Sanctioned & Unsanctioned Art in Public Space.

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Introduction

Art within public space can be perceived as a reflection of our notions of identity and associative memory. It has the potential to celebrate the diversity within, and use of place, however it has primarily developed into a tool of the dominant capitalistic ideology, creating little public engagement or interest and so increasing the separation between individual and community. If 'the reality of modern life, particularly in the city, is that the greatest commonality between us is our distinctions and idiosyncrasies,'[1] is indeed as Shapin suggests, we need to explore new methods of communication with each other. We need to create artworks that recognise and openly discuss our asymmetric society with all its imbalances; excising the mass homogenisation to reveal the flowing lifeblood beneath.

I propose to examine the shifting dynamics of public space and how these works can either inspire or dissuade us from engaging with each other and systems of control. New forms of both unsanctioned and unsanctioned public space art have within them the generative seeds of greater societal openness and acceptance. A heightened awareness of each environment encourages us to come forward and become proactive citizens coveting a meaningful engagement with the interconnected worlds in which we can exist, corporeal or otherwise.

Through its organisational and architectural structures, the city reflects cultural and economic forces that at once reveal identity and collective significance. Within the city one can identify three main type of space that each in some way affects its meaning and function. Private space is chiefly determined by its barriers of entry: legal access into a private space is entirely determined by the owner or ruling bodies controlling that space. Public space can be defined as a place where 1. economic activity is not obligatory; 2. the inherent plurality and diversity of society is ideally embraced and encouraged; and 3. spontaneous interaction is possible.[2]

Increasingly, public space is shrinking, morphing into 'public-use' or 'public-access' space. It is progressively subject to surveillance and control where even minor deviation from the conventional established social standards becomes illicit, and commercial codes of conduct are enforced. Many shopping centres and transport stations fall under the definition of 'public use'. Permitted access is based on criteria such as dress code, tickets and restricted opening hours. Through these constrains the corporate body is empowered to conduct its own expulsion of "undesirables" such as groups of young people or the homeless.

Homogenisation of the public environment is coupled with the increased privatisation of public space. Many contemporary urban designs aim for parallel similarities rather than celebrating distinctive differences thus creating isolation and disconnection between individual and communities. Often this results in the construction of characterless buildings in a sterile environment. This 'banalisation' of the space leads to the dominant feelings of individual detachment from the environment and the need to disregard possible societal connections outside those of consumption and fear. The destruction of autonomy and quality of places, as Debord

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[1] **Shapins, J** *To Soar with Wings of Desire in Visible Cities: A Theory and Practice of Contemporary Public Art*
http://www.pulsate.org/photo/jesse/bio/papers/contemppublicart.pdf
[2] **Shapin, J.** To Soar with Wings of Desire in Visible Cities: A Theory and Practice of Contemporary Public Art.
http://www.pulsate.org/photo/jesse/bio/papers/contemppublicart.pdf

suggests, is induced by capitalist production. Beyond the ubiquitous and safe glow of a Tesco complex, or the rigid structured monotony of modern housing estate development, lies uncertainty, change and challenges.

Functions of Art in Public Space

Public space is in any modern city is encroached by "public use" spaces to the extent that their boundaries are wholly indistinct. Where true "public space" would have at least a semblance of civic interest during inception, the aesthetic of "public use" space is subject almost entirely to its commercial viability. Abstract Sculptures are installed outside financial centres to imbue the monoliths with kudos and a more human, thinking sensibility. It is practically a global standard on large scale construction projects to allocate 1% of their budgets for art acquisitions to be displayed with pride in the lobby or outside the boardroom.

Built to preserve a capitalist elite and their sustained domination, these "public-use" spaces are not intended to allow for diversity of both opinion and interactions. Reflecting the singular motivations of the surrounding businesses the public art within these areas has typically been Modernist, following the ideal of the artist considering no-one but themselves, an asocial entity with no consideration of audience, where only the end product counts. Abstract art can also in its obtuseness provide a politically-neutral object, one which may be devoid of any overtly expressed meaning. It is art that intends to exist only in the world without saying anything about the world. Failing to address social issues or promote public dialogue this art can be seen as merely an extension of the museum and the perpetuation of acutely established high art aesthetics which by their vary nature are accessible to only a few.

