective emotion) ; if several contemporary art works have set out to refute this viewpoint; the question is legitimate: what is at stake in the work of public performance, and most notably in the art of the route, that interests politicians so much?

It is no longer the first communal sense (which has dissolved). Could it be just a matter of a prolongation of the juxtaposition (though this is not efficient in the long term)? Or is it the invention of something else? What then? In any case, it is not the invention of the collective, since it does not incite any collective action, and there is certainly the presence of institutional control. In another way, we are witnessing a mix of collective emotionality, momentary communication and effortless conciliation. And sometimes it even results in agitation (sublime or a bit wild).

But does that create an effective sociability? For us the issue is, above all, to know if citizens in these cases open contexts of political conversation within an exploited aesthetical sphere. Do they create a public discourse inducing significance to their general

situation? How is the person who follows the route here transformed? He perceives the situation as being "public". But does movement within these situations lead to discourse and dialogue with the other? How does the wanderer acquire a sense of the collective? How does he play the game that is presented to him (or does he)?

And this question is intensified by yet another. What is the role of the politician within the unfurling of these works? We may wonder if they are brought down to the streets in order to amplify control of the space as well as of urban time!

- 1 For the definition of contemporary art, refer to our publication, *Devenir contemporain ? La couleur du temps au prisme de l'art*, Paris, Le Félin, 2008.
- 2 This was the significance of the Pompidou Centre exposition, 2000, *Au-delà du spectacle*: it developed "how a major cultural phenomenon contaminates artistic practises. The leisure industry affects our economy so deeply that there is no reason to think that the cultural fields remains untouched, or wants to."
- 3 refer to our chronicle in *Urbanisme*, n°357, Paris, 2007.
- 4 refer to our article: "Ce qui est public dans l'art (public)", *L'Observatoire des politiques culturelles*, N° 26, Summer, 2004, Grenoble, p. 29sq.
- 5 The bibliography on "the street" is now considerable. Let us simply refer to one publication combining reflection on the street and art: Collectif, *L'Esthétique de la rue*, Amiens, colloquium L'Harmattan, 1998.
- 6 About his work at the Grand Palais, 2008, Richard Serra points out: "I do not see this work as subscribing to any kind of theatrical tradition, or even a sculptural one. It seem to have more to do with the way we move around and with temporality. It should make one aware of time and the various speeds of movement around and through time. Consciousness of moving in time will be an essential part of the experience" (*Art Press*, n° 345, May 2008, p.32, "Traverser l'espace").
- 7 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960.
- 8 In the classical sense of *Critique du jugement* by Emmanuel Kant, 1793, Paris, GF, 2008.
- 9 With one objection: the case of festivals (Aurillac, Chalons), since the public certainly expects this kind of wait.
- 10 Incidentally, there is also a paradox here: in contemporary art, the activism of the artists is blooming while a doubt persists regarding art's place in the work of the collective vis-à-vis oneself, while political themes are often placed in the centre of the performing arts. So we will note a common point between the two: a questioning of the sense of the collective.
- 11 Cf. the historical synthesis established in the *Dictionnaire critique de la République*, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson, Paris, Flammarion, 2008.
- 12 Cf. the 4 volumes of *Culture Publique*, Paris, MouvementSkite and Sens & Tonka, 2004.

Nomadic Creations, mobile constructions and wilful connections

Alix de Morant

JDancer of education, graduate of the Jacques Lecoq International School, Alix de Morant leads since the nineties researches on artistic nomadisms and aesthetic experiences conducted in public spaces, accompanying some choreographic journeys like those of Dominique Boivin, Christine Quoiraud, Julien Bruneau, Christophe Haleb or Valentine Verhaeghe and more collective thinking like the one of Controversy Public Off Avignon in 1999 and 2000 or of the group Acte in the Paca Region. Associate at the ARIAS CNRS laboratory, she notably contributed to the books "Des écrans sur la Scène", "Buto(s)", "Tatsumi Hijikata'Butoh" and led a critical workshop entitled "Reading and writing contemporary dance" in the University of Lyon II.

Over these past few years, which took place within the flux that presides over a general state of mobility, and this was more often than not a result of the artists' own initiative, new creative devices have appeared that have made circulation no longer just a distributing vector for works, but also a defended issue of poetic and societal innovation. The professional seminar and public gathering on the "Artistic nomadisms and new media: new artistic mobility in Europe", an event organised by the artistic network Containers² at the Théâtre Paris Villette on February 21-22, 2008, will have allowed us to identify over one hundred nomadic projects throughout the continent, and also to question the motivation behind these new ways of operating that are establishing themselves throughout the territories in both an ephemeral and unexpected way.

Adjustable containers piled up in city squares in large lego-like formations or transported by trucks, travelling theatres or river-bound stages, from the portable studio to the virtual museum, from the donkey to the highway, from the road to the walkway, using transportation networks as well as the traceability of new technology (mobile phones, laptop computers, WiFi and GPS devices) that now allow artists to be, like navigators, findable and reachable at all times), contemporary artists have, now more than ever, become full-fledged nomads. Including spectators in their approach, and rediscovering the meaning of a mediation that had once escaped them, they consider themselves to be scenographers of the landscape, or surveyors of the territory. Geographers, cartographers, and sometimes ethnographers³, on the lookout for the latest signs of an ancestral or meteorological nomadism influencing the real or fictitious climates, they are the exact opposite of mass tourism. As visionary travellers, they introduce an aesthetic (or even an ethic?) of displacement. Whether it is a bus, or caravans converted into moving stages or travel simulators, inflatable galleries, or raids into urban territories, their methods take place within a landscape of multi-polar and relatively undefined creation, where performances, works in progress, work sites, installations and wanderings all

"Prefer that which is positive and multifaceted, difference over uniformity, flux over unity, mobile constructions over systems. Consider anything that is productive to be not sedentary, but nomadic."¹

participate from a collapse of the landmarks that once marked off and delineated distinct art territories. As suggested by Luc Boucris, one could think "that it is actually the entire theatrical territory itself that is being placed under the label of the wandering"⁴. The word "progress" was once used to indicate travel, or seasonal travel. We therefore come to consider creation as a means of roaming, whereas the term "work in progress", which has been used as a substitute for the word show or exhibit in many publications or programmes to cultural events, further evokes the elaboration of a process that evolves to the maturity of interplay with a spectator. But there is also the primary notion of the word progress, which, beyond the artwork itself, also calls the artist to be put to a long-term test through a continual state of learning. This "work in progress", addressed from an artist to a spectator invited to follow in its reasoning, designates once again this need for the permanent acculturation that corresponds better to the imperatives of a changing world whose codes are in a constant state of re-adjustment.

A topographical imagination

It indeed seems that conjointly with the phenomena linked with globalisation, there is a growing geographical ambition (or geopolitical, according to Kenneth White⁵) that recovers concepts such as the ethno spheres of Appadurai⁶ (diasporas or public spheres of exile). The semio sphere of Sempri⁷ (fabric made up of images, ideas, and values), and the neurosphere of Flusser⁸ (network made up by the entirety of media and inter-relational flux that stimulate our imagination) incite the return to a new topographical imagination⁹. But in a world that is fully explored and indexed down to the smallest parcel by maps, enlarged to its fringes thanks to images sent back by satellites, and prolonged by immaterial networks, what, for artists, is the new order of mobility while the very vocation of art is the transmission of perception? The virtualisation of the world does not keep us from wanting to walk within it, to venture out, or to gather knowledge. "We are always crossing the horizon, but it remains in the distance", wrote Robert Smithson¹⁰. It is better to bring things to the idea of circulation and arrange a horizon for our vision: the issue of the nomad allows us then to go beyond a shifting context and situate a number of current initiatives while offering them a plan of coherence.

In a first phase for the artists choosing the nomadic life, far from the walls that would like to contain them, and on the lookout for the smallest free space, sometimes wishing to escape all regulation and surveillance, it is a matter of situating themselves within modernity while rediscovering the space as an active partner. The use of the space as a medium is not new, but it is pertinent within this continuation of the stage arts moving to urban expressions, in a transversal logic between disciplines and to the benefit of a dynamic state of articulation and movement. Landscaped itineraries, contextual experiences, or manoeuvres carried out in the public space, from urban wastelands to encampments, we are here confronted

with the notion of site and with the perspective of works, of which a great number are carried out, in situ¹¹, in the historic prolongation of the avant-garde movements which they have inherited. They ensue from Fluxus and questions, on the terrain of an action, which is perhaps not complete, but from a reflective point of view full of the promise of situational variations.

A contextual intelligence

As forays outside of the frameworks meant to present and regulate creative life, situating themselves outside the spaces reserved for the art market, these artworks also contribute to a decentring of relations between different actors of the cultural transaction. Alternately a creative aid and distribution platform, the nomadic equipment can be positioned as "momentary anchorings", to borrow from Paul Ardenne¹². Their goal is both to situate themselves on the exterior (outside, on the periphery, on the border between) in order to open new trails, and to weave, or even to repair certain links. We situate a playground in connection with the past, but also with the future, and we opt for mobile solutions to overcome the interrogations of a world in transition. The desire to travel, to break with a continuation, to put holes in the public space using the invasive, nomadic presence of the war machine, or any other technique of sudden appearance, to occupy the abandoned, to take possession of vacant spaces, the refusal of anything other than a fleeting or provisional installation, an ecosophical conception of art, a thirst for autonomy and the fear of setting a process, all motivate an investigation of the territories as the creation of alternatives put to the test by reality. The sole privilege of social critique, just like the desire to truly involve a public open to enter in movement within what is offered to them, also elicits what Nicolas Bourriaud defined as *Relational Aesthetics*¹³. A space to cover, a length of time to endure, the value of exchange and giving, the artist's commitment, the co-presence of individuals, and the game of interactions, all participate in the communal desire to create new spaces of conviviality. It is both the envelope and the matrix, and it is all around an artistic proposal that is no longer limited to an object, but would even become a particular use of the world. A notable case of this was the cottage village of Mari Mira¹⁴, a small, fabricated artistic utopia on the scale of a global village.

