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Hegemonic Struggles in the City: Artist-Run Spaces and Community Art in the Anti-Gentrification Movement

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ABSTRACT

Gentrification processes are one of today's most critical social issues hitting metropolises around the globe. The role that artists play in these processes by upgrading neighborhoods and making them attractive for further commodification is undisputed. At the same time, independent artist-run project spaces in neighborhoods provide spaces for debate and initiate collective processes. Not only small independent actors and collectives interfere in the political debates, but also large public art institutions that respond to current social and political issues and public demands.

Artistic interventions in urban transformation processes are also political interventions, expressing the permeability of the line between art and politics. Indeed, thinking along the political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, such a line does not exist; rather, every cultural and artistic project must be thought of politically. Drawing on theoretical approaches on hegemony, this article aims at examining the critical aspects of community art in relation to the current gentrification processes.

KEYWORDS

Artist-run spaces; Lefebvre; Gramsci; Community art; Gentrification

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FIG. 1 Installation of Kotti & Co / Kotti-Coop / Kotti-Shop / SuperFuture: [Der Kotti ist kein Ponyhof] https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/programm/pdetail/kotti-shop-der-kotti-ist-kein-ponyhof/ at Berlin bleibt! Festival 2019, photo Monique Ulrich

Gentrification is one of the most critical social issues faced by metropolises around the globe today. The role that artists play in gentrification by making neighborhoods attractive for further commodification is well documented.[1] At the same time, independent artist-run project venues provide spaces for discussion and initiate collective action against capitalist, gentrifying forces. Small, independent organizations and collectives are not the only actors from the art world taking part in these political debates. Large public art institutions are also engaging with current social and political issues and responding public demands. When art intervenes in urban transformation processes it functions as a political intervention and shows the permeability of the line between art and politics. According to the political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, such a line does not exist; rather, all cultural and artistic projects must be thought of politically. This article argues that socially engaged art practices face the unavoidable risk of reproducing social conditions, even if they are conducted with best intentions. This risk is increased due to the fact that artistic practice is often considered to be merely benign, even when self-described as politically engaged. Art criticism rarely engages deeply with political theory. Counteracting this tendency, the present work proposes that artists involved in community-based initiatives be analyzed as embodying the figure of the organic intellectual as described by Gramsci **[Fig. 1]**.

1 See for example Stuart Cameron and Jon Coaffee, "Art, Gentrification and Regeneraton—From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts," *European Journal of Housing Policy* 5 no. 1 (2005): 39–58; Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *The Portable Lower East Side* 4 no. 1 (1987).

The city as a hegemonic battlefield

Artistic interventions in cities are usually based on emancipatory claims. In principle, these initiatives focus on encouraging local residents' participation and the co-design of urban and social processes. The French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre has pointed out that space is a social product and, thus, it reflects social conditions.[2] Significantly, his work influenced a subfield of Marxist-informed geography that seeks to analyze what role spatiality plays within social structures and processes—i.e. how the structures of power in a particular society are replicated and thereby reinforced in that society's spatial organization.[3] Lefebvre is known for his demand for citizens to claim the "right to the city,"[4] a claim that has acquired a new significance in light of gentrification.[5] The social divisions produced by class and prosperity, property rights and the power of disposal, as Stuart Hall remarks,[6] are exacerbated in many cities by gentrification. Gentrification is omnipresent in 21st century urban life. For centuries, metropolises like New York, Berlin, and Istanbul have attracted very diverse population groups. Cities absorb wealthy global nomads as well as tourists, migrants, and artists. One consequence of migration to urban centers is the substantial exclusion and displacement of those who cannot keep up with the ever-increasing competition for housing. In this context, the city, where the social order becomes spatially materialized, can be regarded as a political battlefield. Lefebvre emphasizes the active role of space in reproducing hegemony, "as knowledge and action, in the existing mode of production."[7] In his "Gramscian reading" of Lefebvre, Stefan Kipfer speaks of an "urban hegemony," identifying the city as one locus of political-economic contestation and making everyday urban life the terrain in which hegemony is negotiated.[8] In accordance with Kipfer's idea, urban voices that are critical of the current social order from the cultural and artistic fields interfere with and try to influence civil society. From a hegemonic theoretical understanding, neither culture nor the arts are neutral or harmless. Rather, they are always already existing within structures of domination and power.

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2 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

3 Georg Glasze, "Eine politische Konzeption von Räumen," in *Diskurs und Hegemonie*, ed. by Iris Dzudzek, Caren Kunze, and Joscha Wullweber (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012): 155.

4 Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Economica, 2009).

5 I refer to Andrej Holms definition of gentrification: "gentrification is any urban district-related revaluation process in which real estate economic strategies of valorization and/or political strategies of revaluation require the exchange of the population for their success. Displacement is the essence and not an unintended side effect of gentrification" Andrej Holm, *Wir bleiben alle! Gentrifizierung—städtische Konflikte um Aufwertung und Verdrängung* (Münster: Unrast, 2010), 102.

