

## Art's Dialectical Role in Urban Social Struggles

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Much has been written about how cities are central to the spatial development of neoliberalism, where the macro-politics of globalizing economies make and unmake landscapes and architectures within which the micro-politics of many millions of people's day-to-day existences are lived out (Lefebvre 1968, 1974, 2000, 2003; Harvey 2006, 2012; Sennett 1994; Tonkiss 2005). As a response to this urban experience, identified as deeply segregated urban landscapes and social inequality, a growing urban resistance has also become visible features of urban life (Purcell 2008).

Urban art has long been discussed for toning down urban anxieties, boosting the economic environment of post-industrial cities, energizing communities and neighborhoods, and enforce policies for new urban planning (Rich 2019; Zukin, 1987; 1995). Although the relationship between art and power is multifaceted, art and artists' image as a malign force of the neoliberal urban landscape. There is a pressing need to challenge the dominant arguments that reduce the complex and contradictory role of art to a straightforward phenomenon in a continuously evolving urbanism. While the aesthetic reconstruction on urban space has an essential role in

producing and reinforcing socio-spatial divides, the anti-hegemonic struggle tries to reconnect the fragmented subjects through shared aesthetics that reframes the apprehension of to whom urban space belongs. Art is in the middle of this contestation for the aestheticization of the urban space—as a tool to both reinforce and resist it.

Art has a long story of standing at the forefront of movements for social justice and social change. Last decade, the role that the urban space plays in the construction and communication of urban struggles has been well demonstrated and the artistic field has become more visible in the moment of accelerated urbanization and urban social movements. Therefore, arts in urban space have been receiving more and more critical responses. However, while a myriad of topics are discussed on the neoliberal urban impact of social realities on the social perceptions within the milieu of divided and segmented urban space, much less is understood about the impact of new social realities on social perceptions of urban creativity vis-a-vis urban social struggles.

In recent years, we have witnessed that the urban social struggles have shown very diverse rebellious creative activities and subversive visual representations that

changed the definitions of political agency and public responsibility in an increasingly divided and unjust urban public sphere—all the while art's function in the politics of the public space revealed its intimate relationship with the visual memory of the society. Art's relationship with social struggles has a broad scope from a clear "right to the city" aspiration with its ecological, spatial and ideological agenda, as well as individual and collective freedoms.

Art had an essential part during the Egyptian and Tunisian revolution (Abaza 2012), Spanish Indignados (Ramírez Blanco 2018), the Greek Aganaktismenoi movement (Tsilimpoudini 2016), and the Gezi Uprising (Tunali 2018). It is even argued that the civil war in Syria is triggered by a graffiti work in Dara'a (Asher-Shapiro 2016). Recently, the Black Lives Matter movement leaves its mark in the urban space with street murals in nearly 550 places across the US. However, most research related to the arts in social resistance, both from a social science perspective and from a community arts perspective, tends to emphasize the therapeutic, unitary, or reconciliatory attributes of art, paying attention to how art contributes to ease tensions between communities and city authorities. Although such criticism for socially engaged art and community art is sound, it undermines art's capacities of struggle and antagonism, of contestation and re-appropriation that emerge through the creation of common and shared spaces for socialization, mobilization, and political action

This special issue aims to understand how we can interpret the relationship of various forms of urban creativity to urban social struggles from the perspective of subcultures, freedom of expression, community participation, sustainable environment and social and spatial justice. The articles and essays seek to reveal the potential of art in the critically reflecting formation of agonistic experience that constitutes democratic political culture in the urban space. They discuss the construction of the counter aesthetics in the neoliberal urban space and capture not only how art declares itself about social struggles but also how it functions in these very struggles. And they seek answers to questions such as: What kind of urban public should critical art try to constitute and what kind of public spaces are needed to that effect?

Rebellious artists have always engaged with issues of oppression and exploitation—by-products of colonialist and capitalist systems—throughout history from slavery and resource extraction; to exploitative labor practices and the environmental consequences of industrialization; and human rights movements and climate change anxieties of the past century. Art that takes place in urban struggles are not about igniting a change but are about creating unmediated spaces and instances of emancipated subjects. The authors in this issue analyze various forms of art within economic, cultural and social urban contexts to shed light on the complexity of modern urban life and struggles for more just cities.

