

ISSUES OF PUBLIC SPACE: DECISION-MAKERS AND ART

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ABSTRACT. Issues of Public Space: Decision-Makers and Art. This research addresses the problem of the way public space has been used and thought of throughout history as well as to show just how much exclusion has been part of an apparently democratic space. It will then follow Henri Lefebvre's well-known theory on "the right to the city" in order to analyze how this is relevant for Graffiti and Street Art practices, while pointing out the seemingly inherent hypocrisy of decision makers when it comes to commissioned public artworks.

Keywords: *public space, public art, Graffiti, Street Art, the right to the city*

Introduction to a Much-Debated Area

When one talks about public space, the term itself does not seem to pose a serious question, mostly due to the fact that instinctively everyone thinks they have a good-enough definition as to what it refers to. This perception often arises from the opposition perceived between the public and the private spaces. The general and common-sense notion regarding public space is centered on the idea that it belongs to everyone and through that it simultaneously it is no one's property so much so that an individual should not impose his/hers beliefs or tendencies in a way that is detrimental for the others. This strengthens the concept that one may do whatever in his own private space, while reserving some self-restraint when acting in public,¹ out of mutual respect.² However when one goes a bit deeper than that, it become easy to see that not all public spaces are alike and their (rather numerous) rules are contradictory to the instinctual definition, it is precisely this reason and the

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¹ Gert Biesta, "Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere", *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol. 13, No. 7, (November 2012), 686.

² Gürçan Koçan, "Models of Public Sphere in Political Philosophy", *Eurosphere: Working Paper Series*, No. 2 (2008), 14.

inherent paradoxes of public space that made it a subject worthy of the consideration of many thinkers. The perspective used here provokes a departure from the concept of public sphere as theorized by Habermas,³ as abstract and universal realm of democracy, and towards a more pragmatic one of public space as an actual and problematic site.⁴

Aristotle was the first philosopher to underline a strict demarcation between the private and the public space concerning the urban territory as he remarked that the good of the city is not necessarily the same as the good of the individual.⁵ Today, even though his opinion is not only appealing, but also very important for the constitution of a democratic society, the concept of public space is still as elusive as it ever, which leaves it highly open to interpretation through which it can be juggled in more than one direction as it comes to mean different things to different (types of) people. As an adjective, the word “public” has several definitions, seemingly revolving around the same general consensus: “of, for, connected with or owned by people in general” and “known to all”,⁶ while as a noun it is defined both as “people in general” and as “a particular section of the community”,⁷ and by accepting this distinction public space becomes obviously problematic and every theory regarding it as at the disposition of *all* the members of society tends to being merely utopist.

In regard to methodology two main types of conceptualization of public space have been identified, the first is descriptive, concerned with facts, it mostly seeks to explain the whats and the whys and how they come to affect social and political life, while the second is normative, concerned with principles, it is necessarily evaluative and striving to establish what and how public space ought to be.⁸ Throughout this paper the descriptive conceptualization will be put in the service of the normative one, as it would be necessary to be aware of the mechanics and the issues that arise before being able to formulate a more favorable direction. Therefore, firstly some of the most important theories on public space will be analyzed along with the most common policies they have inspired, as well as their pitfalls, with special emphasis on the art that is to be encountered in these

³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴ Don Mitchell, “The End of Public Space? People’s Park Definitions of the Public, and Democracy”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (March 1995), 116–117.

⁵ Gürcan Koçan, “Models of Public Sphere in Political Philosophy”, 1.

⁶ Christina Ruse, ed. *Oxford Student’s Dictionary of Current English*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 501.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Gürcan Koçan, “Models of Public Sphere in Political Philosophy”, 3.

spaces. Secondly, Henri Lefebvre's concept of "the right to the city", which has spawned numerous movements and ideologies, some quite contrary to the author's intentions,⁹ will be used to explain and maybe even justify the unsanctioned artistic expressions that are such a common feature of today's urban landscape.

