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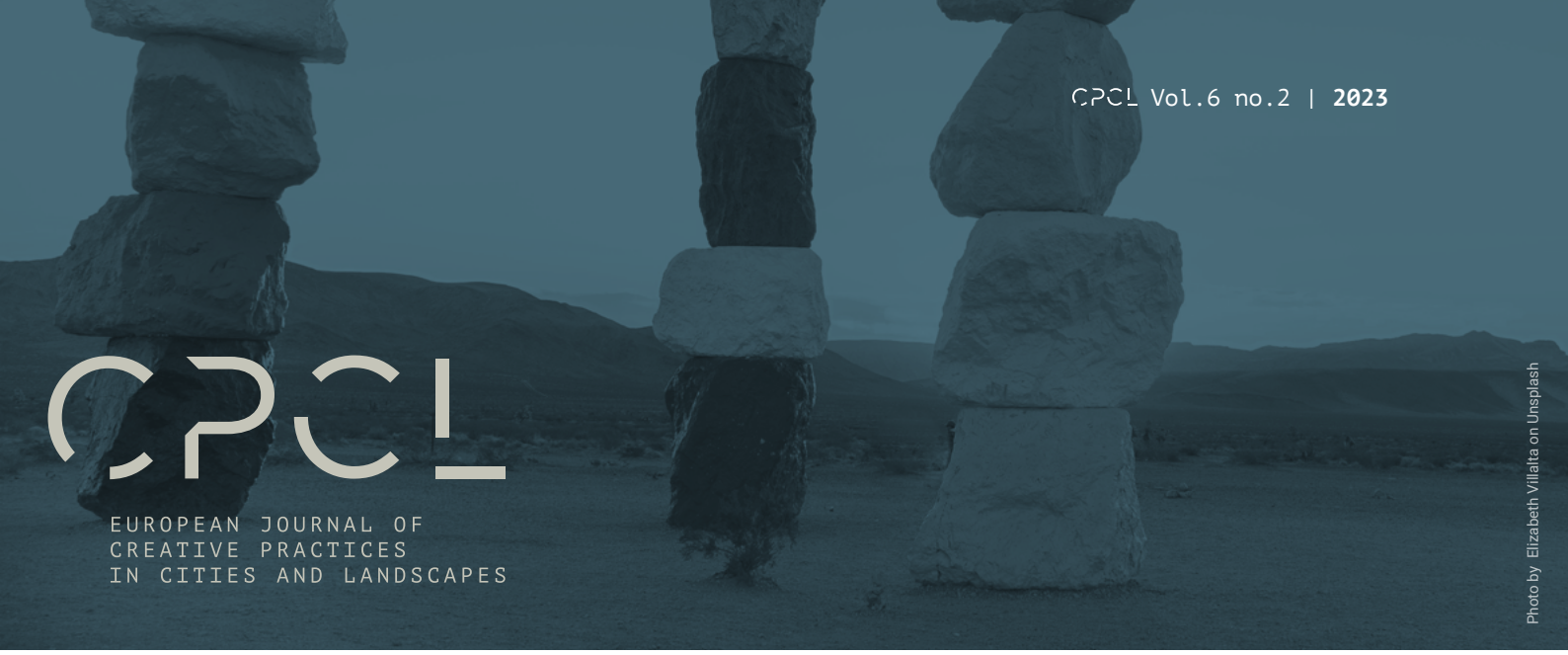

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MAIN SECTION

Public Art: a Review. Social and Political Practices

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ABSTRACT

Public art covers a range of phenomena in which aesthetics and urban life intersect. Public art introduces a broad of practices that opened to a number of interpretations regards their contributions to the urban environment, functions as a key factor in a city's regeneration policies, and is the primary fuel of urban capital production and accumulation today. The article focuses on the art practices that declare ethical commitments with the social-political sphere, promoting participatory and collaboratively-led activities, converging thus with the dynamics of activist practices. The article reconsiders the role of public art as a socio-political agent, taking into account the timeless self-defining and self-regulating autonomy of visual arts, which claims the right to set specific norms of cultural inclusion and exclusion in the public space, reducing thus the multiculturalism of urban life to the restrictive framework of a one-dimensional culture. The paper elaborates on some aspects of the discussions about the social-political engagements of public art, developing a brief discussion of some of the most current themes emerging from it.