6 Stuart Hall, "Cosmopolitan Promises, Multicultural Realities," in *Divided Cities: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, ed. by Richard Scholar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.

7 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 11.

8 By Stefan Kipfer, "Urbanization, Everyday Life and the Survival of Capitalism: Lefebvre, Gramsci and the Problematic of Hegemony," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 13, no. 2 (2002): 117-149.

Hegemony and the politics of the cultural

According to Gramsci, hegemony is to be understood "as a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class" or group.[9] Hegemony describes how dominant groups use their influence to create a cultural hierarchy that maintains and justifies a social order in which they have disproportionate power and capital. Through hegemonic processes narratives about the political organization of society are normalized into "common sense." Hegemony is not simply a passive form of dominance; rather, it must be constantly restored, renewed, defended and modified.[10] The negotiation of hegemony takes place not only in the realms of politics and the economy, but also in the realm of civil society. Culture, education and art play a critical role in the domain of civil society, shaping "common sense." This negotiation hierarchically assigns value to different types of actions, lifestyles, and identities, privileging some and marginalizing others.[11] The hierarchically tiered values assigned to these things create a "view of the self and the world that encompasses not only consciousness, but everyday practices, routine actions and also unconscious dispositions," according to Benjamin Opratko.[12] The negotiation of hegemony, and the fight for a hegemonic order that values oppressed (proletariat) lives and voices, involves a critical examination of and striving for a "higher elaboration of one's own view of the real,"[13] which for Gramsci is an explicitly political project. He asserts that the "choice and criticism of a world view" is a "political fact."[14] In this context, Gramsci also identifies the "politics of culture"[15] or the "politics of the cultural"[16] as an essential front in battle over hegemony. For him culture includes habits and perceptions of the world, as well as aesthetics and artistic practices.[17] Culture is as little separable from systematic power relations as politics is from the production of knowledge and identities, as Henri Giroux points out.[18] Thus, critical cultural work is central to Gramsci's emancipatory thinking. In order to achieve liberation,

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9 Peter Mayo, "Synthesizing Gramsci and Freire: Possibilities for a Theory of Radical Adult Education," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 13 no. 2 (1994): 127, in reference to David W. Livingstone, "On Hegemony in Corporate Capitalist States: Material Structures, Ideological Forms, Class Consciousness and Hegemonic Acts," *Sociological Inquiry*, 46 (1976): 235.

10 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 112.

11 Iris Dzudzek, Caren Kunze, and Joscha Wullweber, "Einleitung: poststrukturalistische Hegemonietheorien als Gesellschaftskritik," in *Diskurs und Hegemonie*, ed. by Iris Dzudzek, Caren Kunze, and Joscha Wullweber (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), 18f.

12 Benjamin Opratko, *Hegemonie. Politische Theorie nach Antonio Gramsci* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2014), 44.

13 Antonio *Gramsci, Gefängnishefte: kritische Gesamtausgabe in 10 Bänden*, ed. by Klaus Bochmann, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, and Peter Jehle (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2012), 1384.

14 ibid., 1378.

15 ibid., 2113.

16 ibid., 1689.

17 ibid., 2108.

18 Henry A. Giroux, "Rethinking Cultural Politics and Radical Pedagogy in the Work of Antonio Gramsci," *Educational Theory* 49, no. 1 (1999): 1–19.

the proletariat is supposed to break away from the given ideological contents of the bourgeoisie and (collectively) develop its own culture.[19] This elaboration of a distinct culture is a process of self-determination and, therefore, a form of intellectual and political self-empowerment. Engagement with the arts can be used to elaborate one's own culture and, thereby, to develop one's own "view of reality." However, this intellectual self-empowerment can only take place gradually.[20] Gramsci calls the slow cultural, ideological and political penetration of the proletariat worldview into civil society and state institutions a "War of Position." He uses the term because, for him, "the superstructures of civil society […] are like the trench system in modern warfare."[21] Culture especially, in which "various ideological layers" are united, is "the product of a complex elaboration."[22] According to political theorist Chantal Mouffe, the politics of the cultural must be conducted as a War of Position, where the central statements and practices that support and reproduce bourgeois hegemony should be dissected or disarticulated.[23]

Gramsci advocated engaging with art and culture dialectically. Changing art and culture goes hand in hand with changing society. Stuart Hall refers to the ensemble of language, signs, and images as systems of representation.[24] These systems contribute critically to the (re)production of social conditions, while a new society leads to new art and new culture. Accordingly, Mouffe sees the main task of artistic practices to be the production of new subjectivities and the elaboration of new worlds. That that is why it is necessary to initiate artistic interventions in a multitude of social spaces outside traditional institutions.[25]

The most important strategic actors in social struggles over hegemony are organic intellectuals. In Gramsci's understanding, all people are intellectuals, but not everyone can take on this function, since not everyone has the necessary qualifications.[26] Organic intellectuals are those who form a social, cultural group, they develop this group's self-understanding and organize its cohesion.[27] Social change is closely linked to how new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting are being developed and spread through a community. It is the organic intellectuals who organize the

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19 Sabine Kebir, "Einleitung," in *Antonio Gramsci. Marxismus und Kultur. Ideologie, Alltag, Literatur*, ed. by Sabine Kebir (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 1991), 12.