It must also be mentioned that this article will only take under consideration for analyses the *proper* public spaces such as streets, public plazas and parks, as opposed to the quasi-public ones like malls, museums, libraries, etc. Although they seemingly are public spaces, the fact that they are open only during certain times, greatly limits their accessibility and this is but one of their many specific conduct rules and restrictions which greatly narrow their usage.¹⁰ Especially when discussing art, it can be considered that the gallery and the museum, be they public, are actually the "antithesis of public space"¹¹ and the issues of public art be it commissioned or unsanctioned are very specifically applicable to the art outside these established institutions. Here, unsanctioned is used in opposition to commissioned, in the sense that the works were done without a proper permit, or authorization, and thus often illegal, even though sometimes informal permission is asked. A different kind of public space that will not be dwelled upon on this occasion is the virtual one, the Internet cannot yet be considered as encompassing the entire society¹² and that is because despite the fact that at the present moment connectivity is common-place it is still the attribute of both certain age and certain social standing. A special mention however must be made in regard to the way the virtual space is largely responsible for keeping and spreading works of Graffiti and Street Art that usually have a short life in the real world.

It can be argued that urban communities have, since their beginnings been defined by their urban public space, especially in the West, where a direct line was drawn from the Greek agora and the Roman forum,¹³ so that not only does this ideology of public space feed into the idea of democracy, but it is also considered the actual place where "citizenship is enacted",¹⁴ thus playing a very important role in cementing society. Even though they rarely are these true expressions of

⁹ Judith Bodnar, "What's Left of the Right to the City?", in *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 73.

¹⁰ Alexander J. Reichl, "The High Line and the ideal of democratic public space", *Urban Geography* (2016), 6.

¹¹ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy", *Social Text*, No. 33 (1992), 46.

¹² Don Mitchell, "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (March 1995), 123.

¹³ Richard Williams, "Public Space: Designing in Community", in *The Future of Community: Reports of a Death Greatly Exaggerated*, ed. Dave Clemments et al. (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 42.

¹⁴ Richard Rogers, *Cities for a Small Planet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 15, quoted in Richard Williams, "Public Space: Designing in Community", 42.

democracy, it is still considered that meaningful public spaces are instrumental for the well-being of the citizens, and they are essential in order to complement the private and the work space.¹⁵ It of course remains a major goal of every professional involved in contemporary urban design and planning to create a public space that would instill a sense of social belonging and pride, to achieve this, art onto itself is not sufficient,¹⁶ but it is generally regarded as an important element and often encouraged.^{17 18 19} The relationship between art and the public space through which the collective memory is build and thus helping the social cohesion of a group, can be traced as tribal gatherings, where relevant memories were presented in the “public”, common space.²⁰ This memorial function of public art remained one of its main roles through its long history, and the need for it still remains to this day,²¹ even if it has massively started to lose this role in the past hundred years.

The stated goal may be noble, but appears elusive since it is notoriously hard to satisfy the general public, but also the decision-makers often seem to suffer from what Michel de Certeau called the “paradox of authority”²² as any competences they might have had in order to become invested with authority over the public space, is drowned out, usually by their political responsibilities. Although not localized to any specific area, this paper will trace politics and practices concerning public space in the western culture, where it is curious to notice different approaches to public space and to public art in Europe and in the United States of America. It has been shown that European countries spend significantly more of the taxpayers’ money on public art that the United States,²³ where the situation there is complicated by the difficulties involving the Federal administration and its conflicts with the local authorities and the urban government.²⁴

¹⁵ Vikas Mehta, “Lively Streets: Determining Environmental Characteristics to Support Social Behavior”, *Journal of Planning, Education, and Research*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2007), 165.

¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishings, 2000), 156.

¹⁷ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy”, 34.

¹⁸ David H. Fisher, “Public Art and Public Space”, *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 79, No. 1/2 (Summer 1996), 41.

¹⁹ Debbie Qadri, “Memories in Motion: learning, process, history and art in public space”, *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (November 2015), 380.

²⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres, Vol 2: Globes: Macrospherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban, (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014), 164.

²¹ Albert Elsen, “What We Have Learned about Modern Public Sculpture: Ten Proposals”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 1989), 292.

²² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

²³ Joseph J. Cordes and Robert S. Goldfarb, “The value of public art as public culture”, in *The Value of Culture*, ed. Arjo Klamer, (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1996), 77.

²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 125.