Moving stages

Beyond the diversity of the proposed initiatives, there is also the question of nomadism as a genre. We would not want to enclose all acceptances of nomadism in just one definition, but we can bear witness to the real instability of an artistic period that has put the entire establishment into question, as well as to the variability found in the current reduction of stages, whether they be tow-drawn, self-transporting, or simple areas delineated by a strategic occupation of the space. Through the course of a study¹⁵ focused on nomadic artistic equipment, we saw all sorts of artists, visual artists, circus artists, actors or choreographers as a sample of the large scope of scenic typology, distinguishing observatory devices, such as that of the cinematographic truck of *Cargo Sofia*, Rimini Protokoll's highway project¹⁶, or panoramic devices such as the sky tent of Gigacircus¹⁷, which plays images gleaned by Sylvie Marchand and Lionel Camburet throughout the paths that lead to Compostelle. We have regrouped into a single opus objects, pathways such as that of *Duodiptyque*¹⁸ or of Claire Ingrid Cottenteau in Marseille¹⁹, situations and intentions like this thirst for disorientation of the

Ici Même Grenoble collective²⁰, exploring with *Encore plus à l'est de chez moi* the cities of Eastern Europe to meet new partners, and found new activities. We have travelled from the hideouts where the itinerant company protects itself, keeping the company from falling apart, to the labyrinthine enigma of Constant's New Babylon, an urban utopia of the sixties, today transported in the multimedia environments such as those create by the group Dunes²¹.

This brings us to the following observation. In the nomadic arts, although the stage is in movement, it is nonetheless the starting point and obligatory element of passage. The furtive, unbound or dissolved stage is nomadic, but also retains the potential for exhibiting oneself for artists who have broken away from the well-structured locations in which they no longer feel at home, or which ignore their presence entirely. Walking, for example, is that shifting action that brings on a different positioning, a change of locale and a modification of one's point of view. To place oneself in mobility is not to be satisfied with pre-formulated answers, but to propose a postulate, an unusual angle of approach for considering reality. It is also to start from an idea of hospitality, and of the place that the city may hold for the intrusion of the poetic. Like an introduction, the notion of displacement out of the times and places usually set aside for cultural exchange thus proves to be an impulse intended for all receivers of the artistic act, all the while indicating the role claimed by artists in the transformation of social customs.

From the site to the situation, the mobile stage can therefore be considered the starting point of a reasoning that is reflective, unset, and unable to be set, which is interested in freeing spaces as well as in de-compartmentalizing discourse. In the same way that we substitute a convention for a driving cause (nomadism, as it is seen by Deleuze and Guattari), and contained gesture with oriented gesture, we dismantle the usual representative devices out of preference for an ensemble made up of fully lived moments and their prolongations. Concerned about an architecture that is porous to outside influences, contemporary forms, delineating a common ground of understanding with their audience, call for us to inhabit the moment, developing what Georgina Gore²² called, while speaking about the rave culture, which is a neo-nomadic culture par excellence, an "infinite present". This is also the hope for a direct relationship with an audience, non-differentiated by the intervention of institutional authorities or private operators and other cultural mediators. That is at the very heart of the space-inhabitation of nomadic artists, a space inhabiting that acts or reacts in interaction with a public space that is increasingly sterilized and that is losing its credibility as an agora. From this point of view, an experimental project like the one taken on by Public Art Lab with its mobile studios²³ travelling in 2006 from Berlin to Bratislava is exemplary. It regroupes an entire bundle of horizons by proposing laboratories in vivo for youthful creation, moments set aside for public debate, activities ranging from publications online to performances, diverse ambiances that activate the spectators who are called to move from one module to the next, contrasting climates. A meeting platform for local associations, grounds for social experimentation and attempts to amend the public place, as well as the temporary installation of the device, all participate in a re-appropriation of the city for its inhabitants.

Trajectories and ramifications

Although interventions in the public space are of an ephemeral nature, they nonetheless have repercussions amongst a larger audience, while the artist also feels the need to diversify his artistic

connections. Nomadic art is both the art of the site and the art of the organisation of sites between themselves through the intervention of a certain number of liaising operations. The questions that seem to occupy us here seem to adjust just as much to the issue of artistic nomadism as to the issues of virtual art. According to the theories put forth by the philosopher and art theorist Vilem Flusser, today's nomad should also be able to assimilate new technologies and take advantage of the growth of his perceptive field in order to extend his reasoning into a multimedia environment. Moreover, new perceptive experiences and the superimposition of virtual and real images force the contemporary receiver, confronted with incessant changes, to adopt a nomadic point of view. I will bring this geographic overview to an end then by following the path put forward by Anne Cauquelin in her study of new forms of experimental spatiality by Internet-users to speak of nomadic arts as arts of the site, taking on hybrid forms in order to take into account shifting landscapes. "Site", as she states, since the site is reached by its source, and not by its edges, is in relation with the place, but is also distinguished from it since it is also the centre "whether it is the physical centre, or the contextual, or behavioural centre, transmittable by its use, or whether it be archival. The site contains time in the form of accumulated memories, and it is contained in and by that same temporality of which it provides an expressive image."²⁴

In the logic of nomadic arts, one momentarily occupies a ground. One sows it with a presence. Then, one extracts an ensemble of information having to do with the ground and its occupation, and one patiently cultivates the accumulated traces in order to establish around the prime event an entire game of related operations that one could relate to harvesting, and which therefore allow one to resituate the event within an artistic movement or as an echo of other performances or poetic enterprises carried out at other times or simultaneously in other places. Thus the real importance of navigating tools and technologies that allow one to both capture the fleeting nature of a gathering or event, and then to anchor it within the weavings of the network's widened tapestry. Whether we use canvas to cover the windows of a bus²⁵ in order to project added travel images, open on the city square an office of latitudes with camping furniture, plunge, like Ali Salmi of the Osmosis company, a dancing body into the torments of migration²⁶, or trace a wake in the city with ones footsteps, the entire directorial work for nomadic artists is to invent a trajectory so as to branch out ones extension into the virtual. It therefore follows to say that the nomadic arts, these arts of forecasting and connection, are inasmuch signs of an exploratory phase, where art is looking to inaugurate spaces and dimensions other than the ones that have been reserved for it up until now. This is also one of the reasons why, without wishing to place them in opposition with sedentary mindsets, we would prefer to approach them from a nomadic point of view.

1 Michel Foucault, preface to the American edition of *L'Anti Oedipe* by Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, 1977, in *Dits et Ecrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001, p 134.

2 www.conteners.org

This is the case of Sylvie Marchand, the artistic director of the collective Gigacircus. It is also the case of the photographer Clothilde Grandguillot, who will accompany the travels of the Apprentie company in their search of Rire de l'autre.

3 With regards to the Ici-Même Grenoble company, they diversely practice a groundwork sociology, while the dancer Christine Quoiraud in *Marche et danse*, a project by Villa Medici Hors les Murs in 2000, leaves in search of a state of the world.

4 Luc Boucris "S'installer ou divaguer ? Déambuler !" in "Arts de la scène. Scène des arts III", *Cahiers de Louvain* n° 30, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2004, pp78-79.

5 Kenneth White, *L'Esprit nomade*, Paris, Grasset, 1987.

6 Arjun Appadurai, *Après le colonialisme*, Paris, Payot, 2001.

7 Andrea Semprini, *La Société des flux*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003.

8 Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2003.

9 Gilles A. Thiberghien, *Finis terrae, imaginaires et imaginations cartographiques*, Paris, Bayard, 2007.

10 Robert Smithson, "Incidents au cours d'un déplacement de miroirs dans le Yucatan".

11 In situ : The in Situ term from the sixties takes notes the permanent movement, the situational nature of a certain perspective on an artwork.

12 Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel*, Paris, Flammarion, 2004.

13 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Paris, Les Presses du Réel, 1998.

14 <http://lespasperdus.free.fr/marimira> et Brice Matthieussent, *Mari-Mira, chronique d'un art plastique fait maison*, Montreuil, les éditions de l'œil, 2006.

15 Alix de Morant, *Nomadismes artistiques, des esthétiques de la fluidité*, doctoral thesis, Université Paris X Nanterre, November, 2007, to be published soon.

16 www.rimini-protokoll.de

17 www.gigacircus.net

18 www.conteners.org/CHRISTINE-QUOIRAUD?lang=en

19 www.claireingridcottanceau.net

20 www.icimeme.org/projetest.html

21 www.groupedunes.net

22 Georgina Gore, "The Beats Goes On" in "Danse nomade", revue *Nouvelles de Danse* n° 34/35, Brussels, Contredanse, Spring-Summer, 1998, p.91.

23 www.mobile-studios.org

24 Anne Cauquelin, *Le Site et le paysage*, Paris, PUF, 2002, p.85.

25 www.alternativenomade.org

26 www.osmosiscie.com

From the Street Theater to Theater in the Public Space

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"The increased social sensitivity gives rise to the first impulse releasing creative process. (...) The greater weight belongs – not to the art which enters the street festively – but to the one which is born out of the essence and structures of the city. Created by the spirit and rhythm of city life, and not for the city, from the position of creator-philanthropist."¹

Theatre performances taking place outside buildings are most often defined by a common term "street theatre", which treats all of such phenomena as homogeneous from the point of view of aesthetic principles as well as the choice of space and the consequences of both. Is such treatment valid, however?

At the turn of 2006 and 2007, a group of researchers from all over Europe prepared a study *Street Artists in Europe* concentrating both on history, aesthetics, types of street theatre, as well as on its social context and its influence on the shape of urban space². One of the basis of this report was the survey conducted among the very artists of street theatre, referring, among others, to the influence of such art on social reality and the development of urban spaces. Among a couple of possible answers referring to the aims of creating street theatre, the one very frequently chosen by artists and directors of festivals was about the wish to create the "public space" through their own street performances. Does it mean that contemporary artists by practicing street theatre in reality wish to practice the "public theatre"? And what, in fact, does the term "public space" mean for the contemporary theatre artists?