20 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, 2178.

21 ibid., 1589.

22 ibid., 2178f.

23 Chantal Mouffe, "Alfredo Jaar: der Künstler als organischer Intellektueller," in *Alfredo Jaar. The Way It Is. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstandes* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2012), 270.

24 Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon (eds.) *Representation* (London: Sage Publications, 2013).

25 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 87.

26 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, 1500.

27 Uwe Hirschfeld, *Notizen zu Alltagsverstand, politischer Bildung und Utopie* (Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 2015), 103.

development of "common sense" within their group and its dissemination. They organize the political consciousness of their group, as well as the group's representation. After all, any group that seeks to become hegemonic is concerned with the goal of assimilation and the ideological conquest of traditional intellectuals; the more a group of organic intellectuals has developed, the more successful they will be at such an undertaking.[28] Since culture and art play a crucial role for the negotiation of hegemony, it would be reasonable to assume that artists can become organic intellectuals. Chantal Mouffe, for example, attributes this quality to all those who work in the field of art and culture. However, in Gramsci's understanding, organic intellectuals cannot simply be defined by categories or activities. For him, questions of art are to be discussed separately from those of intellectuals and, thus, artists can take on the function of intellectuals, but do not necessarily do so.[29] Whether they act as organic intellectuals or not depends on the mindset of the artists and the context in which the artistic interventions are taking place.

Emancipatory claims in artistic practices

Referring back to Gramsci's emancipatory project of finding new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting and, thus, developing a new culture and new art; this project is reflected in many artistic initiatives with "communities"[30] that take place in so-called community and independent artist-run project spaces and that encourage the participation of neighborhood residents. As art historian Grant Kester remarks, concepts such as "empowerment" and "participatory democracy" that found political expression during the 1960's were re-emerging in the rhetoric of community-based art in the 1990s.[31] The emergence of these participatory and socially engaged art forms can be traced back to earlier movements of the avant-garde. These include, for example, Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, and also Futurism, which Gramsci first praised but later critiqued. These movements raised questions of originality and authorship, challenged conventional assumptions about the passive role of the viewer or spectator, and took an anti-bourgeois position on the role and function of art itself.[32] Subsequently, the neo-avant-gardes of the post-war period, such as Fluxus or the emergence of happenings, developed an increasingly participatory approach to artistic practice by involving the audience and

28 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, 1500ff.

29 Cf. Ingo Lauggas, *Hegemonie, Kunst und Literatur. Ästhetik und Politik bei Gramsci und Williams* (Wien: Erhard Löcker GesmbH, 2013), 38.

30 I use the term "community" to refer to community art. However, a precise definition of community would open up another discussion, which cannot be conducted here. I therefore put "community" into quotation marks.

31 Grant H. Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage* 22, no. 5 (January 1995): 5–11.

32 Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), "WHAT IS Education and Community Programmes" (2010), 28. <www.imma.ie>.

orienting themselves towards "reality."[33] As the author Stella Rollig argues in her brief historical outline of activism and participation in the arts in the 20th century, the emancipation movements of the 1960s, especially in the USA, had a significant impact on the arts.[34] In 1969, for example, the "Art Workers Coalition" was founded to promote the representation of women and People of Color in the art world and to fight "against the neglect of the socially disadvantaged in cultural provision."[35] Other initiatives arose to work with underprivileged group, in order to encourage them to formulate their own ideas and find their own cultural expression.[36]

The demands for enlightenment, politicization, and effectiveness beyond an art audience, which arose at the beginning of the 20th century, were further elaborated in the art practices of the 1990s, whose central idea became critical social intervention.[37] This happened in dialogue with the emergent scholarly field of Cultural Studies which was characterized by its "desire for 'real' life, for mixing with popular culture, for insight, participation and change."[38] Strongly influenced by Gramsci, scholars of Cultural Studies examined the triangle of culture, power, and identity in hegemonic struggles "for dominance and subordination, inclusion and exclusion of social groups."[39] In particular, research in Cultural Studies focuses on the significance of popular culture—which includes *folklore* in Gramsci's words—within the struggle for cultural hegemony.