Aside that however, there is another rather ironic aspect of the American perception of public space, this stems from the apparent desire and openness of the authorities (here in the form of scholars, politicians, policy-makers, etc.) towards finding a solution to their issues and to properly define public space and its role.²⁵ However has a consensus not been reached, and what is more their policies seem to get ever more restrictive and less flexible particularly when it comes to public art. The remarks can be read in a particularly elitist key, proving time and again that Hannah Arendt's observation on the fact that America is more open to modernism since, unlike Europe, the value of art is not determined by taste and social class²⁶ is misinformed. Even though it would seem that Europeans have a more matter-of-fact approach to these issues, recent examples have shown the adoption of American-style politics in public spaces.^{27 28}

Past Regulations, Current Trends, and Future Possibilities

Even though the public space is considered by many a democratic space, a space of inclusion, where different people are expected to converge, it is exactly this vast difference, that is most likely to cause a rift between the ideology of public space and the real-life practices enacted within these spaces. Large urban areas are, of course, the ones most prone to difference between the actors found in the public spaces,²⁹ and it is here also here where the struggle for inclusion is at its peak. One must be careful before judging this as a characteristic specific of contemporary society, because historically speaking, the public space never was quite as free as misguided nostalgia would influence us to think. The opposite is in fact true, as public spaces have always painted a picture of exclusion ever since the Greek agora, the democratic space *par excellence*, where only free men were considered citizens.

The issues largely seem to stem from an equilibrium that is by all indication impossible to strike, namely the liberties of the citizens versus the legitimacy of the administration of public spaces, which continues to be a preoccupation for scholars

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 201.

²⁶ Cecilia Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 24.

²⁷ Quentin Stevens, "'Broken' Public Spaces in Theory and in Practice", *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4/5, Place Shaping and Livability, (2009), 373.

²⁸ Bernd Belina, "Ending Public Space as We Know It", *Social Justice*, Vol. 38. No. 1/2 (123-124) *Policing the Crisis – Policing in Crisis*, (2011), 19.

²⁹ Don Mitchell, "To Go Again to Hyde Park: Public Space, Rights and Social Justice", in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, ed. Jen Jack Giesekeing et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 193.

in this field. Administration is always combined with a process of elimination and there are often inevitably conflicting visions of the decision-makers in opposition to the individuals³⁰ and their different modes of appropriation and use of a certain space, and although most would tend to agree to the fact that not everything belongs in the street, the same majority would admit that regulations, though needed, should not also include a selection of the participants,³¹ except this is precisely what is going on, sometimes in a surprisingly assumed manner. Nowadays, at least in theory, one can observe a tendency towards opposing segregation, as society is increasingly preoccupied with integration, participation, and diversity. However these tendencies often do not make the translation to practice,³² where not only segregation is as common as ever, but it is sometimes encouraged as laws continue to eliminate the “undesirables”³³ from both public view and public space.

Not so long ago homosexuals were banned from using public spaces³⁴ and chasing away the homeless in nothing new either,³⁵ however these practices are now being carried on in name of “livability”, along with the exclusion of teenagers with their noise and their graffiti which seems to be the norm for newly implemented public spaces.^{36 37 38 39 40 41} The continuous criminalization of these practices does not however address the bigger issues that have caused them in the first place and only manage to create ghettos and increase the differentiation between classes of citizens as well as further delinquency.⁴² The fact that these minorities are not seen as representative for society as a whole, transforms public spaces into ones available for

³⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 94.

³¹ Cecilia Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, 7.

³² Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sascha Rabinovitch, (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 95.

³³ Z. Muge Akkar, “Questioning the “Publicness” of Public Spaces in Postindustrial Cities”, *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 2005), 82.

³⁴ George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets”, in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, ed. Jen Jack Gieseck et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 202.

³⁵ Lawrence A. Herzog, *Return to the Center*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 9.

³⁶ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Art and Public Space”, 38.

³⁷ Don Mitchell, “The End of Public Space?”, 117.

³⁸ Alexander J. Reichl, “The High Line”, 18.

³⁹ Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space”, in *Variations on a theme park*, ed. Michael Sorkin, (New York: Noonday Press, 1992), 163.