KEYWORDS

Public art practices; Participatory art; Art activism; Public art & gentrification

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Introduction

The current debate about public art focuses on the issue of sociopolitical engagement, which declares the capacity of art to create "a feeling of connectedness and belonging, to organize skills of civic involvement, and also to invigorate groups (often marginalized groups) to explore and express individual and shared identities."[1] Sociopolitical engagement has become the foundation for an ethic of care, "the unifying reason of public art for treating the urban environment with a great sense of responsibility."[2] In their report on the impact of public art on American cities, Ann Marcusen and Anne Gadwa summarize that public art"reflects the neighborhood, animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves the viability of local business and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.[3]

Public art we encounter in our time is quite different from the phenomenon of public art of the 70s, which was driven by giving a voice to those who umpire it and providing a breath to all those who pass it as it speaks from the streets, as the artist and activist Judith Baca has pointed out."[4] The last decades, terms like "socially engaged" "participatory art," "collaborative art," "useful art," "new-genre public art," and "social practice," among others used in scholarly criticism in the art world,[5] supports several practices through an ongoing process of integrating concepts and tools paving the way for the convergence of public art and social practice, within the ambiguous assumptions of socio-political activism.[6] Also, under the term Socially Engaged Art Criticism, art practices establish new relationships between the art domain and other fields of knowledge production, from urbanism to environmentalism, from experimental education to participatory design, according to the art historian, editor, and founder of the journal Field, Grant Kester.[7] In other words, public art is an amalgam of forms and contexts that produce unstable scenarios of sociopolitical applications.

However, the association of socially engaged, participating, or collectivism with public art is not self-evident, as many of these art practices have been produced informally (in terms of production, financial management,

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1 Katherine Melcher, et al. *Community-Built: Art, Construction, Preservation, and Place.* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 121.

2 Ronald Lee Fleming, T*he Art of Placemaking: Interpreting Community through Public Art and Urban Design* (New York: Merrell Publishers, 2007), 28.

3 Ann Markusen, Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking* (Washington, DC, 2010), 4.

4 Judith F. Baca,"Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a many-cultured society," in *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* ed. by Suzanne Lacy (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995), 131-138.

5 Castellano, Carlos Garrido, *Art Activism for an anticolonial Future* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2021), 3.

6 Boris Groy, On Art Activism, *e-flux journal* #5 (June 2011). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/

7 FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism, https://field-journal.com/about.

and presentation) developed at the margins of the institutions or even as a reaction to them. This is the point where the contradiction of sociopolitical engagement in public art arises. Public art, "fitting comfortably on a traditional, romantic notion of artists in their garrets,"[8] is supported by institutions that legitimize its role in urban beautification, making it more attractive and seductive. This role of art transforms any sociopolitical engagement toward the direction of its aesthetic form. The moment art operates to notions of aestheticization and spectacularity, any political art action turns into a spectacle, as art historian Boris Groys has pointed out.[9]

In this regard, public art cannot be understood as a coherent art term corresponding to a multinational society i.e. to various social and cultural environments, or as a specific art expression that would justify urban development or refinement policies. Where such a thing is justified, it is nothing more than an ideological pretext that establishes a stable cultural mechanism, which replaces the free play of competitive (inter)reactions,[10] in the terms of Michel Foucault.

Speaking for public art – from the most traditional to its most contemporary versions – we can identify it with the dynamics of the production of public sphere conditions in the urban environment. Public art is a means to express the self-evident values of a city interwoven with its symbolic values necessary for the (re)production of urban life. Synonymous with the concept of place, public art gives local clarity and creates interactive relationships with its environment. However, based on its current discourses and applications, important questions arise regarding the nature of its public character. Public art has established itself as an institutional art category with uncertain context drawn on the constant exchange process of disciplinary concepts and the adoption of sociopolitical means and practices. On the one hand, the term is used as an agent to create a positive image of the place for the benefit of urban regeneration that identifies the field with the processes of urban beautification and economic viability. On the other hand, it is defined in sociological terms as a cultural intervention that organizes a sociopolitical system of relations since it incorporates practices produced into contexts that transcend the limits of the art context itself, proposing models of collectivity and ideas of access and participation. As a result, public art has tended not to represent the materiality of the culture where we live anymore, having transformed into an apparatus of direct social intervention that gives surplus value in the urban environment, suggesting itself as a collaborative arena with cultural institutions, governments, and public/non-profit/private urban and economic sector organizations. Based on the words art and public that compose the terminology, the only indisputable public art should be the

8 Anty Pratt, "The cultural and creative industries: new engines for the city?," in *Culture: City*, ed. by Wilfried Wang (Berlin: Academie der Künste, 2013), 37.