In the 1990s new terms emerged within art criticism to describe the ways that artists engaged with political topics. These concepts are useful for understanding socially committed art practices like those examined below. The term "context" refers to the specific spatial and socio-historical site of an artistic intervention. It also refers to the structures and conditions in and under which artistic production and presentation take place. Taking context as such into account naturally also brings about institutional critique. The terms "process," "project," and "practice" foreground the importance of the act of production over the final artistic product.[40] The concept of "public sphere" refers to the exhibition of the production as

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33 Christian Kravagna, "Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft. Modelle partizipatorischer Praxis," in *Die Kunst des Öffentlichen. Projekte, Ideen, Stadtplanungsprozesse im politischen, sozialen, öffentlichen Raum*, ed. by Marius Babias and Achim Könneke (Amsterdam/Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1998), 31.

34 Stella Rollig, "Zwischen Agitation und Animation. Aktivismus und Partizipation in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Dürfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum*, ed. by Stella Rollig and Eva Sturm (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2002), 4.

35 ibid.

36 ibid., 5

37 Stella Rollig, "Das wahre Leben. Projektorientierte Kunst in den neunziger Jahren," in *Die Kunst des Öffentlichen. Projekte, Ideen, Stadtplanungsprozesse im politischen, sozialen, öffentlichen Raum*, ed. by Marius Babias and Achim Könneke (Amsterdam/Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1998), 14f.

38 ibid., 16

39 Oliver Marchart, *Cultural Studies* (Konstanz: UKV Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008), 35.

40 Rollig, "Das wahre Leben. Projektorientierte Kunst in den neunziger Jahren," 16f.

well as the reception of it beyond the art field.[41] The focus on "community" usually implies working with (supposedly) ethnic, social, or political minorities, as well as the cultural representation of these groups, which can have a politicizing and community-building impact.[42] The keyword "self-organization" refers to an infrastructure for production, presentation, publication, and distribution created by artists themselves, and independent, artist-run project spaces.[43] The terms "communication," "information," and "reflection" signify a "desire for common ground, participation, exchange" that is pursued via debates and discussions.[44] The concept of the "cultural worker" is a redefinition of the figure of the artist. According to this concept, the artist's role is no longer limited to artistic production. Instead, the cultural worker operates in spaces that are not exclusively deemed artistic, addresses different public spheres, works collectively rather than individually, and, above all, conducts interdisciplinary research and intervention beyond the artistic field.[45] The concept of "cultural worker" can already be thought as approaching the figure of the organic intellectual. Lastly, "counter-publicity" refers to the creation of a political public sphere through the use and transgression of the actual art context[46] in cooperation between artists and political groups.[47]

The author and curator Nato Thompson refers to "socially engaged art" as less an art movement than a reference to the possibility of a "new social order—ways of life that emphasize participation, challenge power, and span disciplines ranging from urban planning and community work to theater and the visual arts."[48] Arts figures act as effective instruments for discussing socio-political issues by using their professional attributes such as "performativity, representation, aesthetics and the creation of affect" in order to have an impact on the political sphere.[49] Both in terms of content and method, socially committed and participatory art forms claim to have emancipatory powers to affect social conditions. Opinions vary greatly about in what ways and to what extent these art forms should intervene in society. According to art historian Christian Kravagna, the demands for change "vary according to the ideological basis"[50] of artists, project leaders, institutions. These can be revolutionary demands (as in Peter Bürger's concept of the *Aufhebung der Kunst in Lebenspraxis*),

41 ibid., 17f.

42 ibid., 19f.

43 ibid., 21f.

44 ibid., 22f.

45 ibid., 23f.

46 BüroBert (ed.), *Copyshop Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit. Ein Sampler von Büro Bert* (Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv, 1993).

47 Rollig, "Das wahre Leben. Projektorientierte Kunst in den neunziger Jahren," 26

48 Nato Thompson (ed.), *Living As Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012), 19.

49 ibid., 22.

50 Kravagna, "Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft," 31.

or reformatory demands ("the democratization of art"), or appeals with lesser political content that call for more playful and/or didactic changes in perception and "consciousness."[51] Participatory art does not always have to be about direct participation, but simply about the problematization of participation, as theorist Juliane Rebentisch reasonably remarks.[52]

The positive political implications of these participatory and socially engaged art forms can hardly be called into question.[53] However, how and by whom artistic projects and programs are designed will have a critical effect on their political possibilities. In other words, it is important how "organic" the involved artists are to the respective group or "community," and out of which desire/motivation they act. To return to the initial question, it may be asked at this point how close artists come to the function of organic intellectuals. Following Gramsci, the attitude of organic intellectuals should be examined more closely from the point of view of their suitability for the subaltern struggle for hegemony. In order to analyze the socio-political function of intellectuals, it is necessary to explore and test their psychological attitude and to ask whether they have a "paternalistic" attitude toward the group or "do they think they are an organic expression of them?."[54]

To give an example of a community-oriented artistic intervention that was based on a paternalistic attitude, Kravagna uses the New Genre Public Art, which made a name for itself in the mid-1990s. He clearly identifies the problems associated with addressing a specific audience as a process of "othering" and the construction of an "Other" as a condition for further projections."[55] The"Others" are poor and disadvantaged, held up as representatives of what is real and genuine. On the one hand, they were seen as being in need of help and, on the other, as a source of inspiration.[56] Such "Others" were to be helped through art, as it was intended in one of the group's first and most prominent community art projects, *Culture in Action*, where several artists worked with urban communities in Chicago between 1992 and 1993. They created formats such as community gardens, dinner parties, interactive sculptures, on topics like AIDS, gang violence, public housing, multicultural demography, and neighborhoods. The project was meant to "lead away from the object into the lives of real people, real neighborhoods."[57] And these "real people" and "real communities,"

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51 ibid.