⁴⁰ Don Mitchell and Nik Heynen, “The Geography of Survival and the Right to the City: Speculations on Surveillance, Legal Innovation, and the Criminalization of Intervention”, *Urban Geography*, 30:6 (2009), 614.

⁴¹ Quentin Stevens, “‘Broken’ Public Spaces”, 387.

⁴² Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 206.

the privileged and as the undesirables are shuffled away, they are not even registered anymore, creating a picture-perfect image that is indisputably very far from the actual social reality. The success of the policies centered on livability signals the fact that they are comfortable both for the authorities and for the majority of the people (who are not destitute), marking a trend on the rise, a quick fix to a much larger problem, while no permanent solution is on the horizon for the ones who continue to be displaced. However the order imposed by them also represents a rise in the authority of the policy-makers which inevitably comes at the cost of individual freedom of expression.

This shift is problematic because the existence of a proper public space is a quintessential requirement for a properly functioning democracy, and its legal status as such should be a primary concern.⁴³ Commenting on Lefebvre's writings, Don Mitchell believes that public spaces start off as orderly representations of space, that are then appropriated and turned into unconstrained representational space,⁴⁴ but this process is more and more often reversed and truly representation space keeps getting smaller. Lefebvre's "right to the city" was taken on as a model for many movements, indicating a need for this type of behavior, however through so many readings it was sometimes stripped in part of its radical character, by being applied to a capitalist society that may not be able to fully sustain it.⁴⁵ This softened version of the theory does not mean there is not a real need for it, but instead it may just point to the practical impossibility of imagining something other than a capitalist system which in the minds of most appears to be currently irreplaceable.⁴⁶

Many authors consider that the current and prevalent neoliberal doctrine is responsible for the increase of displacement through gentrification, the militarization, as well as the commercialization of public space.^{47 48 49 50} Favoring competition and free market, neoliberalism assumes that those who fall behind get exactly what they deserve, and although there is no government implication in the market economy, the authorities are very much responsible for facilitating the transformation of its

⁴³ Laura Stein, *Speech Rights in America: The First Amendment, Democracy, and the Media*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 66.

⁴⁴ Don Mitchell, "The End of Public Space?", 115.

⁴⁵ Andy Merrifield, *The Politics of the Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest under Planetary Urbanization*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 26.

⁴⁶ Alejandro Quinteros, "The colonized mind: Place making and the right to the city", *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2015), 324.

⁴⁷ Mike Davis, "Fortress Los Angeles", 154.

⁴⁸ Judith Bodnar, "What's Left of the Right to the City?", 81.

⁴⁹ Gert Biesta, "Becoming public", 685.

⁵⁰ Krishan Kumar and Ekaterina Makarova, "The Portable Home: Domestication of Public Space", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (December 2008), 326.

citizens into consumers.⁵¹ The citizenship here is not related to the legal terms of citizenry, but rather to the more nuanced idea of what a citizen should stand for. By turning into a consumer, the individual is dulled into submission, as he gets to choose from a previously set list, instead on being able to choose what goes on the list. This explains why the authorities only seem to cater to the needs of those who are able to fulfill this role and they are made increasingly comfortable in doing so. These actions have further implications as the much-debated opposition between the right to public space and the right to private property^{52 53} is no longer truly the heart of the problem, because the authorities often themselves invade the right to the private property by acting on behalf and in the benefit of large companies which gives way to the privatization and commodification of the public spaces. A prime example of this is the removal from the wall of private properties by the city council of unsanctioned art that was done *with* permission⁵⁴ in the idea of livability, but simultaneously allowing and encouraging the ever-increasing apparition of advertisements in the public space.

This type of privatization of the urban space is clearly preferred by the authorities over the personalization of the space by the citizens, probably because it is after all a method of planned communication,⁵⁵ and thus ultimately controllable, but it in fact ends up in undermining the needs of the community over the ones of the private companies⁵⁶ and dulls the uniqueness of each urban area, while at the same time cluttering it in a seemingly unnecessary manner. Some form of advertising was always part of the public place as merchants looked to sell their products, but it was only with the massive industrialization that it truly started to invade the public realm by all means. Despite initial opposition, on the basis of aesthetics and the preservation of the landscape⁵⁷ it managed to insert and establish itself and this is a tendency which does not give any signs of receding, especially if the planning of the cities

⁵¹ George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems", *The Guardian*, (15 April 2016), accessed 6 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>.