The theatre's coming out on the street, into the space belonging to "people", the "common" space, which is not subject to mercantile processes, and at the same time freed from the authority of the governing, was supposed to be – in the intention of the artists – the

search for new ways of theatre existence, and the search for new ways of communicating with the audience. Moreover, the socially and politically active theatres in the sixties chose the "neutral" space as it seemed, the one belonging to everyone, also because this is where they could find the audience – partners to initiating the dialog on issues crucial for a community (for instance, racial segregation, the war in Vietnam, or on a more local level – the rise of rent in the tenement building). This treatment of the street as the naturally "public" space can be easily explained, if we quote Jürgen Habermas defining the term. "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs – as when we speak of public places or public houses"³. „The public sphere itself appears as a specific domain – the public domain versus the private. Sometimes the public appears simply as that sector of public opinion that happens to be opposed to the authorities."⁴

Born out of the street (so a place which is "public" in definition) more than out of theatre, it located its goals in social issues, which were not artistic. It also seemed that theatre returned to its "natural" space, restoring the memory and tradition of theatre in urban spaces, which was pushed to the margins by the nineteenth century bourgeois theatre enclosed in a building. Philippe Chaudoir, French sociologist and at the same time researcher of the street theatre, points out, however, that this similarity is extremely misleading, just because of the differences in the "audience", which the past and the contemporary street artists made use of⁵. The public space, in which for example the celebrations of fools took place, had nothing to do with the public space, which the artists of the sixties decided to choose – as they understood it. This difference is very clear, when we quote for instance the analysis of the Christian interpretation of public field by Hannah Arendt: "The Christian hostility towards the public sphere, the inclination, at least of the early Christians, to lead life distanced from the public area as much as it was possible, can also be understood as the self-evident consequence of sacrificing oneself to good deeds"⁶. The public scene is therefore not – like in Aristotle – the area of realization."

The public space of the medieval theatres is thus a space suspicious. Those who enter it with performances put themselves in a position doubly suspicious – the troublesome disturber of the peace and the people "of the margins". Whereas, the artists entering the public space in the sixties were people with the mission, who wanted to change the order of reality, to "save" public space by creating there a "new space of culture"⁷.

Currently, cities also "provide" their space for the artistic activities. The artists on the street are not in "free", "liberated" space. However, they very frequently want to treat it so. Performing on the street is most often not the act of giving oneself to the "Dionysian element", but it is subject to many legal and administrative restrictions. The authorities of cities issue permissions to occupy specific urban space (sometimes claiming money for that, which is for example made possible by a new law in Great Britain), they make sure that

artists obey the regulations of traffic, the level of noise, or security, which in Poland is referred to by the law on mass events.

The theatrical building, although it is not a place *sensu stricto* "private", also has not been perceived by artists as the public place. Robert Schechner explains it, "The theatre with a stage frame, characteristic for the period from the 18th to the 20th century in the West, just as well displays some particular plan and sociometrical design [...]. The Greek amphitheatre is open; during the performances taking place day by day one can see the city around and outside it. This city is POLIS [emphasis by the author – J.O.] within precise geographical and ideological borders. The theatre with a stage frame is a strictly restricted singular building, the entrance to which is scrupulously controlled."⁸ Let's add that the walls of this theatre are supposed to effectively shut what is happening inside off the life of the city, and the entrance to it is possible for only those who can go through this "scrupulous" control thanks to the ticket they have bought and the appropriate appearance – both depending on the financial status of a potential member of the audience.

The coming out into the street by the artists in the sixties should be considered as the appearance of a new theatrical form; it had a different basis, it was a conscious refusal to remain enclosed "inside", in a building.

The ambition of coming out the street initiated in the sixties was to restore the space of a particular community to the "audience"⁹. "In our times, this space is considered as the communicative support for the exchange and creation of the public opinion. For these artists, it is the space which is in need of transformation, in order to make it a common place."¹⁰ Street theatre is intended to enable the creation of a dialogue forum in the urban space, allowing the exchange of thoughts, opinions, so *de facto* it is supposed to be the attempt to revive the "public sphere" in the already quoted here Greek and modern sense. It is the sphere which suffered destruction and which was superseded by the social sphere, abolishing opposition between the public and the private. At the same time, the privatization of the urban space developed itself, as well as mercantile processes, under control by the discourse of authorities.

The beginnings of the development of theatre in the public space seemed to prove its triumph both as a discipline of art as well as a means of communication. The most substantial growth of the number of street theatres in Europe is dated at the end of the sixties and the seventies, which in some respect was the effect of the urban planners having recognized the dangers related to the development of cities, which led to the depopulation of city centers and the emergence of the so called "areas of no importance", otherwise called by Chaudoir *les non-lieux* (non-places). As Chaudoire noticed: "Urban planners during the same years noticed their own inability to contribute to the urban development, and they started to believe that they can achieve their goals by employing street theatre in the process of restoring the health of cities."¹¹ Street theatre, organizing theatre performances and festivals became the integral part of social politics and urban development¹². It has also led to the dependence of street theatre on cities – their authorities, and also on the legal regulations which came with it. The present-day consequence of those historical circumstances is, as the researchers in *Street Artists in Europe* noticed, that in the countries where there didn't develop this bond between the city and the street theatre, either such theatre didn't develop at all, or it is now perceived as a phenomenon potentially dangerous since it is introducing confusion to the city, and it may scare off potential investors¹³.

Thus, the street theatre created its own conception of the public space. It would be then concrete, physical urban space with minimal (favorably no) restrictions of its availability. It wasn't, however, the space understood in any way through its own function, for example a passing way from a house to other useful places in a city (so it doesn't have to be a street or a square, but it could also be areas for walking, the ones provided for entertainment etc.). The public space of street theatre understood in this way would also be the space which could be used by everyone to the same extent, the common space making it easy for various groups of people to meet. This restoration of DIRECT interpersonal relationships seems to be in the present medialized world one of the key values of the street theatre. Therefore, this term "street" has become some sort of conventional name for shows which could take place in various spaces (especially that theatre makes contact with the street as the real space more and more sporadically).

This performing certain tasks which are assigned to theatre by the city (preventing the degradation of the urban space, supporting social integration, among this the integration of the excluded groups, creating public space as a dialogue forum) has led to the change of cities' role, theatres which were related to them also had to change the function they performed. And so, the successive reasons for creating theatre performances in the public space which are referred to by street artists are as follows: the improvement of attractiveness of the city, the strengthening of international image and position of the city, and the work supporting restoration of the city's substance (revitalization of the urban spaces)¹⁴. It has become the reason, unfortunately, why street theatre was very often reduced to the role of tourist attraction, in spite of boisterously expressed declarations. And this, in turn, has led to a situation which was named by Paweł Szkotak, who is himself an author of street performances of Teatr Biuro Podróży, "the censorship of being popular", "which leads to commercialization of artistic expression, theatre performances begin to be treated as something which is supposed to be attractive, and draw audiences"¹⁵. Moreover, theatre in the public space thus treated becomes the method of arranging free time and employing the purchasing power of its audience. The analysis of the process of theatre becoming an example of mercantile processes made by Schechner, may be now perfectly applicable to festivals of the street theatre¹⁶.

The consequences of this transition "from a culture-debating public to a culture consuming public" was described by Habermas. "So-called leisure behavior, once it had become part of the cycle of production and consumption, was already apolitical, if for no other reason than its incapacity to constitute a world emancipated from the immediate constraints of survival needs. When leisure was nothing but a complement to time spent on the job, it could be no more than a different arena for the pursuit of private business affairs that were not transformed into a public communication between private people. The individuated satisfaction of needs might be achieved in a public fashion, namely, in the company of many others."¹⁷ "The leisure activities of the culture-consuming public, on the contrary, themselves take place within a social climate, and they do not require any further discussions. The private form of appropriation removed the ground for a communication about what has been appropriated."¹⁸

For the most radical street artists, the existing space of the street is not as much "public" in definition, meaning available to all and possible to be equally used by all, as it is a space to be conquered,

hostile, agonistic, which can again transform only through artistic activity, at least for a moment, into a space truly public. Agonistic public space is characterized by Chantal Mouffe not as a place of reaching consensus, but "contrary, the public space is the field of battle, in which two hegemonic projects are confronted, without the possibility of the final reconciliation." Therefore "the goal of those who support creating agonistic public spaces is revealing everything that is superseded by the dominating consensus, and so they also imagine the relation of artistic practice and their recipients differently from those whose goal is to create consensus, even if it is supposed to be a critical one. According to the agonistic view, the critical art is the one which incites disagreement by bringing to light what the dominating consensus is trying to fog and obliterate. It is about passing over the voice to all the silenced within the existing hegemony, bringing out the abundance of practices and experiences, which constitute the tissue of given society, together with conflicts, which are brought along."¹⁹

Thus, the public space of the "critical theatre", here identified with radical, will be defined in a completely different way, it is supposed to be not as much the space of summoning even a short lasting community, of deliberate consensus, but more of the emancipation.

Jan Cohen-Cruz systematizing material for the book "Radical Street Performance" explained what this theatre which used the agonistic model would be: "radical" means here "[...] acts that question or re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power. Streets signals theatrics that take place in public by-ways with minimal constrain on access. Performance here indicates expressive behavior intended for public viewing"²⁰. It was Cohen-Cruz who pointed to the fact that the public space is for these theatres not as much the starting point, but a planned goal to reach, and it doesn't have to exist as a specific real space. It may rather be identified with the public sphere²¹.

The social aspect as well as the social impulse were the starting points for the street theatres. Therefore, street theatre was an expression of not only the democratization of art but also the democratization in general, the democratization of appropriated social spaces, which were yet to become the public space again, but democracy understood from the agonistic view, and not the deliberate and consensual. The street appears to be in this context a "means of expression" more difficult to control by authorities, and also by the dominating consensus, than for example the media, which is confirmed by not only the Polish or Maltese street theatre, which were born in the times of martial law in both of the countries, but also by the history of strongly theatricalized mass street protests in Belgrade and the whole Serbia (1991-92, 1996-97). The artists practicing theatre in the public space thus understood evade the alternative imposed on their work: "activists" or "artists" dealing with "what is political". Theatre in the public space understood in such a way relies on estheticisation, it is more difficult to analyze it by means of categories assigned to the works of art. It has, however, the chance of transforming the public space into the space of emancipation.