52 Juliane Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2013), 68.

53 Cf. Stefan Neuner, "Paradoxien der Partizipation. Zur Einführung," *Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie No 10/11* (2007): 4.

54 Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks: Antonio Gramsci, ed. by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 275; Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, 1975.

55 Kravagna, "Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft," 31ff.

56 ibid.

57 Michael Brenson, "Healing in Time," in *Culture in Action*, ed. by Mary Jane Jacob, Michael Brenson, and Eva M. Olson (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 20.

in turn, were to be empowered by the means of art to aspire to something greater and to have their "real voices" be heard.[58] Kravagna critiques the actions of artists who enter marginalized communities with the intention of educating them, likening the artists to evangelizing missionaries.[59] For Grant Kester the work with urban communities "is understood to produce certain pedagogical effects in the community."[60] By drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the problematic relationship that exists between a particular community and the "delegate" who chooses or is chosen to speak on its behalf,[61] Kester comments that the supposed "community" (political and symbolic) is only created through the medium of expression of the delegate.[62] By romanticizing the Other in this way and interpellating the Other as a marginalized subject, the project instrumentalizes and reproduces the very social inequalities which it was meant to counteract.

Artist-run-spaces

In contrast to projects where communities are created by a delegate, independent artist-run project spaces are at least partially rooted their "communities."[63] The communities exist in the neighborhoods prior to the "creative" act of delegation, and project spaces engage in a long-term idea-exchanges due to their proximity to their target audiences. Some of the problems associated with short-term projects, especially with regards to having outsiders speak for/over the voices of the community, are mitigated when artist-run spaces undertake long-term collaboration with people from their neighborhoods. When long-term collaboration takes place, residents themselves feel a sense of ownership over the space's activities and are given a voice in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, most of the time the artists still differ from residents in categories like class or ethnicity.

There is a long history of such spaces working within their local communities, mainly in Western art metropolises. The spaces are organized by the artists themselves. They provide a platform for other artists and are not funded by public money. They produce and exhibit art in experimental, discursive, and interdisciplinary ways.[64] These artist-run-spaces are usually found in old city centers, which have low rents, high levels of diversity, and close proximity to other facilities of artistic production. It is not surprising

58 ibid., 26.

59 Kravagna, 36.

60 Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists."

61 Pierre Bourdieu, "La délégation et le fétichisme politique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 52–53 (1984): 49–55.

62 Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists."

63 Here it has to be stressed that the spatial structure of neighborhoods is not equal to the structure of communities.

64 Séverine Marguin, "Die Pluralisierung der Autonomie. Eine soziologische Untersuchung über die freien Berliner Projekträume," in *Autonomie der Kunst? Zur Aktualität eines gesellschaftlichen Leitbildes*, ed. by Uta Karstein and Nina Tessa Zahner (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017), 290.

FIG. 2 June 10, 2001, Picnic project by Erik Göngrich, Oda Projesi courtyard, Galata-Istanbul, photo: Oda Projesi archive.

that the artists running these spaces start to interact with neighborhood residents, and even actively involve them in creative work, as the artists themselves become integrated into the community. Living side by side has a reciprocal effect on artists and residents alike. Yet, having artists present in a neighborhood enhances an area both qualitatively and symbolically. As their presence draws capital into neighborhood, artists are accused of fostering gentrification. Of course market forces have dictated that these neighborhoods are the only areas where many of such artists can afford to rent a space. At the same time, the independent spaces themselves easily fall victim to gentrification and, thus, organize resistance to it out of a "solidarity of interest" with their neighbors. In Gramsci's understanding, this solidarity is an important phase in political struggles.[65]

One example of this process is seen in the work of *Oda Projesi,* an artist collective that rented an apartment in the Galata district of Istanbul in 2000. The apartment was converted into a project space that facilitated encounters between local residents, guests, and artists. The interaction with the residents arose naturally as the artists and neighbors got to know each other better.[66] The artists tried to find a form of collaboration with their neighbors, and the space served as an open studio for diverse (not only artistic) activities and as a meeting place for neighbors. As one of the few low-budget project spaces in the city center addressing urban issues, *Oda Projesi* is considered to be an important artistic intervention in Istanbul.[67] Later, the collective's projects fundamentally dealt with

65 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, 1560.