⁵² Lynn A. Staeheli, Don Mitchell, Kristina Gibson, "Conflicting rights to the city in New York's community gardens", *Geo Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 2/3 Social Transformations, Citizenship, and the Right to the City (2002), 197.

⁵³ David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 315.

⁵⁴ Debbie Qadri, "Memories in Motion", 381.

⁵⁵ Leif Dahlberg, "On the Open and Closed Spaces of Public Discourse", *Nordicom Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2006), 35.

⁵⁶ Z. Muge Akkar, "Questioning the "Publicness"", 76.

⁵⁷ Catherine Gudis, "The Billboard War: Gender, Commerce, and Public Space", in *Public Culture: Diversity, Democracy, and Community in the United States*, ed. Marguerite S. Schafer, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 171.

continues to be left at the hand of developers who are only interested in turning out a profit, or that of the administrators who are linked to the public sector,⁵⁸ both of which are currently omnipresent practices.

Concerning contemporary artistic manifestations in the public space the same tendencies seem to apply as commissioned art is nowadays more attentive to diversity and the way it is perceived by the enlarged audience,⁵⁹ at least on a theoretical level. However even if the art world started to take democracy more seriously in the last decade or so and art started to try closing the gap towards everyday life, the criteria for public art is still formulated by the art administrators and the city officials, and while they sometimes try to relinquish elitism,⁶⁰ this is a perilous path as it could lead to the creation of bland artworks that tend to please everyone or simply prettify an existing space, especially considering the fact that true unity of culture can only be achieved at the higher levels of the institutions.⁶¹ A possible solution to this could reside in what is being called “new genre public art”⁶² which focuses on creating a greater connection to its viewers by also feeding into society’s apparent obsession with integration and participation⁶³ and at the same time it is often functional,⁶⁴ which makes it even more appropriate for the public arena. However one can’t help but observe that many of the sought-after characteristics of public art are fulfilled by the unsanctioned one that can be found on the streets, which is still illegal for the most part and generally not encouraged by the authorities⁶⁵ in the same way established art is, despite the fact that it would be one of the most sincere expressions of democracy.

Although one of the most important difficulty is raised by the heterogeneity of the public itself,⁶⁶ ignoring a large part of it and only taking account of the others in certainly not a viable or worthy solution, and at least when it comes to public art. Although many other options were offered,⁶⁷ one of the most sustainable ones

⁵⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 83.

⁵⁹ Cecilia Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, 3.

⁶⁰ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Art and Public Space”, 34.

⁶¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life*, 97.

⁶² Suzanne Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys”, in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), cited in David H. Fisher, “Public Art and Public Space”, *Surroundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 79, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1996), 51.

⁶³ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 144.

⁶⁴ Debbie Qadri, “Memories in Motion”, 384.

⁶⁵ Alexander J. Reichl, “The High Line”, 18.

⁶⁶ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1954), cited in Maxine Greene, “Public Education and the Public Space”, *Educational Research*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (June-July 1982), 5.

⁶⁷ Joseph J. Cordes, and Robert S. Goldfarb, “Decreasing the “Bad” for Mixed Public Goods and Bads: The Case of Public Sculpture”, *Eastern Economic Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 2007), 165–168.

should come in the form of education. This of course implies long-term involvement in a policy, but the results could bring real improvements all around if taken seriously by transforming existing practices. Attention must be paid however to the way public education is implemented, because its methods could just as well be used towards the manipulation of the masses, which of course would pretty much leave problems unattended, or possibly reinforce them. This being said, public education should not be understood as the instruction of the citizens, as it often is, because this tends to annul the differences, nor should the public feel compelled to learn from the educators in order to become upstanding actors on the public scene. So far an acceptable approach seems to be revolving around awareness by turning social and political problems into learning opportunities⁶⁸ so that the users could eventually judge the public quality of a particular space for themselves, which in turn could prompt their implication in bettering the situation.