- 1 Wojciech Krukowski, *Teatr w "teatrze Życia"*. Akademia Ruchu, in *Teatr w miejscach nieteatralnych*, J. Tyszka (ed.), Poznań 1998, p.230.
- 2 Y. Floch (HorsLesMurs), *Street Artists in Europe*, European Parliament, March 2007. www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/searchPerform.do
- 3 J. Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 1.
- 4 Ibid, p. 2
- 5 P. Chadoir, *Discours et figures de l'espace public à travers les "Arts de la Rue"*, La ville en scènes, Paris, 2000.
- 6 H. Arendt, *The human condition*, Kondycja ludzka, Warszawa, 2000, p. 82. Habermas notices, however: "During the Middle Ages in Europe the contrast drawn in Roman law between publicus and privatus was familiar but had no standard use. The precarious attempt to apply it to the legal conditions of the feudal system [...] unintentionally provides evidence that an opposition between the public and private spheres on the ancient (or the modern) model did not exist."
- 7 Compare Bogusław Litwiniec, "Miejsce nietatralne - przestrzeń nowej kultury", in *Teatr w miejscach nieteatralnych*, J. Tyszka (ed.), Poznań, 1998, p. 219-220.
- 8 R. Schechner, *Z zagadnień poetyki dzieła teatralnego*, "Dialog" 1976, nr 5, p. 115.
- 9 As another example of such attempt to restore traditional theatrical building to "the audience" we may take the occupation of the OdDon by students and The Living Theatre group in May 1968.
- 10 Y. Floch, Introduction to Report *Street Artists in Europe*, op. cit., p.22.
- 11 P. Chadoire, *Arts de la rue et espace public*, Collège de Philosophie – Institut Français de Barcelone, April 1999, p. 2.
- 12 This is also present in the modern thinking about the role of art in development of cities. Compare: "Festival impact on Urban Development", www.efa-aef.org/efahome/efrp.cfm
- 13 K. Keresztely, "Street Arts and Artists in the Urban Space: Urban Development and Regulations" in *Street Artists in Europe*, op. cit.
- 14 *Street Artists in Europe*, op. cit.
- 15 The conversation with the author, October 2006.
- 16 Richard Schechner, op. cit.
- 17 J. Habermas, op. cit., p. 160-161.
- 18 Ibidem, p. 163.
- 19 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistyczne przestrzenie publiczne i polityka demokratyczna*, Quoted after: www.recykling.uni.wroc.pl/index.php?section=5&article=154
- 20 J. Cohen-Cruz, "General Introduction", *Radical Street Performance*, op. cit., p. 1.
- 21 Ibid, p. 2

Artistic interventions Affirm Public Space

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Public arts invokes nightmarish associations of every traffic roundabout decorated with a sculpture, every small square embellished with its own fountain, every blind wall covered with a mural – a crowding of the public space with superfluous pieces of art of dubious value through the zealous engagement of urban planners, city bureaucrats and commission-hungry artists. Across Europe citizens' group argue with the authorities over the placement of art objects in public spaces that supposedly offend their taste, values or sense of moral propriety while at the same time large urban zones succumb to permanent neglect and deterioration and elsewhere public space is exposed to merciless corporate usurpation and privatization through intrusive advertisement, expansion of businesses on the sidewalks and squares and illegal construction. The main risk of public art projects is that they become possible only through a series of compromises among the stakeholders and yet, art that is meant to please everyone usually turns into most bland sort of kitsch.

As most European cities experience radical alternation of their demography through migration, it is futile to believe that public art display will automatically improve social cohesion. The urban population is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, in socio-economic standing, cultural background, education, life styles, political views, moral norms and religious beliefs. Consequently, it is increasingly difficult to reach a consensus of local residents about the suitability of a concrete work of art to be placed in their midst for good. Tolerance in practice means mass indifference but more often residents tend to divide themselves and the discord about artistic taste, moral decay, ownership and control escalates into confrontations that pit elitists and populists, officials and residents, artists and art consumers, moralists and libertines against each other, to agitate, protest, argue rather than to engage in a polite intercultural dialog as European Commission would expect them to do in this solemnly proclaimed Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.

Moreover, intercultural dialog itself is a fiction, a publicity stunt, invented to improve the standing of the European Commission in the eyes of the citizens across Europe, while in fact cultures clash, compete with each other, influence and absorb each other and public art controversies across the continent provoke sometimes

more anger than good will. Rather than creating a "feeling good" sentiment, placement of public arts can also cause self-ghettoization, enhance the sense of alienation from civic and political processes and reveal significant cultural fault lines running across many neighborhoods and cities.

Airports as art zones

Has public art then any chance to enrich and inspire collective life as often aimed? A video clip, recently placed on the YouTube (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=RgZuHIDuulk>), gives an emphatic affirmative answer. It shows a mini opera of less than 4 minutes unraveling itself unannounced, as a conspiratorial happening, among the passengers, numb from boredom and exhaustion in the waiting hall of the London Stansted airport. Seemingly provoked by a jammed vending machine, this vivid acting and singing intermezzo of professional performers, costumed as cleaners, security and ground personal, creates a sense of solidarity among abused consumers. I have believed over a long time that airports offer unique opportunities for the display of public arts of various sorts: posters, video, photography, sculpture and installations, documentary film, mini-mime and dance performances and even puppet shows. Amidst ugly plastic-metal-neon functionalism, advertising overflow, expensive stores and shoddy watering holes, airports could offer passengers, those rushing through to make a connection, or to others, waiting for hours for a departure of a much delayed flight, an opportunity to experience art that will unexpectedly pop up in their vicinity – as the Stansted mini opera – or confront them on their route from the security check to the gate via another rip-off shop. Airport art is to alleviate disorientation, soothe the time zones confusion, play on cultural alienation and diffuse the stress caused by the overwhelming security paranoia and long waiting lines for everything. London's Heathrow with its 68 million passengers and Amsterdam Schiphol with 46 million, together with Frankfurt and Paris De Gaulle but also many mid-size and smaller airports have a potential to deliver a huge uninitiated audience for the arts, in a challenging intercultural setting of intensive mobility and despite all the airport concerns about security, fluidity of movement and quick processing efficiency. But to get a fair chance, art needs to compete with the strong orientation of the airport authorities to squeeze advertising revenue from any square inch of space. And yet, advertising is inevitably always the same and so is the shopping experience. Consequently, if airports want to achieve some distinction, to offer some extra value, they better seek it in the opportunities for the artistic intervention in their crowded terminals.

So I felt vindicated recently hearing that Dublin International Airport has appointed its first arts commissioner. This is happening at the time when this airport is building a new terminal and while in Ireland a law requires any investor to set aside 1% of the construc-

tion budget for public art. That stipulation does not have to mean another fountain squeezed in the lobby nor another mosaic decorating the parking garage, but leaves free the investor to subsidize any art form, at any location, even off the construction site, in any time frame. A simple regulation has unleashed a panoply of creative opportunities for the artists in Ireland and for a variety of public spaces to test how art could enhance their public character, but also prompted discussions about procedures, decision making, authority and limits of acceptable and tolerable versus bland, ugly and outrageous art. Hence the Dublin Airport arts commissioner, to bring professional competence and conceptual coherence to the vagaries of corporate mis-en-scene that tend to stay away from anything slightly critical or controversial. The Dublin Airport air commissioner comes on duty years after the successful functioning of the Rijksmuseum branch at the Schiphol airport (between gates E and F, free entrance, 180.000 visitors per year!), displaying some 20 masterpieces in temporary thematic exhibits. The cost of the exhibit surface rental is covered by the profit made by the museum shop under it. Similarly, the Venizelos airport of Athens, opened a few years ago, offers on a gallery in the departure hall a well appointed museum of local archaeological findings and reconstructs the prehistory and early history of the surrounding area. Where else are opportunities for the display and initiation of public art? Not only in the urban squares, streets and parks but elsewhere, in the nature surrounding the cities, in the post-industrial debris and in the historic objects of cultural heritage.

Sensitive ecology

The more urban dwellers become aware of the precious value of endangered and retrenching nature the more reasons to celebrate it through and with art, to bring urban residents into the natural sites by staging performances, concerts and exhibits there. In France and the Netherlands especially the public authorities have enabled and even stimulated the landscape artists to intervene in the nature, sometimes on a rather grand scale. For more than 20 years performers and spectators have gathered for 10 days in June in the dunes, forests, granaries, helmets and on the beaches of the island of Terschelling, off the Dutch North Sea coast. The comprehensive and ambitious programming of the international Oerol festival (www.oerol.nl) attracts 60.000 spectators and generates 1/3 of the island's tourist revenue but also engages practically all of 2.500 island residents as volunteers. In 2008, among the specially commissioned productions is the one by Robert Wilson, created as a complex and slow-paced collective stroll across the island, every single spectator kept at bay from all others and nudged into his/her own solipsist reflection on the nature, own single and unique experience in a constantly changing daylight. Moreover, the vulnerability of the nature is taken into the account at Oerol and the ecological damage of an open air performance and audience concentration on some specific natural spot is carefully measured and afterwards expertly redressed. Festivals thus celebrate the nature by endowing it with intensified sociability of a shared art experience and they also take care of nature's ecological re-balancing.