9 Boris Groy, "On Art Activism."

10 Michel Foucault, "*The subject and power*," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4, (1982): 777-795.

right of all social groups to be co-expressed and represented in the public (common) space, either participating in the dominant cultural patterns or diverging from them.

The first thing to discuss about public art is perhaps that it is a verbal construction of so-called postmodernism and thus should not be seen simply as a particular genre of art but as a means of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices that cannot be studied outside its relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination.[11] Taking this as a point of reference, the following article will attempt to explore the contexts that explicitly differentiate the contemporary applications of public art from the terms of their association with the architecture of previous periods, "when architects jumped between different scales and forms of representation, while artists focused on the intimate quality of space and materials."[12] As the article will argue, public art in its contemporary applications, driven by its proximity to cultural institutions and its engagements with the social-political sphere, exposes its regenerative role in the public space, functioning as an agent of "cultural governmentality."[13]

The following text is divided in three parts. The first part examines the concept of participation automatically associated with a democratic version of art, promoting the art practice as the performance of social action· that of open communication with the otherness. The second part focuses on the problem of community-based art, which is sponsored as public art, connecting the role of art with the representation of a local community and the art practices as agents of social cohesion. The third part elaborates on the topic of activism in art, which is separated from the horizontal oppositional guerrilla tactics of the 70s, producing a range of practices based on ambiguous assumptions of socio-political activism that express the convergence of critique and social practice.

Participation in art

One of the fundamental components of public art today is the concept of participation, which describes a process carried out by the artist in collaboration with others, mainly non-artists, who are involved with the art project. Participation recommends several practices, precursors of other concepts, and terms such as involvement, interaction, or inter-subjectivity that converge with the broader issues of the arrangement, reception, and distribution of art practices within a reformative transformation of the field of art itself into a democratic practice that relativizes human action,

11 *ibid*., 782.

12 Jes Fernie, *Two Minds: Artists and Architects in Collaboration* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 15.

13 Maroš Krivý, "Don't Plan! The Use of the Notion of 'Culture' in Transforming Obsolete Industrial Space," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 5, (2013):1724–1746.

producing an interpretative framework of social significations. The author Tom Finkelpearl framed these practices with the term social corporation, defining art participation as a spiritual practice of human collaboration.[14] While Finkelpearl stresses that the social space and the interactive moment produce participatory art rather than any physical element, Claire Bishop defines participation as a practice "in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material."[15] In other words, participation in arts implies engaging with the public, structured in a particular space and a timeframe to facilitate human interaction.

Participation in art is built on collective communication either in the public space or in the exhibition venue, structuring a process of producing connotations of art and the social sphere. Participatory art does away with the traditional concept of art as form and representation. The artwork is the remnants of the collaborative work of artists-participants. This means that art does not produce works but projects, transforming the art field into an "issue-based art process" that is built on the gathering of artist-public. Art is transformed into a discipline that relativizes human action, producing an interpretive framework of social signification determined by the moral values of altruism and solidarity, indicated as representative values of art engagement with society. In this regard, participation in art is considered an active agent of highlighting and perhaps recovering the sufferings of contemporary social realities. Participation includes, among others, communal and collective responsibility, as Bishop affirmed.[16]

Generally, art participation signifies the reconstitution of the art field to a field of social supply. From the 90s, art cooperatives and individual artists directed to the "offering" as a means of participatory art. For example, they offered buses to transfer visitors from Stockholm to a small town (Jorgen Svenson, Bus 993, 1993), distributed free small mirrors to protesters in the anti-capitalist movement against G8 (@rtmark, The Archimedes Project, Genova, 2001), or created a hydroponic garden as an alternative healthcare treatment for HIV/AIDS (Haha collective, Flood, Chicago, 1992). The catalog is broad in the book "What We Want Is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art" which examines the use of the notion of gift by the artists, considering as a kind of distribution of goods and services as a medium for artistic production.[17]

However, "the gift" falls within the practice of charity and almsgiving and may not necessarily indicate an act of altruism. In the classic treatise on the gift, the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss established at

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14 Tom Finkelpearl, *What we made - Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Dahram & London: Duke University Press, 2013).