66 OdaProjesi, "Ohne Dach, jedoch mit Hof," in *The Art of Urban Intervention. Die Kunst des urbanen Handelns*, ed. by Judith Laister, Margarethe Makovec, and Anton Lederer (Wien: Löcker Verlag, 2014), 123.

67 Pelin Tan, "'Quale Utopia?' Failure of Urban Utopias and the Approach to the City," in *The [Un] Common Place. Art, Public Space and Urban Aesthetics in Europe*, ed. by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi (Barcelona: Actar, 2005), 176.

FIG. 3 Exhibition of PASAJ "61 meters of Kahya Bey Street" at Apartment Project Berlin, October 2015, photo David Gauffin

the ongoing gentrification of the area, about which they wanted to raise public awareness and amplify local critical voices. After they lost their premises in 2005 due to gentrification, they held a number of activities in other spaces, including artist residencies. Projects used a variety of media to continue their exploration of urban space. These included the founding of a local radio station as well as the publication of books, postcards, and magazines. One such publication was the Annex newspaper,[68] which served as a platform where residents, artists, and scholars could communicate with each other [Fig. 2].

Another example from Istanbul of an independent artist initiative is *PASAJ*, which was founded in 2010 and moved to Tarlabaşı in 2012, a district close to Taksim square. Although Tarlabaşı has been an economically depressed part of the urban center for decades, it is currently the subject of a government-sponsored urban renewal project. The PASAJ space is used for workshops, artist-in-residence programs, and exhibitions. The artists behind PASAJ have used the project space to develop a participatory and interactive socially engaged art practice in collaboration with the residents of the neighborhood. In 2015, PASAJ took part in the year-long project *We decide how we reside, initiated by Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (HKW) (Berlin), which dealt with questions of fair housing. PASAJ organized workshops with children living in Tarlabaşı in order to educate young people about urban transformation. The workshops produced sixteen films in which the children interviewed other residents about the positive and negative aspects of life in the neighborhood, showing the diversity of the area's inhabitants and the ways that neighbors relate to one another. For *PASAJ*, the project also served as the first phase of a larger documentation effort about Tarlabaşı, a place whose character is severely endangered due to encroaching gentrification [Fig. 3].

68 http://odaprojesi.blogspot.com/2009/10/annex-say-4-ckt-annex-issue-4-is-out.html, accessed November 11, 2020.

FIG. 4 Exhibition at Kotti-Shop for "We decide how we reside," October 2015, © David Gauffin

Another independent art and project space with a similar profile that took part in the HKW project was Kotti-Shop in Berlin. Founded in 2009, the space tries to create a meeting space where residents of the Kreuzberg Zentrum (NKZ) can connect. NKZ is a large social housing building with eleven floors and about 300 apartments surrounding Kottbusser Tor, an area stigmatized as a "bad neighborhood" that is also a destination for "cool" global nomads. The NKZ is one of two buildings that has been at the heart of discussions about "ghettos" and "social hotspots" in Berlin since the late 1990s.[69] Several newspaper articles have even characterized the residents of NKZ as dangerous and criminal.[70] In spite of the stigma, rents are rising there and residents are afraid of the impact and consequences of gentrification. As a response, a number of initiatives have been founded that focus on the social fabric of the neighborhood. Kotti-Shop is one of such initiatives that has built a close link with residents [Fig. 4].

People whose voices are not usually heard in political and urban discourses should be listened to. The artists at Kotti-Shop focus on the neighborhood by analyzing, reflecting, examining and archiving the living environment, concrete stories, and personal experiences from the NKZ. This happens in collaboration with residents, ensuring that that the artistic methods and expressions used are compatible with residents' needs and desires. Residents and artists craft and employ collages as

69 Ulrich Best, *Ghetto-Diskurse. Geographie der Stigmatisierung in Marseille und Berlin* (Universität Potsdam, 2001), 136.

70 ibid.

the basis for discussion and critical commentary on the issues facing the neighborhood. Additionally, other techniques, such as interviews, mapping, and 24-hour films are employed to produce residents' own narratives of the urban experience. The aim of these activities is to build up communication channels among the neighbors and to create structures for better co-existence and social cohesion. The artists' engagement with their community certainly had a politicizing effect. Together with the residents, the artists were involved in the resistance against the sale of the building to a private real estate company. The sale was averted and the building was taken over by a municipal housing association in 2017. The artists continue to act as delegates for residents in negotiations with the housing company. Recently, the residents negotiated with the housing company to have a room designated for social gatherings that is to be managed solely by residents. This is an example of actual political organizing against real estate speculation.

Different elements of representation

In the examples discussed above, the artists may be regarded as organic intellectuals in a Gramscian sense. This is because the artists organize the political consciousness of members of the neighborhood by facilitating group meetings and fostering artistic engagement; they act as representatives of this so-formed group or "community" and, by extension, the whole neighborhood. The artists represent the community on two different levels. On the one hand, they represent residents through speech acts with outside actors, serving as the face of the neighborhood. On the other hand, the artists represent the community by post-producing the creative expressions of the residents.