Post-industrial debris as experimental polygon

Every European city is burdened with former industrial objects, now abandoned and decaying, often transferred from bankrupt private owners into public receivership. Public authorities seek ways how to recycle those chunks of dead real estate and endow them with

new function, mostly in cooperation with private capital. In some cities, an experimental phase is allowed before the final decision can be taken and needed capital secured. Artists are allowed to occasionally stage events in former industrial objects, festivals find there an adventurous temporary shelter, with a minimum of clean up, security and comfort. Former ex-industrial debris becomes a public place, an experimental artistic polygon, especially if artists are allowed to stay there for a while, in a sort of semi-legal squat that can last 2-3 years. They appropriate and slightly re-arrange the place, attract other artists and some curious audiences, shape unexpected partnerships and alliances, initiate a creative dynamic in a spontaneous manner that would be impossible to program top down in a cultural center that is deliberately planned and built for a cultural function. When discussions about the definite renovation heat up, artists ironically enough do not have always the major input and find themselves sometimes at the losing end. The place is renovated, beautified, gentrified and turned into apartments, expensive offices or hubs of "creative industry" but some of the organically developed synergy of temporary artistic users is lost and the public character of the place is gone as soon as temporary artist tenants move away. Even worse, if the real estate prices raise in the vicinity as a consequence of the buzz the artistic activities have created, the cultural function of the ex-factory could be menaced by commercial parties that start eyeing the object destined for a cultural function and the city greedily considering making money by renting the object to a commercial operator instead of spending money on it by subsidizing the artists. In the emerging market economies of post-communist transition, in Budapest, Vilnius, Zagreb, Skopje, Prague and elsewhere, but also in Amsterdam Westerpark for instance, initial ideas to devote converted industrial objects to artistic purpose and public cultural function have come under the pressure of commercial interest that want to exploit them for private gain, sometimes even in cohort with the city officials. It is chiefly through arts that the material traces of the past industrial epoch can be revived as public spaces but only if the local public authorities are determined to firmly stage manage the conversion process and if they are apt enough to co-finance with the private parties but not yield to their dominant influence.

Cultural heritage sites and contemporary art

Objects of cultural heritage are usually publicly owned and institutionalized but the public access and use are restricted by regulations and standards that are supposed to ensure proper protection. Across Europe, thousands of such objects are used occasionally or regularly for the artistic creation and presentation. Concerts, performances, poetry recitals, exhibits, workshops and debates endow palaces, abbeys, churches, castles, guild halls, even baths and prisons with a new function. They become public places not only because of their cultural heritage value but because of the artistic programming. Unfortunately, many cultural heritage places are stuck in their protectionist ideology, in a firm, unalterable monological display of their content, in a hegemonic version of the past and they shun contemporary artistic creativity as problematic, potentially controversial and even inherently inferior to historic art. And yet, so many artists reach out to the material and immaterial cultural heritage, to use it as inspiration, context, mirror and location. What they are doing is to engage in a dialog with the cultural heritage, its stylistic, thematic and narrative elements and underlying ideology. Without a possibility for a dialog none of those sites can rightfully claim to be a public place since their public character

is affirmed through a dialog, confrontation, polemics and debate. Occurrences of contemporary art in the cultural heritage context attract an enlarged and more diversified audience, break with the pattern of passive consumption of the authoritative memory narratives and emancipate those sites from the exclusive claims of the localist and nationalist ideologies that tend to appropriate such places. A cultural heritage site acquires its European and global significance through the presence and radiation of artistic deeds occurring there, through the quality and diversity of the artistic programming implemented in the cultural heritage context, often as its counterpoint. When Peter Greenaway creates his installation *The Flood in the Fort Asperen* (2007, www.fortasperen.nl) this fortress of the Dutch water line defense system from the early 19th c. is reclaimed from its habitual confines, retrieved from the small niche of the Dutch military and architectural history and becomes a site where every visitor and implicitly all of humanity confront a personal version of the deluge, discontinuity mortality and uncertain legacy.

A panoply of opportunities

There are many other types of much frequented places that could enforce their public character by opening themselves for artistic interventions and display of arts: museums of complex historic narratives and historic arts in the first instance, especially suitable to dialog with the modernity through incorporation of the contemporary arts programs; but also post offices, hospital lobbies, town halls, public libraries and even sport facilities, thus places much frequented by many and diverse citizens' groups, not necessarily initiated in the complexity of the contemporary arts and often reluctant to enter prestigious buildings, built on purpose to serve as permanent art temples. The advantage of art in this sort of public place is that it pops up where people already are on some other business and other purpose rather than expect them to come to an earmarked art zone, specifically to experience art, like the mini opera unraveling itself unexpectedly in the morning in the departure hall of the Stansted airport. I am not forgetting the shopping malls but keep them deliberately off my list because they are only seemingly public spaces and in fact corporate owned commercial zones with hired private security guards and strict rules of behavior. Their managers even reserve the right to evict people whom they consider bothersome and play classical music primarily in order to chase away teenagers from their favorite hangouts. The public purpose is subservient there to a private commercial gain and the operators put up with some decorative function of the visual arts and with the performing arts acts if they are entertaining, so as to provide a short rest for the exhausted shopper or keep the kids busy while the parents continue on a shopping spree.

A matter of citizenship

The quality of urban life cannot be derived from the "creative city" mantras nor guaranteed by the emergence of going-out, shop-and-drink zones (alcoholic agoras, as Franco Bianchini calls them) but from the vitality of urban public spaces available and the art experiences offered regularly in them. This art will be more appreciated if it is in aesthetic and communication sense markedly different from the art offered in the museums, galleries, theaters and concert halls, resisting the dumbing down tendencies and benevolent trivialization. Feasts, carnivals, processions and similar superficial celebrations of cultural diversity and glitzy displays of truncated

traditions cannot hurt but can't advance much the cause of the arts nor affirm the standing of public spaces in the contemporary city. Art in public spaces inevitably invokes questions of citizenship, on the neighborhood or city wide level, in terms of access, involvement and active participation of various groups of residents, their sense of responsibility and capacity to negotiate their divergent interests among themselves. Those who feel as stakeholders of public places will often disagree about its meaning, usage and the type of arts to be displayed in it but have a common interest to make this space inclusive, diverse and vibrant. As for the artists and artistic organizations, they will make their appearance in the public space more effective and radiant if they create alliances with various civic group and address their members as the primary audience. While city authorities in many places still tend to focus on consumers and tourists, artists and artistic organizations better remember that they need a strong civil society as much as a vital economy to prosper and that open, inclusive, appealing public spaces offer opportunities to reach out to a new public.

Arts Don't Have to Know How to Behave - A Commentary on Street art in Contemporary Urban Surroundings

Corina Suteu & Cristian Neagoe

Corina Suteu started her career as a theatre critic in Romania. She became interested in managing cultural organizations immediately after the fall of communism. Passionate about an emerging and controversial discipline (cultural policies), she continued working in France, head of a European master's degree in cultural management and became an international training expert. Her key interests continually balanced a focus on the relation between policies and practices in the arts. In her present capacity as director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York, she developed a keen interest in the emerging arts and the impact of creativity on the urban environment. She considers street art exemplary for a new way of doing art today and is interested in finding out in which way public policies are instrumental to it.

Cristian Neagoe studied Philosophy at the University of Bucharest, graduating with a thesis on authority and open knowledge in virtual communities. He worked as a librarian, translator, events organizer and PR manager in Bucharest and New York. He writes articles on art, activism and online living for several cultural magazines in Romania. He is interested in deviant, hardcore, underground aspects of contemporary social behaviour and artistic expression. His critical perspective is nourished by the need to render objective visibility to apparently conflicting creative visions.

From the outset, the issue of street art, as presented in the following pages, will be considered more in its creative dimension than in its political one. The interest of the ideas explored lies in knowing how much today this kind of art is part of a more general resurgence of a wider creative process. Also, the perspective chosen as well as the style (an ad hoc commentary using direct observation of street art practices and set in a general historical context based on cultural studies in Europe) are aimed at pinpointing some critical landmarks and at paving the way for further comments and ideas.

The themes explored in this paper relate to the following questions:

- How and why did the arts escape from being institutionalized and return to the public space (the example of street art).
- Is street art a possible oasis of self-expression for recalibrating creative freedom? Is street art reinventing the content and social function of the arts?
- Can street art's creative content become part of marketing logic as readily as its traditional counterpart - the high arts?
- Are contemporary arts in the urban space still instrumental in developing social capital and emancipating audiences? Or

have they become more effective in empowering the individual to resist the image standardization logic inherent in postmodern urban environments?¹

In order to address these issues, it may help to look at the historical perspective of the social function of the arts in modern European society.

European cultural public policies after the 1970s: the tension between free access and institutional constraint

Shown to be a key preoccupation of all Anglo-Saxon cultural policy research in 1997¹ with the identification of 50 indicators regarding the social impact of the arts and completed in 2008 with a comprehensive study published by Bennett and Belfiore², the question of how much can and do the arts influence and reshape society has permeated the history of European public cultural policy-making ever since the time of the ancient Greeks. Two are the main modern approaches of other European countries and both are rooted in the same sense of using art as a means of education and citizenship-building in an urban context. Anglo-Saxons have been more preoccupied than other European nations in documenting the issue in recent decades because Great Britain's cultural growth is mostly based on private investment and participation in the arts through private funding. Its policy system is based on regularly assessing results on the basis of indicators that help to understand and classify the cultural practices of groups and communities.

By contrast, France, the Latin countries and former communist countries have theorized less on the instrumental character of arts in regard to its social impact, because the approach to cultural policy design and implementation has been non participative, based on top-down public policy decision-making methods, out of which further cultural practices are assumed to derive³. The Netherlands is closer to the Anglo-Saxon approach, while Germany, for instance, reproduces, at a regional level, the French policy pattern⁴.

These differences in approach were only reconsidered in the 1980s, when the emergence of broad urban, multicultural spaces brought to light the mismatch between the top-down approach of traditional cultural policy and the grassroots-based urban regeneration policies. This was necessary for the arts to play their key role as 'glue' for the building of social capital within newly designed urban environments⁵.

During the same period, the proliferation of cultural institutions, of cultural practices, of comprehensive access and its counterpart - participation, led to what Bennett calls 'cultural pessimism', i.e. culture seen as an affordable and banal commodity by broad European audiences and the arts understood as a universal

remedy by all public authorities and by the artists themselves and subsequently "used" to heal and prevent social ills.