15 Chantal Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 2.

16 *Ibid*., 12.

17 Ted Purves, Shane Aslan Selzer, *What We Want Is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art* (New York: Sunny Press, 2014).

the beginning of the twentieth century a theory of the complexity of gift exchange18 in which donation is responsible for building an economy that strengthened the ethnocentrism of Western societies during the colonial period, leading Georges Bataille to point out that the construction of the theory of donation, which is posited as a prerequisite for any possible economy, embodies the Hegelian dichotomy of master and slave within the act of gift exchange.[19] From this point of view, participation as a kind of charity proposes morality as the responsibility of art to othering, deleting the sociopolitical significance of the public sphere that is replaced with the ethical sphere.

On the other hand, participation allows to art the folding of interventions, not only ephemerally or intangible but permanently in the physical space, where social relations are formed. Such as the Victoria Square Project in Athens, created by Rick Lowe in 2017, in the frame of the exhibition "Learning in Athens" organized by the Institution of Documenta. Despite declaring itself a social sculpture,[20] in reality is about a space – a former shop – that has developed into a significant cultural center in the Victoria district. The space functions as an active intervention in the urban fabric, having been constructed as a stage of social gatherings in a marginalized area with a strong immigrant presence, which frames actions such as art shows, workshops, music events, or kids' games. According to the official page of Documenta 14, Rick Lowe first came to Athens from Houston in 2015 via a philanthropic conference, while for the creation of its "Victoria Square Project," collaborated with diverse Athenian individuals and initiatives, including Afghan Migrants and Refugees.[21] In this context, the collaboration between the artist and the public is made from a top-down base, in which the artist, as project manager, separates himself from his collaborators. As an art project, the work addresses a public which crosses the city to participate in the events and thus functions as an observer of the environment of Athenian otherness. In other words, despite the good intentions, participation in art does not negate the divide that separates the art world from others. In their work on the anthropological turn of art, Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright pointed out that artists reveals "the cultural distancing as well as appropriation or partial assimilation of another's culture through a romantic perception of others' indigenous cultures."[22] In sum, participatory art does not undermine the

18 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Gunnison (London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1966).

19 Michelle H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

20 The terminology social sculpture was introduced in the 1970s by Joseph Beuys, who proposed sculpture as a process (prozess) of a set of art practices that sculpt, reveal, and mobilize social criticism through dialogue, which is an integral part of social sculpture. See:Volker Harlan, *What Is Art? Conversations with Joseph Beuys* (London: Clairview Books, 2004).

21 Documenta 14/Artists: Rick Lowe. https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13512/rick-lowe.

22 Arnd Schneider, Christopher Wright, *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2006), 192.

dominant bourgeois ideology connected with the art domain since the collaborative work does not invalidate the hierarchal distinction between the creator, who produces the artwork, the public that consumes it, and the uncanny others.

In conclusion, participation in art is associated with the emergence of the terminology of socially engaged art, which is directly linked to a democratic version of art. Obsession regarding the role of participation in the various shades of democracy by the art discourse recommends participatory art as a critical element of the cultural infrastructure of society and an agent that strengthens civic cohesion. In this regard, art practices are entwined with the manifestations of participatory democracy,[23] establishing a distinction between the narrow system of politics and the political dimensions of the social, which finds support from neoliberal governance, in which social participation signifies the move from the social democratic welfare state to participatory democracy. Participation thus acquires political importance as a concept that reformulates the citizen's obligation towards the society of participatory democracy. That means the responsibility shifts to citizens through the development of activities at the core of which participation in culture connects with self-development. And maybe participation in art is promoted culturally within the current neoliberal democracies but, in reality, celebrated as a social-democratic nostalgic desire. The same nostalgic desire has promoted community art as a form of public art.