The issue opens with Philipp Shadner's discussion of the 1970s punk movement, which not only questioned and provoked aesthetic values but also has had a major influence on the multitude of styles of urban art until the present. Shadner gives us insights into the history of the punk movement, the symbols and slogans punks used and still use not only for tagging urban spaces, but also put temporarily or permanently on their skins and/or their clothes to create a visual struggle against the conformist mainstream society. Arthur Crucq's article analyses the social and political role of collaboratory art in an urban community in The Hague, Netherlands. Using examples of textile installations, Crucq's discussion centers on recognizing community art projects as autonomous platforms for the development of political agency in the urban space. Jeni Peake looks at street art activism from the perspective of linguistics. Peake explores English graffiti found in urban spaces in the city of Bordeaux, France. With a large number of the graffiti examples adhering to many themes of social struggle, Peake's article seeks to establish to what extent the use of English could be understood as a political or at least rebellious and creative act. Angelos Evangelidis examines the political posters on the walls of the streets in Athens that worked as both a visual and political platform for the anti-austerity movement in Greece (2010-2015). Furthermore, Evangelinidis' literature review shows that the dialectical relationship between urban space and visual practice is the key to map the process of art's role in social struggles.

## Editorial

Jenna Altamonte's essay is concerned with street activism in 2015, 2017 and 2018 surrounding the Venice art biennale and architecture biennale. Altamonte discusses how the protestors used streets, sidewalks and docks around the Biennial pavilions to protest human rights abuses, climate change, government corruption and neoliberal restructuring of the urban space. Mathilde Vignau introduces her current field research in Toulon in France that challenges the dominant discourses on the role of culture and creativity on local economic development and urban attractiveness. Vignau's perspective offers to look at art and gentrification in this city from the perspective of "institutional creativity" rather than "creative city" discourses. This perspective allows us to notice how urban creativity also partakes in current urban struggles - in this case of the social struggle for sustainable development in Chaluget neighbourhood in Toulon.

The invited researchers from the University of St Thomas in St Paul, Minnesota belong to the Urban Art Mapping research group. Their current research maps the anti-racist street art in the twin cities—St Paul and Minnesota—that developed as a visual uprising after George Floyd's death at the hands of the Minneapolis police. Their research shows, how, in the context of this intense crisis, street art transforms urban space and fosters a sustained political dialogue, reaching a wide audience and making change possible. We propose that protest art in each of the three neighborhoods under examination varies in aesthetics and content. In addition, this paper argues that these differences can be attributed to a number of factors having to do with the demographic characteristics of each neighborhood, the experiences of neighborhood residents and their relationship to the art, and the political realities and challenges each neighborhood faces.

The issue finalizes with Alla Myzelev's interview with Marine Tanguy. Marine Tanguy is an art entrepreneur and founder of MTArt Agency that helps artists negotiate public projects. The interview with Tanguy is centered around the discussion of creating the language that helps both artists and those in charge of commissioning for the public good understand each other. Tanguy's art agency is interested in pushing and furthering neo-liberal urban

aesthetics that is currently very prevalent in larger cities by commissioning projects that deal with social struggles as a way of whitewashing the deep-seated issues of unequal distribution of resources that are embedded in cities such as London or New York. The interview presents us with the insider views from the commercial art world to see art's role as both a resource and resistance in the changing neoliberal urban landscape.

Perhaps now it is more pressing than ever to acknowledge, examine, and reflect upon both historic and perpetuating inequalities in urban social life. It is imperative now to talk about art and its involvement with urban struggles as pertaining to the re-creation rather than the consumption of the city. Therefore, this special issue's contributors engage in key areas of the socio-political relationships with new urban poetry--what the reconfiguration of difference, equality, and equity entails at present moment in the urban space for art and artists. This issue further aims to construct bridges between the contemporary practices of art for the urban public and the critiques of the city generated in disciplines such as urban sociology and human geography, informed by critical theories of urbanism, society and culture.

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