If one tries to put this process into a nutshell, a paradox immediately becomes apparent. On the one hand, over the last half century audiences gained extended access to all forms of art and culture and, on the other hand, clearly defined borders between elite and popular culture disappeared. By contrast, a process of exclusive confinement of the arts to the inside of proliferating cultural institutions, the building of important and multidisciplinary cultural centres all over Europe, the generalization of heritage restoration and the recycling of older cultural infrastructures and industrial sites into creative houses gradually brought spontaneous creative processes to a dead end. Democratization and access combined with confinement and the taming, the 'bureaucratization' of the artistic dynamics, are responsible for this paradox.

One can conclude that the two most important processes relating to cultural activities after World War II – cultural democracy and cultural democratization – both produced, thanks to the institutionalization of the arts, an important aspect of "non-freedom", of closure, rendering too much stability and order to the most unsettling and fragile domain of human expression.

The invasion of new technologies: a shifting point

The 1990s brought the technological revolution, with its specific cultural practices and its new communication paradigms. This process introduced a completely innovative way of distributing the arts and of participating in art-making.

Today, the contemporary passer-by is highly connected through the internet and the mobile phone. He has access to recording devices and enough "memory" to carry around (in digital form) an entire library (be it text, music, or video). He is no more just a consumer of culture; he can also act as a producer, a mixing and remixing factor (or, in Lessig's terms⁶, an active member of the 'read-write culture', as opposed to the 'read-only culture' that dominated the 20th century). He is under a constant visual bombardment; thus, he is more prepared to filter it, to critically dismiss it, to demand higher standards. As the stream accelerates reproduction and transmission of content, emotions related to it become themselves fugitive, giving place to new ones, in a never-ending process that leads to some kind of a generalised attention deficit disorder. It's hard to concentrate on something when so many things happen simultaneously, each of them fighting for attention, each of them trying to seduce. So the passer-by just slides from one symbol to the other, developing a protective shield that lets few things pass. Such a continuous stream of strong emotions makes the subject immune or numb to them. Revelation or catharsis is less likely to occur in such an environment. It is replaced by a state of numbness or by a series of instant semi-prepared catharses, 3-in-1. "Live fast, die young, and leave behind a beautiful corpse" seems to be the contemporary mantra, and urban spaces are becoming filled with "temporary creations done with permanent markers" (to quote Dan Perjovschi in one of his recent exhibitions⁷).

On the commercial side, recent decades have been characterized by other processes that influence the radical revolution of audiences. International market practices induce a strong desire for consumption, abundance and luxury very much nourished

by artistic symbols and signs, thus emptying them of cultural meaning and turning them into basic marketing propaganda. Some forms of art became vital tools for advertising businesses, like graphic design, illustration, animation, cinematography and music. The multiplicity of signs and their constant repetition in order to impose and identify brands penetrates and parasites the global visual culture, giving birth to new archetypal figures (the "logos"⁸, the "memes"⁹). Their methods of entering the minds and lives of "consumers" make them too aware of their presence, creating suspicion. Consumers start building barricades: they are drawn only to smart ads or ones so stupid they can only laugh at them.

Street arts and the new artistic paradigm for authority

Due to globalization, national cultures no longer predominate in shaping taste. Theatre, opera, and ballet audiences represent a minority compared to the huge on-line audiences of multimedia content. The criteria for legitimate and mainstream arts have disintegrated and, increasingly, people have started to decide on their own what is valuable, no longer as a result of a shared initiation into elite codes regulating what value stands for, but mostly according to what a critical mass of users has decided, each of them on his own. The domination of the 'user' thus asserted, the question of authority is seriously shaken and a radical change from the notion of "collective culture" to one of "connective cultures" occurs.

This change also redefines the notion of authority in the arts. Traditionally, human societies use organizational systems based on hierarchies and authority to identify valuable information. Concerning the efficiency of disseminating knowledge, hierarchical structures act as a collection of filters. There is only one official path between any two knots on a graph, so the probability that people will circulate information decreases directly with the number of knots it has to pass through to get to its destination. Assuming that all members of the structure are benevolent, information will only be passed forward if it is seen as relevant for the recipient. So any error in evaluating information risks blocking its distribution. Similarly, if an error occurs it gets propagated in the same way as correct information, hierarchical structures recognizing the absolute authority of the superior knots. Information coming from a member on a superior level is correct based solely on the authority of its issuer. This absolute epistemic authority is functional only if the transmitted information is correct and the members on the lower levels are capable of reproducing and processing it optimally.

The world we live in has strongly accelerated its rhythms in the last decades, and the need for fast, good quality information has followed closely. Traditional methods prove not to be suitable any more. Hierarchical structures are very efficient for completing tasks in a divide and rule paradigm, but the division of labour is no longer crucial today; it is more the efficiency with which one succeeds in communicating and sharing knowledge. Networks are better suited for facilitating the free exchange of knowledge¹⁰, for connecting tastes instead of imposing one taste.

In a similar way, an appreciation of value in art tends to escape traditional authority based on a hierarchy of initiates and takes its strength from networks of people with a common denominator,

their interest in art. High level contemporary art tends to lose its link with the common viewer, to become less initiated in its code, and more self-referential.

Dissolving the 'high/low' cultural dichotomy, surrealism and pop art long ago paved the way for street art performed by anyone who wants to 'exhibit'. What kind of art is more suitable for ephemeral emotions than the one that has no intention of outsmarting or outliving the viewer? Just a glimpse, an unexpected flash in the middle of the journey to the office or the restaurant, is enough to steal a reaction. It is this sincerity of street art, this acknowledgment of the perishable, of *vanitas vanitatum*, that makes it attractive and valuable to the passer-by.

Street art not only does not need exhibiting space (art galleries, museums, bank lobbies), it does not need art critics, collectors, curators, it does not rely on the academic authorization process, nor on its educational program. The materials it employs are quite cheap, its exposure is immediate and the audience much more numerous than that of modern institutions. Street artists do not need approval to do their work, as it is already illegal. It clashes with the laws of property and it tends to create a "broken window effect"¹¹.

Arguments on street art as a tool for creative content renewal

Thus, street art is a response to this new pattern of global societies' behaviour. We will observe some of its characteristics in trying to understand why this creative form has gained such importance in the metabolism of the postmodern city.

First, the release from cultural mainstream institutions, combined with the necessity of refreshingly direct interaction with audiences, characterise the street art mode. There is no longer the need to explain the importance of the arts. Decades of strong access have redefined viewers' expectations and turned them into informed audiences. The mixed intercultural public takes any artistic action as coming from an environment they themselves grew up in.

Each metropolis is today like a huge network knot and street art on a wall has the potential of creating disruption within the urban enclosure, interacting with it and revitalizing it. Many contemporary cities play host to extremely discontinuous social realities (rich and extremely poor, crowded and empty, built and derelict, etc.). Street art reconfigures these discrepancies, offering the possibility of a special kind of intimate interaction between the city and its inhabitants. Being illegal, most street art reinforces the heroic character of the creative act itself.

When doing a piece, a street artist knows that his art is not going to last for a long time. In fact it is so ephemeral that it can be covered in just a few hours by someone else, or it can be erased by the graffiti police. In a vibrant city like today's Sao Paulo, a well-done piece can last for a few days. Its life cycle follows a natural selection process - the most respected art tends not to be crossed-out. Street artists do hope that their work will last longer, but the ephemeral status is assumed from the start. These works escape the archives¹², most of them will never be seen in museums, so the attitude of the establishment is either to deny their aesthetic value, or to try to incorporate them into the mainstream. Despite the fact that street art exhibitions in established galleries and museums (see *Design and the Elastic Mind* at MoMA¹³, for example) are symbolic gestures of recognition and admiration by the

artistic establishment towards the vitality of this type of expression, they are more of an enacted illusion of being able to catch something that loses its meaning outside of its natural medium. Street art is inherently contextual, and the White Cube is not very good at providing context. The richness and the feeling of the street are crucial for this form of creative expression. Maybe that's why it's called "street art".

Some of the street art works, though, are recorded through photography and video, circulated on blogs and stored on huge searchable image archives like Flickr¹⁴. As an example, one of these blogs 'celebrating street art', Wooster Collective, is one of the most comprehensive street art archives of New York; its founders receive hundreds of emails from all over the world with recorded traces of the ways in which people use streets as a canvas. New media channels are subverting the official ones, which are not accessible for editing by their audiences. Blogs and online social networks (counting tens of millions of active members) are gaining trust and respect for their voluntary reorganization of valuable information. 'Commons-based peer production'¹⁵ is not only changing the economy, it's also changing the arts.

Hence, a second questioning arises: can we still label street art as 'underground' or 'counterculture'? Couldn't it be today just the opposite? Public spaces desperately need blueprints other than the huge Hugo Boss or Revlon posters, in order to gain genuine individuality and distinction. Street art may be the only way to effectively bring the arts face to face with the market icons. People are not asked if they want to be visually befuddled or the subject of commercial information bombardment. In the same way street artists don't ask permission to react, sometimes by using the billboards themselves as canvases. If during the sixties and seventies the emergence of graffiti (mainly in New York, rapidly followed by other major urban areas) gained public attention as the means of expression and empowerment of marginal communities¹⁶, in the past two decades a process of decolonization of taste has taken place, and street art has become hype. This has meant a reconfiguration of the way taste-shaping is taking place today. Each social cluster tends to determine its own set of aesthetic values, no longer dominated by the traditional Western European pattern. Inside the urban space, street art can be the common expression of the people, their signature, a silent and personal form of visual resistance to the preformatted image invasions filling each city. It is no longer the sign of peripheral emotions shared by small communities, but proof that the urban ecosystem can afford and allow the "bad behaviour" inherent to creativity.