Asserting “The Right to the City” by Means of Art

When it comes to unsanctioned art in public spaces, the discourse changes drastically as these manifestations are never seen as something that might help in binding the community, quite the contrary according to livability policies. The presence of Graffiti in particular⁶⁹ triggers negative feelings such as lack of pride and safety on the streets, and thus their makers are targeted and the signs are erased.⁷⁰ In the spirit of these policies, Graffiti has never been considered to be anything more than vandalism and in the public places that have gone through restructuration, special emphasis has been put on getting rid of such elements. The works are erased by the city council, and if Graffiti artists are caught upon the act they are not only fined, but sometimes even taken in to be “educated”⁷¹ in what is presumably a more civic spirit. Despite the fact this sounds like a line out of *A Clockwork Orange*, this is a relatively new strategy implemented in some locations, which attests to the ways public education has been understood and applied, as discussed above. The true hypocrisy of these regulations can be seen in the fact that they are selectively applied to certain areas of interest, as the laws are decidedly looser in poorer neighborhoods. The authorities are not concerned in the livability of those public places as they do not

⁶⁸ Gert Biesta, “Becoming public”, 691.

⁶⁹ Even though a clear distinction is visible between the effect of Graffiti and Street Art practices, the terms are often used interchangeably, noting that “Graffiti” is always used with a negative connotation.

⁷⁰ Quentin Stevens, “‘Broken’ Public Spaces”, 371.

⁷¹ Z. Muge Akkar, “Questioning the “Publicness””, 83.

belong to the target population, however as soon as they do start to take interest in them, by imposing more restrictive and orderly rules, they displace the local population, that moves to other ghettos, where they are again to be left alone to their own ways as long as they are contained to a certain area. This shows Graffiti is not in itself an actual crime, unless when done somewhere where it might disrupt the idyllic image the authorities seek to maintain.

Lefebvre is credited with the idea of social space being a product of society⁷² ⁷³ and implementing the demand for the “right to the city” is considered the ultimate purpose of critical urban theory⁷⁴ especially as human rights now seem to occupy the central stage in both political and ethical discourse.⁷⁵ However what Lefebvre himself consider a core point in his theory, namely the right to the *œuvre*,⁷⁶ the right to shape the city, being granted to those who inhabit it is not nearly as popular in practice. It is hard to tell if Graffiti as an action or as an artform would have pleased the author as a affirmation of such rights since he never mentions it directly in any of his writings, except for a passing mention of the colorful murals from the suburbs of Los Angeles, which he considered beautiful.⁷⁷ But one cannot help but observe that through Graffiti, the marginalized and disenfranchised youth of the city is announcing their presence and appropriating the urban space, which is what he militates for in his work. Lefebvre is very adamant in the fact that the right to the city should act towards the wishes and the well-being of the citizens who spend their entire time in the city, or as he puts it the “working class”,⁷⁸ that despite working in the city in instrumental positions, can no longer afford city life as they are pushed farther and farther away, and the locals should thus be prioritized over newcomers, magnates, and tourists. This is also why Graffiti can be considered a prime representation of this demand to be taken into consideration, by a part of society that was cast aside.

To reach the status of proper enacted rights, a practice first needs to become an accepted custom, which is done with the help of pressure put on by the working class.⁷⁹ And even though Graffiti has not been particularly successful in doing this, the Street Art practices that more or less evolved from Graffiti, are well on their way to

⁷² Ed. Jen Jack Giesecking et al. *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 289.

⁷³ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. I: Introduction, trans. John Moore, (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 92.

⁷⁴ Peter Marcuse, “From critical urban theory to the right to the city”, *City*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3 (June-September 2009), 185.

⁷⁵ David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, 315.

⁷⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 154.

⁷⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 208.

⁷⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 154.

⁷⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 157.

becoming not only very popular, but also legal. The difference between the two types of practices should be discussed at large, but a main reason for the preference of Street Art over Graffiti resides in the fact that the first is much more of a joyous and playful appropriation of the urban area, as compared to Graffiti and its closed aesthetics which is often perceived as brutal by the people outside the culture. Even though Lefebvre considers that public art should not be made in order to fulfill the tourist's expectations,⁸⁰ which is something Street Art can be considered guilty of doing, it should however be taken into account that in reality this aspect can boost the local community's pride, which is also important.