Community art

Community art refers to works that mediate as agents of restoration, empowerment, and cultural development of a localized human group. Community art is a socially engaged art par excellence that has as a reference point the idea of participation. The importance of communitarian in art emerged in the 1990s under the redefinition of the very content of the field, which had been constituted of the urban movements in the 70s. The term community art, which in the 1970s framed the actions and practices of artists who participated in the campaigns for individual rights, housing, or medical coverage of the residents of the degraded neighborhoods and ghettos in London, was associated with neighborhood regeneration and the diffusion of cultural goods to disadvantaged communities, functioning as a countervailing factor of Public Art and its identification with urban landscaping beautification. Thus, community art has been identified with rundown neighborhoods, "demonstrating the potential of communities to define the nature and work that art produces as an integral part of the

23 Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

transformations within them."[24] As a result, the role of public art has expanded to issues of social policy that are directly or indirectly related to the impact of art on neighborhood economic revitalization issues.

In community art there are converged two models of urban politics, which determine the terminology in a category of public art. In the first model, art is considered an agent of social change in urban areas with economic, cultural, environmental, and educational deprivation. This is rooted in the British organization Free Form Art Trust, which, in the context of the general artists' mobilizations of the 1960s, turned to the deprived urban areas, inventing creative ways to upgrade the urban environment, calling its practices community art. Applications of the Free Form Art Trust were absorbed by the urban mechanisms in the 1990s and worked as factors in combating social exclusion in areas affected by post-industrial decline.[25] The second model was established in the United States through the Neighborhood Arts Program, which aimed to integrate members of ethnic communities into the normative conditions of participatory democracy. This politics was developed after the explosion of movements for civil rights, especially after the coordinated and unified Black Civil Rights movements in the South, which led to a wave of vandalism of public and private property. Arts for Neighborhoods programs focused on funding participatory projects, mainly workshops and street art festivals, as a strategy to address the cultural deficit that urban exclusion implies.[26]

However, the association of community art with public art in the frame of the politics of community reconstruction developed a series of critical debates among art scholars. The art historian Miwon Kwon suggested the patterns of community art proposed by the exhibition "Culture in Action" curated by Mary Jane Jacob in Chicago in 1993 that goes beyond ethical communitarianism. The "Culture in Action," was oriented to patterns of communities through the art grouping built on "public interaction and participation, the role of the artist as an active social force, and the art education programming as a core part of the artwork."[27] Thus the creation of an art working group, which disbands after the end of the work, the partnership between the artist and the locals in the production of the art project or the artists' support to an existing community organization, according to Kwon "address daily problems collectively, integrating the art project into the flow of the everyday life of the participants."[28]

On the other hand, Grand Kester, recognizing community art as socially

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24 Joanne Sharp et al., "Just art for a just city: public art and social inclusion in urban regeneration," *Urban Studies* 42, no. 5/6 (2005): 1009.

25 Kate Crehan, *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective* (Oxford: Berg, 2011).

26 Owen Kelly, *Community, Art and the State: Storming the citadels* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1984).

27 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 100.

28 Id., 134.

engaged art, sees in its applications the moral dimensions of art.[29] Kester understands community art as an intervention within human groups that uses participatory practices for the improvement of their living conditions. For Kester, "these practices based on creating solidarity, counter-hegemony and escape of the isolation."[30] Interestingly, the examples used by Kester concern contemporary precarious labor communities such as seasonal Mexican workers in the US, border trade unionists, and marginalized groups of the industrial proletariat.[31] In this sense, the community is resurrected based on economic terms, while art attempts to materialize an anti-capitalist community of supply, according to Kester.

In sum, the approaches of art theory to the concept of community are contradictory. On the one hand it is protective, in the sense that art tries to preserve the minimum contacts and meanings, with which the community articulates its existence. On the other hand, the concept is extended beyond the predetermined status of its existence, through processes that establish art as a producer of the community itself. In other words, the notion of community art is not fixed. It is in a constantly dialectic redefinition that moves between institutionalism and anti-institutionalism as well as between the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic status. These contrasting perspectives converge on a common point: the entirely warm connotations regarding the idea of community. Art perceives the idea of community as a homogeneous and mono-cultural group of people living in a stable place, having particular characteristics in common. It is a nostalgic idea of a human organization where the proximity of human beings was based on ties and blood mixing, spatial proximity, and mental and spiritual closeness. In the contemporary era, such a conception of community does not exist. In contrast, it is shaping as an imaginary formation, mobilized from time to time in the service of ideological power by various forms of nationalism.