Consequently, street art transforms the city into an open habitat, a web of images constantly proliferating and disappearing, icons that last for one day or for a week, creeping on to walls and growing from nowhere like vegetation, giving the passer-by the unusual offbeat impression that he is surfing the walls of a city as if surfing online: nothing stays, nothing prevails, all is of equal impact and equally susceptible to disappearance. Within the most sophisticated form of human habitat, street art invents a way of 'painting the cavern', of unwinding, of going back to the generic, tribal-like and totemic images of the subconscious.

A parallel can be drawn by looking at the way that some forms of street art come out of a primitive need to doodle, to draw images from the subconscious (like idly playing with a crayon while having a long conversation on the phone). Drawing on the street involves

bringing out very intimate, context-related expressions of individual universes into the public space. At the same time, by overtly opposing top-down authority and the notion of property (both by challenging the concept of ownership and by disregarding the sense of private property), street art remains deeply anarchic. Its ideology can be related to the hackers' movement, to the open-source communities, and the 'copyleft'¹⁷ paradigm, which are now redefining the regulations regarding intellectual property. Street artists try to extend it to the physical world, as objects around them become commodities without a rigid owner. They share and use objects in common, they circulate them like passing a joint, in small groups, strongly connected. Almost anything can be a canvas for the street artist, from a cigarette pack to a billboard or a train. These forms of anarchy become quintessential for the preservation of a genuine artistic anima in the urban environment.

Turning back from this perspective to Myerscough's study on the economic impact of the arts, research that thoroughly reshaped European thinking on the comprehensive economic consequences of artistic creation, one clearly notices that back then, the author did not take into account the phenomena engendered by globalization - the new technologies, the web-like structure of today's audiences or on the "kleenex effect" of desensitized marketing cultural content.

Contemporary societies no longer require solid proof of the importance of the economic impact of the arts. Instead they are prone to observe what is left of the arts in a market-driven economy. The role of street art is better understood when taking this issue into account.

Commercially, street art can be an instrument of disconnection – non-marketable, unpackageable, thus unsuitable for mass distribution as such. It creates the unwritten rules by which it functions; and they are not the same as those of the market. That's why corporations have been trying hard in recent decades to capture that creative freshness and put it to work for their own purposes. To be able to do that, though, market players must "operate within the laws of the universe in which they're exploring", as Josh Spear writes on his trend hunting blog¹⁸. Street art is an exemplary "universe" from this perspective, as it responds immediately to intrusions as well as to creative dialogues with advertising.

In November 2005, Sony Corporation ran a campaign in several major cities of the United States, seeking to market its handheld game device, PlayStation Portable, to urban hipsters. Sony paid building owners to allow their walls to be drawn on by graffiti writers, who were also on their payroll. The spraypainted images were totemic representations of dizzy-eyed kids playing with their gadget as if it was a skateboard, a puppet, an icecream, without including any brand names. This guerrilla marketing intrusion, imitating the style, but not the content of street art, received an immediate reaction¹⁹, as can be seen on Wooster Collective's gallery of defaced Sony PSP graffiti ads²⁰.

In March 2006, Adidas started an advertising campaign in Berlin that was received with a lot more enthusiasm. First, they put up blank white posters with a small Adidas logo and a Leonardo da Vinci quote which read: For those colours which you wish to be beautiful, always first prepare a pure white ground. This was essentially an open invitation for graffiti artists and the like to tag and draw the billboard, which some of them did (although no elaborate piece appeared, mostly doodles and ads for a streetwear shop

that also sells Adidas products²¹). After a few days of mayhem they came back to the same ads and placed another poster over it of the Adicolor sneaker, incorporating tags and masking artwork from the first layer²². This could be, as Mark Schiller Wooster Collective puts it, "the other side of the coin – how companies can get it right with a clever, authentic campaign"²³. This is a "single use" campaign that cannot be reproduced, recognizing the ephemeral status of street art and working within the same creative effervescence.

According to our observations, street art creation in the urban space appears today to be: supranational; nurtured by countless connections floating in a non-hierarchical space (where value is confirmed by a critical mass of informal consensus, not by the assessment of the knowledgeable few); in constant tension with the dominant market icons in the face of which it acts as an efficient critical mirror.

We believe that this kind of art is very well adapted to provide for the cultural needs of contemporary societies, precisely due to its ephemeral, site specific, generic character and its illegal aura. Unable to become a commodity, it is today one of the most effective methods of successfully competing with those forms of recycled artistic content that has been dumbed down and standardized for market purposes.

If one wants to determine to what degree street art is a tool, and in favour of what, the answer might be that it is possibly no longer just an instrument for expressing peripheral social frustration and thus engaging cohesive community movements, but instead it serves to reconfirm the individual's basic creative instinct. "It is the natural impulse of people who are very alive to decorate their environment, make it beautiful. The ultimate question raised by graffiti is: What would a wildly decorated city look like?"²⁴

To paraphrase Matarasso's own metaphor, street art is today the compulsory 'ornament' of postmodern societies, the only resisting human stain on the city, a place where everything else, from human feelings to advertising billboards and cultural events has become exclusively "of use".

- 1 Matarasso, 1997.
- 2 Bennett; Belfiore, 2007.
- 3 Rigaud, 1996.
- 4 Matarasso; Landry, 1999.
- 5 Mercer, 2004; Bianchini; Parkinson, 1993.
- 6 Lessig, 2006.
- 7 *What Happened to US*, Modern Museum of Art, New York, 2007.
- 8 Klein, 2005.
- 9 Dawkins, 1976.
- 10 Mateos Garcia & Steinmueller, 2003.
- 11 "Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building, and if it's unoccupied, perhaps become squatters or light fires inside. Or consider a sidewalk. Some litter accumulates. Soon, more litter accumulates. Eventually, people even start leaving bags of trash from take-out restaurants there or breaking into cars." (Wilson, J.Q.; Kelling, G.L., 1982)
- 12 Groys, 2003.
- 13 www.woostercollective.com/2008/03/the_graffiti_research_lab_at_new_yorks_m.html
- 14 Flickr is an image and video hosting website, web services suite, and online community platform. It was one of the earliest Web 2.0 applications. Its popularity has been fuelled by its organization tools, which allow photos to be tagged and browsed by folksonomic means. As of November 2007, it hosts more than two billion images. (Source: Wikipedia - July 7, 2008).
- 15 Benkler, 2006.
- 16 Ferrell, 1993.
- 17 Copyleft is a play on the word copyright and describes the practice of using copyright law to remove restrictions on distributing copies and modified versions of a work for others and requiring that the same freedoms be preserved in modified versions. (Source: Wikipedia - July 3, 2008).
- 18 www.joshspear.com/item/adicolor-campaign/
- 19 www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2005/12/69741
- 20 www.woostercollective.com/2005/12/woosters_growing_gallery_of_de.html
- 21 www.overkillshop.com
- 22 A slideshow with phases of the campaign here: www.beinghunted.com/features/2006/04_adicolor_berlin/adidas_adicolor.html
- 23 www.woostercollective.com/2006/03/adidas_gets_it_right_with_adicolor.html
- 24 Bryan, Jamie, *High Times* (August 1996).

Art, Public Space and Creation Centres

Ramón Parramón

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Why do artists work in public space? In order to answer this question, we must consider the series of changes that cities, as spaces for cultural production, are undergoing, as well as the role played by Culture in energising the city's economy. This self-perpetuating relationship has quickly given rise to a complex scenario. On the one hand, the interest of numerous artists from an array of disciplines has been drawn to public space and, on the other, local government representatives have become increasingly more interested in promoting this type of activity and art-form. Work in public space highlights the interests that are common to different spheres of creative activity, and represents a major change in the way that cultural activity is planned and administered. This change involves the incorporation of such elements as seduction, experimentation, interaction with the citizen, and the time factor in relation to the space and place into the processes of production and management. The dialogue between Zigmunt Bauman and Maaretta Jaukkuri touches on this shift in perspective: "It was however in the managerial spirit that the role of culture used to be most commonly perceived still two-three decades ago; at a time when culture was annexed ... by the managerial project that ... struggled to master the perception of the human world".¹

If at that time the cultural activity that took place in public space was programmed according to the unidirectional logic of cultural politics, there are now a series of intermediaries whose actions depend on market demand. The consumption of events in public space is part of a demand that the city should supply constant and permanent activity. This activity comes in the form of festivals, events, actions, performances, demonstrations – a conglomeration of elements that turn the experience of the city into the culture of the event, into a city geared toward entertainment, where numerous ever-increasing events are continuously overlapping, and which are reproduced in other cities through a process of contagion. Artists respond to this demand and at the same time demonstrate the conceptual need for finding new stages and new audiences for their activity, and for experimenting with formats in which the urban scene takes on central relevance, both in its spatial as well as its social aspects. The fortuitous and the random create the pre-conditions for the possible sudden appearance of something

new. It is in these terms that we should bear in mind another type of independent initiative that uses public space through informal activities or through the generation of joint projects that deal with local and social issues. Some local governments, in their commitment toward the city and its culture, have also contributed toward creating and implementing activities and proposals whose goal is to overcome the reductionist idea of the "city as entertainment". The *Agenda 21 for culture* is a document that gives central importance to public cultural policies, as well as providing guidelines for their implementation². It is in this multiplicity of conflicting interests that activity in public space becomes more interesting.

Art has coined such concepts as public art, or "new genre public art", in order to encompass these activities that take shape in the city, specifically in the expanded vision of public space. These art-forms employ varying technologies and formulations: actions in urban space, online and in community areas, as well as activities that rely on alternative spaces for their existence – projects originating in the Arts, but which at the same time question their legitimising role in their fusion with other socio-cultural genres, often becoming procedural mechanisms or mediating tools. Art in public space is often posed as an alternative to the benevolent, albeit dominant, model implemented through marketing campaigns for city-brands, or city-monuments, or cities whose only objective seems to be that they be experienced through the logic of tourism. From this perspective, the city, urban life and the territory all comprise an analytical observatory, though also a laboratory for experimentation, into which the critical component is introduced and where public space is defined as conflictive space.