To return to Lefebvre, these two types of representation serve as an active element in the production of space. The production of space is a process containing three equal and simultaneous dimensions: spatial practice or perceived space (*la pratique spatiale*/l'espace *perçu*), spatial representation or conceived space (*les représentations de l'espace*/*l'espace* conçu) *and the representation spaces or lived space* (les espaces de représentation/*l'espace* vécu*).[71] The spatial practice (perceived space) is the concrete daily use of the space with its social interactions, daily present bodies, and the everyday life that inscribes itself in the space. Spatial representation (conceived space) is to be understood at the level of signification, the space as represented in maps, texts, or in the aforementioned artistic works like collages and videos. The third dimension, the representation spaces (lived space) describes the experience of space and its symbolic content, denoting something outside itself. Kottbusser Tor, for example, symbolizes not only the simultaneously repulsive/alluring

71 Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 2000), 48f.

multicultural Other, but also resistance against the neo-liberal sell-out of the city, as ongoing local struggle for affordable housing is concentrated there. Because art has the possibility changing what a place symbolizes in the social imagination, it has a significant impact on representation spaces (lived space). Representation, as Lefebvre puts it, enables a transition between presence and absence: through representation the Other becomes imaginable, apart from his presence.[72] Representation is therefore a link between presence and absence. Thus, artistic representation can have an impact on social and political reality—not only externally but also internally. For this reason, Cultural Studies scholarship is concerned with how meanings are generated by representations. According to Stuart Hall, representations do not simply neutrally depict reality, but are the result of interpretations and therefore meaning-constituting practices.[73]

Because the artists in the examples above are involved in, or even take over, different acts of representation in the negotiation of hegemony, they can be regarded as organic intellectuals. Nevertheless, it is crucial to question who can and should take on this role in which contexts, and, thus, who speaks for whom under what conditions. Because spaces both reflect and produce social reality, it is also important to ask who is represented in which spaces and how. Representation has both a political function and a symbolic function. In her canonical text *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak follows Karl Marx's account of the 18th Brumaire and describes representation as both *vertreten* (represent—in the sense of delegation of authority) and *darstellen* (re-present—in the sense of portrayal), defining the critical difference between "speaking for" and "talking about."[74] According to Spivak, these two sides are to be differentiated but not to be separated as representation always contains both: there is no representation (*vertreten*) without re-presentation (*darstellen*). In the examples above, the artists represent their respective neighborhood on two levels, in speech acts and through post-production. The activities and results of the artistic workshops are represented to the outside world in two ways. In one sense, the artists represent their group in various speech acts and therefore "speak for" them as delegates (*vertreten*). In another sense, the artists post-produce the residents' creative work; they bring the aesthetic debates that have collectively arisen in the small processes into a form that is outwardly representative. This post-production is quite clearly a form of a re-presentation (*darstellen*). Spivak states that there is responsibility in representation. One is responsible for creating

72 Henri Lefebvre, *La présence et l'absence. Contribution à la théorie des représentations* (Paris/Tournai: Casterman, 1980).

73 Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 1–47.

74 Gayatri Spivak, "Spivak—Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 277.

visibility and legitimation for those who cannot represent themselves, and for being aware of these two sides of representation.

Struggle for neighborhoods on an (art) institutional level

In the War of Position in cultural hegemony, "neighbourhoods" are the critical strongholds. Neighborhoods can be regarded as communities in spatial-geographical contexts and places of social reproduction. Moreover, solidarity, which is for Gramsci essential for political will, is built through practice in spatial relations.[75] The social fabric of neighborhoods is often interpreted as an important backstage for social and political organization, and so great hopes are placed in the neighborhood precisely where it is necessary to compensate for the deficits of the political and economic system. This is especially true in the current moment of the global housing crisis. In Berlin in particular, a great number of initiatives and alliances have been formed within civil society to fight rising rents and displacement. The art and cultural scene has played a major role in this struggle. Both independent local actors and state-funded institutions have become involved in these efforts. Neighborhoods, artist-run spaces, and art institutions can be understood as combatants of the War of Position.

The *Theatre Hebbel am Ufer*, for example, opened its 2019 season with the Festival *Berlin bleibt*!, an interdisciplinary program devoted to local movements fighting against gentrification.[76] Like the aforementioned project *We decide how we reside*, the festival is emblematic of (progressive) art institutions that claim to create a democratic place for different voices and to intervene in political discourse. Nina Möntmann describes these activities as New Institutionalism.[77]

Institutions get involved in emancipatory projects and collaborate with local movements, collectives, and artists in order to connect art with people's lives, a trend which has grown since the avant-garde and to commodify site specific knowledge. Art institutions portray themselves as national educational bodies that react to current crises, such as the housing crisis in metropolises. The involvement of art institutions in such projects can have positive outcomes for community members. Institutions have the ability to create innovative formats for social engagement and their

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75 David Featherstone, "'Gramsci in Action:' Space, Politics, and the Making of Solidarities," in *Gramsci. Space, Nature, Politics*, ed. by Michael Ekers and others (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 68; for further reading see also María do Mar Castro Varela and Leila Haghighat, "Solidarity and the City: A Complicated Story," in *Doing Tolerance: Urban Interventions and Forms of Participation*, ed. by Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Barış Ülker (Berlin & Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2020), 67.