According to the historian Steven Conn, those who offered community as the alternative to contemporary impersonality must have in mind there are examples of where communities react defensively to outsiders, where they throw up barricades, literal and metaphorical. "It is this dual sense of gated community, a place welcoming to those inside it and hostile to those outside that makes the recent growth of communities oxymoronic and redundant at the same time."[32]

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29 Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004), 9-10.

30 *ibid*., 100.

31 *ibid*., 163-191.

32 Steven Conn, *Americans against the City* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

Art activism

The idea of art activism is linked to the activation of participatory art practices, which liberate society from the alienation and fragmentation that constitute the neoliberal economic system, thus defining artistic practice as differentiated from political forms of domination,[33] according to Kester. Activism in art is perceived as a democratic process intended to inspire art audiences to take action on identified sociopolitical issues. In this context, the art field is conceived as a self-organized collective, which develops coordinating infrastructures of dialogical connections between different subjectivities, which share an anti-capitalist ethos. Art activism prompts the re-evaluation of the correlations between the urban sphere and social behaviorism, exerting a decisive influence on the processes of public sphere production, including the shaping of new correlations between community, urbanism, regionalism, and globalization. Within these processes, which involve a multitude of cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, artists, and art collectives, activated actions that move away from earlier situations of opposition and resistance, that is, from practices of deviant behavior in the public space, recognizing activism within the current societies of the active citizens. Generally, the fundamental transformation of the revolutionary project in art, especially as formulated by the Situationists in May 1968, has transformed the artist from an active social agent to a critical thinker of the broad social structures being built in the globalized neo-liberal world. Through the ongoing process of integrating concepts and tools, art today produces several assumptions of socio-political activism, which takes the role of an alternative to critical cultural strategies in the urban environment, pushing artists to renounce any form of opposition, "and to embrace the establishment, applying its rules even more firmly and scrupulously than the rest of society."[34]

Art activism, under cultural events such as Biennale and art festivals, creates new fields of convergence of art with the processes of socio-political culture production, activating practices through actions whose characteristics suggest energy and innovation that constitutes such a fundamental ingredient of the current politics of the creative city. One can claim that cities today are the stage of a wide range of art activist initiatives. Street art festivals, performances, parades, public walking, food sharing… These public events seem to balance the mechanisms of cultural production and legalized social behaviorism, benefiting urban policies. Setting up temporary places for entertainment, art activism offers ephemeral experiences while maintaining the necessary bohemian atmosphere for the city to be considered multicultural. From London to Berlin and Athens to Barcelona, art activism has become an essential component of the cultural life of

33 Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 205.

34 Gideon Boie & Matthias Pauwels /BAVO, *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007), 6.

cities. The art practices under the umbrella of activism are considered expressions of an alternative or an underground culture that show the progressive integration of the past grassroots art practices, such as street art, into urban strategies within the general neoliberal turn of the 21st century on the political and cultural level.

Art seems to oscillate between the global milieu and the broadening of neoliberal politics, articulating new myths of radical faith and revolutionary romance under the terms of sociopolitical engagement. According to the curator Nato Thomson, this spatial activist art is characterized "by aesthetic interventions, culture jamming, and a host of neo-situationist tactical media approaches at the bottom that create interventions in space."[35] In fact, under the umbrella of activism, art practices create innovative interventions that adopt a grassroots culture, which combines DIY ethics of the art revolutionary project offset by an urban spectacle, "creating a kind of lifestyle anarchism finding practical application in personal rebellions, giving meaning to individual disobedience against the established social normality."[36]

For sociologist Richard Day, activism in art opposes the normative value standards of neoliberal politics, using existing aesthetic means to produce practices that function as alternatives in the in-between space of institutions and everyday life. As Day argues, without moral engagements around requests for free assertion and equality, art activism involves actions that "enrich the organization of the art content without bringing about any broader forms of social emancipation."[37] In broader a sense, art is engaged with activism, a phenomenon of the present official micro-political scene which includes insurgents, extremists, and bombers in the same category,"[38] playing a fundamental role in the collective imaginary that leads to an ontology of cultural activism, which does not locate hegemony and resistance in the body of society but in the micro-environment of the art word.