I attempted to explain in a recent article that this type of artistic experimentation in public space did not belong explicitly to any specific artistic genre, the concept of public art being too general to be able to specify any single discipline. However, we are dealing with certain approaches that are renewing the concepts of production, dissemination and distribution, generating a project type that finds its natural platform for performance in public space. "The categorisation of public art that has arisen in this country (Spain), responds more to a need for expanding artistic practices into new territory, not in the spatial sense, but rather in the sense of production and transformation of cultural policies".³

The field of Culture, and particularly Art, is currently attending to the pressing need to redefine strategies for actions and proceedings relating to production, distribution and interaction with the public – a public that is increasingly called upon to act as participant or co-author, co-producer or co-actor, of the contents proposed in an artistic context. This redefining of strategies involves the blurring of existing distinctions between creator and producer. Creator (understood as author, artist or shaper of new tales that reinterpret reality or generate a new vision of it) and producer (understood

as promoter, administrator, manager). These two agents, until only recently insufficiently differentiated, can now more than ever be viewed as forming part of a single entity, a necessary part in a single project or strategy. Something that we might call creative management based on work platforms and process management. On the other hand, in what has been referred to as a tendency toward a dematerialisation of the work in favour of the event or the ephemeral action, a scenario unfolds where the creative participation in the territory takes on a fleeting, transitory feel. This situation conditions the way that production is carried out, with temporary teams being formed to handle project development. Tony Bryant comments on the "Hollywood model of organisations, where – just as in film production – people are assembled in order to carry out a project, subsequently scattering once again when it's over. A great deal has been written about virtual organisations and virtual teams, and I suspect it won't be long before a consultancy somewhere is offering Liquid Management Consultancy, or perhaps the new brand of BauManagement."⁴

The combination of these more or less recent parameters enables the existence of spaces for fomenting production which have come to be known as "production centres", or "centres for contemporary creation", or "art and creation", or "art and thought", or "creation and contemporary thought", or any other composition of these terms. These ever-proliferating spaces are far removed from the purely exhibitive concept as format par excellence chosen by creators-producers to make their rehearsals, experiments and findings public or for manifesting their personal visions of the world. As this production expanded in time proliferates, as participatory mechanisms are incorporated therein, as we continue insisting on the need for breaking away from sheltered space, we will demand the existence of this type of centre, which promotes production, mediation, connection with diverse sectors of the society and which incorporates strategies that make use of public space. Some have called them culture factories, given the concept of reconverting old factories into new creation centres and incorporating the concept coined by George Yúdice of "culture as resource"⁵, where he discusses how culture has become integrated into the production apparatus as a resource for economic growth (the cultural industries), for resolving social conflicts and even as a source of job creation.

Traditionally, in the exhibitive field of art, what has been called the *White Cube* was a place where the conditioning factors for perceiving, experiencing and reinterpreting a work of art were brought together. Events of the last third of the past century have placed this model in crisis, at the same time as having proposed multiple strategies for escaping from its constrictive parameters and working outside or beyond its walls. Artistic expression in public space searches in it for what it cannot ordinarily find in the protected space: the direct connection with the citizen and the need for being connected to "reality". This conciliatory objective is, first of all, problematic: the "peripatetic wandering of the passer-by"⁶ seldom coincides with the need to be involved in order to understand an artistic endeavour. This idea has also been elaborated upon by Muntadas in his work through the statement: "warning: perception requires involvement". It is in this controversy that a growing interest in the field of creative experimentation comes to the surface. The inherent difficulty lies in the requirement for a connection with citizen groups, active agents in the social space, in trying to create a new area for artistic production in the public space. Not for generating pseudo-social practices, but rather to define more or less complex collaborative

creative processes for developing innovations that can later be formulated as practices demanding a longer-term work dynamic.

Creation centres (to select a broad term from the many previously cited) can serve as a solution for mediating and enabling this type of more complex work, and for incorporating changes into the production process. When we speak about creation centres in Spain, we must necessarily do so from the point of view of public management. Private initiative is all but nonexistent since there are no mechanisms that clearly favour it, nor do we enjoy the tradition forged in Anglo countries of working with private organisations which, through their beneficent work, might be awarded sizeable tax breaks. The way that Culture is administered in Spain has been associated with elected officials who have defined models and proposals, which have often been elaborated without the active input of professionals in the Arts. This is changing, as the mechanisms of creation, production, management and dissemination have already begun to transform the previous structures and models.

For example, in Catalonia, a law has been approved that will enable the existence of an Arts Council, which will be partly responsible for managing and distributing the funding granted by the autonomous government for cultural and artistic endeavours. The changes which all of this might introduce into the current context remain to be seen and, in any event, they are late to arrive as compared to most of the Anglo-influenced countries that have had this model in place for over 60 years. This temporary gap will be lessened if a fitting model is created, one that is adapted to the context and that enables both international and local connections and relationships and manages to implement a budget in line with its goals.

In order to speak of this change in strategies and the new panorama of infrastructures that we are undergoing, I will refer to two articles written by Jesús Carrillo which, in summary, complement each other. These texts are entitled: "The New Culture Factories: Places for Cultural Creation and Production in Contemporary Spain" and "Reflections and Proposals on the New Contemporary Creation Centres".⁷ The former is an analysis of the current phenomenon of converting old factories, industrial structures, spaces for production in the Fordist sense of the word, into new spaces for culture and the arts. It takes a look at three recent case studies on the current arts scene: the LABoral in Gijón, the Tabakalera ("tobacco factory") in San Sebastian and the Matadero ("slaughterhouse") in Madrid. He says that the common feature of their programmes is the proliferation of such concepts as cultural and contemporary production and creation, visual culture as a substitute for contemporary art, as well as the systematic use of new technology. A will toward making the production process visible: it is no longer enough to make the end result public in an exhibit format – all of the prior steps, the process, must now be made visible, as it all forms part of the work. Another common tie that binds them is the desire to link the local with the global. The nature of the projects related to autonomous politics requires a skilful interweaving of the familiar and the foreign, placing them on the contemporary map (depending on the interests, in one case they might be artistic, in others they will have a much more ambitious function which might involve putting the entire city on the map, or contributing to making it possible). Another common element is that their programmes attempt to bring together different creative fields, such as design, music, the visual arts or gastronomy, and so on.

To all of this grouping of common aspects is added a circumstance that has clearly defined cultural policies: the excessive proximity of politicians in the management of these centres. From programming

to the evaluation of the results (which usually involves counting the number of participants), and including an excessive overseeing of content, which often negates the possibility of including critical work, in favour of neutrality of content or on behalf of partisan programmes. Furthermore, this gives rise to promoting an impermeable type of functioning which does not allow for the incorporation of pre-existing dynamics, activities that have been successful in forging local connections from an independent perspective, and for critical approaches and proposals that serve as alternatives to rigid institutional policies.

In the second text by Jesús Carrillo, "Reflections and Proposals on the New Contemporary Creation Centres", which, in summary, is a more pragmatic complement to the previous document, Carrillo proposes a series of conditions that a creation centre promoted by institutions must assume. I will summarise them:

1 – Independence from macro-projects of urban rezoning in order to keep culture from being de-territorialising, abstracted from meaning and mystifying. (It should be adapted to the ecosystem of the site and not try to devour everything that moves around it.)

Here, in this point, the intelligent suggestion is made that each project must involve negotiations between the local and the distant or foreign.

2 – The generation of functional and financial structures in the aim of guaranteeing the centre's independence and openness. (Constituting an advisory committee on a temporary basis among agents in the area and a specialised sector in the aim of connecting with its social and cultural surroundings.) This should be brought about defining processes, channelling proposals and bringing them into the public domain, understanding the centre as catalyst.

3 – The third point that he discusses is that of identifying the users, collaborators and partners. The creator-spectator relationship is no longer dual, as much more interactive, and thus more complex, dynamics have been established.

I view it as a text that gets down to the level of action, one that establishes very concrete basic points for approaching a new creation centre and even for analysing existing ones.

The artistic endeavour merges with management and is established as a way of rehearsing new forms between production, dissemination, distribution and reciprocal interaction of content, building a new nature for the art-form based on the nodes of an online connection. Faced with this idea of nodes of connection and a services platform, a new concept has been introduced into creation centres: the Hub model. New Museum has already adopted it, defining itself as "Museum as Hub".⁸ This enables them to develop activities in collaboration with other production and exhibit centres on an international level.

This dematerialisation and online connection summarises the contemporary essence of working in public space.

- 1 Zigmunt Bauman talks with Maaretta Jaukkuri, "Tiempos líquidos: artes líquidas" (Liquid Art in Liquid Time), p.78; in Bauman, Z: *Arte ¿líquido?*, Ediciones Sequitur, Madrid 2007.
- 2 The documentation generated during the IV Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion of Porto Alegre, held in Barcelona in May, 2004 under the framework of the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona, 2004, can be found at www.agenda21culture.net
- 3 Parramón, R. "No public art", Article published in *Exit Book* n.7, Madrid, 2007, comprising a special edition on Public Art.
- 4 Antony Bryant, *Modernidad líquida, complejidad y turbulencia* (p. 66), in Bauman, Z., *Arte, ¿líquido?*, Ediciones Sequitur, Madrid, 2007 "Liquid Modernity, Complexity and Turbulence".
- 5 George Yúdice, *El recurso de la cultura: usos de la cultura en la era global*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 2002.
- 6 This phrase has often been used by Manuel Delgado in his prolific research on public space from an anthropological perspective. In *The Public Animal (El animal público)*, Anagrama, Barcelona 1999), he defines public space as "those surfaces that produce sliding motions from which arise an infinity of inter-crossings and bifurcations, as well as dramatisations that one would not hesitate to refer to as choreographies. Their central player? Obviously, no longer coherent, homogeneous, entrenched within grids communities, but rather the actors in a generalised changing scene: drifting strollers, foreigners, passers-by, workers, citizens, born pretenders, occasional pilgrims, bus passengers consigned to wait..."
- 7 Carrillo, J. (2007) http://medialab-prado.es/article/laboratorio_del_procomun_nuevos_centros_de_creacion_contemporanea
- 8 www.newmuseum.org

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