76 https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/en/berlin-bleibt/, accessed November 11, 2020.

77 Nina Möntmann, "The Enterprise of the Art Institution in Late Capitalism," *Transversal Texts*, 2006 https://transversal.at/transversal/0106/montmann/en, accessed November 11, 2020.

platforms can amplify local voices through large outreach networks.[78] With their symbolic, representative, and infrastructural resources, art institutions have an "educational function" and are the essential venues for negotiating hegemony.[79]

Artists collaborate with state institutions for a variety of reasons: for financial support, for expanding the artists' stage of representation, and to make use of institutional resources to further their cause.

Interestingly, the artists' use of institutions complicates the notion of representation—who speaks where, and for whom—even further. These large institutions, and the artists that collaborate with them, are often accused of coopting critiques of capitalism and resistance to market forces merely for cultural or symbolic appeal, rather than out of any true concern for marginalized or disenfranchised people. Even with the best intentions, institutions and artists will always be the ones who profit the most from these kinds of projects, while the political effect for the one's they are speaking for can never be guaranteed. There is, indeed, a danger of institutions using social causes primarily for their own gain. Similarly, artists should be aware of their own role as being the first wave of gentrifiers in poor neighborhoods. Although it is possible to criticize such projects, such critique should avoid either/or logic, and take into account the complex relationship involved.[80] Embracing this complexity, artist Theaster Gates turns abandoned buildings in Chicago into hubs for Black American culture. He does this in full awareness of the possible usufruct of his work by the market, describing one of his projects as "real estate art." His interventions provide a meaningful suggestion for how to think about artists role in gentrification in a different way.[81] This practice and the underlying mindset correlate with what Lefebvre meant by a right to the city: a right to difference, conflict, and antagonism.[82] The employment of art in the negotiation of social conditions and political struggles has to be considered as what philosopher Jacques Derrida would describe as "pharmakon," as poison and medicine at the same time.[83]

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78 Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *E-Flux Journal* #00 (2008) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/, accessed November 11, 2020.

79 Oliver Marchart, *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld. Die Documenta-Ausstellungen Dx, D11, D12 und die Politik der Biennalisieurng* (Köln: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein // Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 20.

80 For a deeper philosophical discussion of either/or logics and the double bind see: Leila Haghighat, "Schizophrenie und Ästhetik. Eine ideengeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem *double bind*," in *Double Bind postkolonial. Kritische Perspektiven auf Kunst und kulturelle Bildung*, ed. by María do Mar Castro Varela and Leila Haghighat (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021).

81 Kathleen Reinhardt, "Theaster Gates's Dorchester Projects in Chicago," *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 2 (2015): 195. https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144214563507.

82 Henri Lefebvre, "The Right to the City," in *Writings on Cities*, ed. by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Malden: Blackwell, 1996), 63–181.

83 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

No easy answers

Socially committed art practices that pursue an emancipatory claim have long established themselves in the temples of high culture. Gaining such prestigious institutional recognition can be useful for political struggles. But the question remains whether and how this recognition will be used to further emancipatory goals. While some artists confine their community-based work to the gallery or project space, others extend it into political action, as in the case of Kotti-Shop where the artists play a large role in the fight against gentrification. Even when artists' activities are more modest, the creative work they do can irritate the current hegemonic order and offer alternative visions for society.

The present work highlights the political aspects of community art by reflecting on how artists engage in urban struggles as organic intellectuals, especially when they carry out long-term, in-situ initiatives in local artist-run spaces. The concep of organic intellectuals can be helpful when examining how artists who work with communities threatened with gentrification are able to affect political or social change. Nevertheless, this paper does not attempt to provide a one-size-fits-all framework for understanding all projects of the sort described above. Neither does it resolve the question of how these techniques can be used to effectively bring about emancipatory results. Even artists working against capitalist forces as organic intellectuals are still bound within the system of capitalism. Capitalist forces and agitation against them are co-present and unresolvable, as no position exists totally outside of the social system. Thus, it is impossible to generalize about whether any particular artist engaged with communities and political struggles is or is not acting as an organic intellectual. As argued above, this clearly depends on the specific context and the conditions, as well as the mindsets and attitudes, of the artists. This article should serve as a guide for thinking these practices both politically and ethically, as a productive meditation on the contradictions that are critical in the War of Position over hegemony.

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