In today's world, with its democratic deficit resulting from ever-increasing powers of surveillance and control, something we all experienced during the recent pandemic of Covid 19, art seems to encourage passive withdrawal. Within the current post-capital policies that push towards manifestations of dissent, which are cultivated through a revolted population

35 Nato Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2015), 22.

36 Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Life Style Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), 19.

37 Richard J.F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London and Toronto: Pluto Press & Between the Lines, 2005), 26.

38 Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism," *Theory Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 11.

worldwide,[39] calling into question the authority and legitimacy of the state, art seems to have allied with the urban liberal treaty, having a crucial role in the sociocultural production processes. As an actor of social cohesion, art activism produces micro-systems of social interactions shaping of relational arenas of political resistance, representing a crucial symbolic system in the urban environment today. In sum, art activism constitutes the arsenal of socially engaged art, restructured into a creative intervention of a time-bound action within a public sphere oriented to cultural recreation, proposes new kinds of rebellion patterns through a collective meditation on the significance of the post-capitalist crisis, that transform the public space into a cosmopolitan nursery of representations of resistance.

Conclusions

The association of public art with social and political practices can be understood as a step of the urban turn to cultural policies involving actors from worlds other than that of culture, particularly the economic world. Public art stems from new urban strategies that tie the fate of cities to cultural planning and creative city strategies in which art is considered a vital agent of capitalist urban production. Of course, the institutionalization of Public Art (in capitals) in the 1980s in a new discipline between art and architecture transformed public artworks into regulators of the urban environment in a crucial period when art was included in the fundamental components of the sustainability of post-industrial cities. As a particular new art genre, public art refers to works of a different and often contradictory nature that democratize the art field while simultaneously acting as a driver of economic development and a factor in tourism appeal. Whether in the case of art-led development strategies or policies to support creative industries, public art has been one of the dominant instruments of city gentrification for almost forty years. Under the art institutional system, which produces and distributes art globally, suggesting particular handling of creative practice-oriented, public art operates deliberate tactics, constructing an one-dimensional and homogenous global cultural sphere in the cities. Although globalization has replaced the traditional universalism of art, the theoretical frames of public art are structured by Western dialectic, meaning the cultural hegemony of the West still prevails globally. The present so-called art world, which could be identified as the alliance of the Western art institutions and academies, omits or conceals "the transnational articulations (both historical and contemporary) deployed by affirmative, resistant artistic initiatives, many of which have emerged and are emerging from the Global South."[40]

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39 For example, the international populist socio-political movement Occupy Movement that expressed opposition to social and economic inequality and the lack of real democracy had spread in 951 cities in 82 countries, according to Wikipedia.

40 Carlos Garrido Castellano, *Art Activism for an anticolonial Future*, 1.

In conclusion, if we want to define the current public art, we can say that it has consolidated its orientation towards a definitive break with its history as an aesthetic entity in the cities and as an essential supplementary element of the architectural space, shifting its point of reference to the temporality of events through the immediate diffusion of practices in the public space, producing an autonomous, self-sustaining cultural model that emphasizes the heterogeneity of art production, which is distributed to the public through the cultural institutions.

In this framework, the social and political practices indicate the desire of cultural institutions to capitalize on the urban space, transforming the public space into an experimental laboratory, a field of criticism, and a platform for the production of spectacle. As a result, the shaping of an increasingly developing trend towards cultural events with the vehicle of art practices that work in the logic of art-run placemaking.

As the artist and writer Gregory Sholette points out, the claustrophobic, tautological, narcissistic art world is the protagonist in all the current successive and accelerating situations of shadow economic policy, in the ever-accelerating shift of capital from crisis to crisis. Under this regime, the art sphere is now manifest as blatant, with the autonomy and exceptionality of art appearing illusory as it suggests all the hallmarks of the inequalities that characterize our contemporary age.[41]

41 Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance. Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 31.

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