The public space has often been perceived as one of clashes between the authority and the citizens, which becomes translated into the opposition between the creators of a certain space and its users, that wish to transform it to better suit their own needs and wishes, often divergent from the initial and official meaning of the space. Again Graffiti is a really good example of this conflict, especially because it is comprised of writing, which is more often than not unintelligible, it offers a sharp contrast to all the other writing and lettering found on the city streets. Aside from Graffiti, all other writing has either a commercial, legal or informational purpose,⁸¹ and it is of course, of great importance for it to be as crisp and clear as possible in order to be understood, by everyone quickly and conveniently and thus Graffiti is subversive in the way it confuses the audiences. Because the majority of the people that encounter it do not understand it and what it stands for, something which was not ameliorated by Graffiti's reputation, instead of being hailed as an empowering action of taking back the city, it is viewed as an anti-social behavior, and the streets where it proliferates are generally considered unsafe.⁸² Street Art on the other hand is directed towards the larger audience and its message is often just as clear as an advertisement, offering a solid competition for attracting attention in the urban landscape. Through this it probably comes closest to the concept of participating in creating the city,⁸³ but in an ironic twist, its degree of success brings once again the displacement of the locals, in order to make room for new-comers that appreciate the lively, artistic neighborhood that was created.

Even though in Lefebvre's writings the difference between strategies and tactics is barely implied,⁸⁴ this becomes a crucial issue for Michel de Certeau as he sees them

⁸⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 158.

⁸¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 115.

⁸² Vikas Mehta and Jennifer K. Bosson, "Third Place and the Social Life of Streets", *Environment and Behavior*, Vol. XX, No. X (2009), 3.

⁸³ Judith Bodnar, "What's Left of the Right to the City?", 83.

⁸⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 154.

in opposition.⁸⁵ So while strategies are employed from a position of power by the established authorities who long to keep the public space as their domain, they usually have the luxury of careful planning and support to be put into practice, tactics on the other hand are an attribute of the weak. Using tactics means taking advantage of opportunities, while rarely being able to enjoy the victories which are short-lived, and if one takes into consideration the illegal artistic practices, it becomes quite clear that the characteristics of tactics can be easily attributed to these actions. And if Graffiti is often confrontational, Street Art implements several more successful tactics, namely a tendency for wit, also identified as being typical for the weak and the repressed.⁸⁶ Lately the strategies enacted in the public space have brought along a high degree of globalization, rendering the spaces ever more neutral and harder to notice,⁸⁷ which not coincidentally, also makes them easier to control. The tactics of Graffiti and Street Art are somewhat successful in doing the opposite while at the same time catering to a different set of needs. Besides creativity and play, Lefebvre also identifies a set of social needs which are opposed and complimentary such as certainty and adventure, security and opening, and predictability and unpredictability, among others⁸⁸ and the great achievement of Street Art in particular is to balance out these needs by stepping out of the prescribed strategy and offering an alternative using surprise, humor, and wit as its tactics. At the same time, with its wide array of styles and techniques of appropriation, it offers the viewers the opportunity to access the pleasure of finding art where least expected, and it is this feeling of urban art hunter that was instrumental in creating such a large acceptance towards Street Art, much more than any of its subversive or decorative characteristics. Through this support, Street Art comes much closer to asserting the much desired right to the city, although there is still a long way to go.

Conclusions

Without wishing to be alarmist, the fact that public space is increasingly controlled is pointing towards the direction of slow but certain loss of democracy. One has to be careful which rights can or should be given away in the name of safety, because a more militarized public space, does not automatically mean the authorities have the best interest of its citizens at heart. The effective segregation that still

⁸⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

⁸⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 38.

⁸⁷ Lawrence A. Herzog, *Return to the Center*, 1.

⁸⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 147.

takes place is the symptom of a much larger ailment, which cannot be solved through mere ignorance, but has to be fully comprehended. The claims of the right to the city have to be understood as something that will continue to happen if they are not met. Street Art and Graffiti are among the mildest, albeit visible form of claiming one's space in the city, so they should not be ignored or cast aside as the result of bored, artsy teenagers. The fact that more and more research is done on these subjects in a more serious manner in proof that they hold much more subtlety and intricacies that it may seem at first sight.

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