Erika Doss notes that the failure of corporations to engage the public in the placing of such art works acts a form of disempowerment,

 "...people have been encouraged to view objects... uncritically without discourse, and, quite literally, at face value.... silent, inert, and out of context, and public art audiences are expected to accept their mute but obvious presence." [3]

As Judith Baca suggests the permanence, size and majestic positioning of many public art pieces in front of office buildings seek, "like their military predecessors in the parks, [to] inspire a sense of awe by their scale and the importance of the artist." [4] The placement of statues or art work pieces can be considered as cultural propaganda. The critical function of art, Adorno claimed, was ensured precisely by its separation from the rest of life. By detaching itself from any practical function, art is no longer a social fact and it is only through this detachment that it is possible for art to 'genuinely contest society'[5]. However by following this detachment art runs the risk of being too far removed from understanding by the public and serving only to perpetuate the aims and control

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[3] **Doss, Erika**. Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, p. 16.

[4] **Baca, Judith F**. "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society." Lacy, Suzanne, ed. Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p. 131.

[5] **Jappe, Anselm:** Sic Transit Gloria Artis: "The End of Art" for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord. 1994
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/substance/v028/28.3jappe.html pg 103

of the ruling elite. So it may be seen as a purely a commodity, with its possibilities of exchange limited to its economic value, while the exhibition of dominance leaves no right to reply, reinforcing the paradigm of the impossibility of communication. Adorno designates art to essentially being 'plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange.'[6]

If we consider Adorno's beliefs to fit principally, only onto sanctioned art, which exists within the sphere of establishment in both the private and public domain; we can recognise that Debord, while he may have considered art to be already dead, calls for the realization in life of what had so far been only promised in art; recognizing that it 'must be "surpassed" by a new form of life and revolutionary activity—a form that would at once can '*preserve and realize the content*'[7].

Once placed within institutions, art is essentially severed from people's day to day lives. With this amputation from the public sphere, and banishment into the contained world of the museum and gallery, the meanings and affects art has to offer become opaque and highly selective, garnered by only the privileged few. Opposed to this, art on the street is fundamentally accessible to all.

Public art's role should be an 'affective' one - exciting passions in people for the present moment and raising their responsiveness to themselves, their community and the areas they live in. It should be surprising, shaking up the habitualised viewer, stimulating them into a greater awareness of their current and immediate physical environment and that which may exist beyond.

If, as Dewey argues, that human identity is formed through meaningful interactions and exchanges with the social world while at the same time transforming the world within which individuals exist, then we can assume that 'An individual artist's character and personality is thus linked to her or his history of social experiences.'[8] And so the work that the artist creates is fundamentally directed by this.

Thus considering art as an expression of common meaning and memory, as a recreation of 'quality of experience'[9] it can be understood as tied at least partially to public and objective social circumstances, or to the shared experiences of people in an objective social and physical environment.

Recognizing that the process of creation is equally if not more important than the final product, public art which involves participation rather than a piece imposed from above, encourages people to '*think* and *care* about themselves and the world around them'[10]

In *The Society of the Spectacle* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, both Debord and Ardono recognise the falsities of social cohesions, the deliberate alienation of the individual, and the fetishism of

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[6] **Adorno, Theodor:** *Aesthetic Theory.* Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. London. Continuum,2004. pg 207

[7] **Jappe, Anselm:** Sic Transit Gloria Artis: "The End of Art" for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord. 1994 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/substance/v028/28.3jappe.html pg 103

[8] **Mark Mattern**, *John Dewey, Art and Public Life* The Journal of Politics, Vol. 61, No. 1. (Feb., 1999), pg. 57 http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00223816%28199902%2961%3A1%3C54%3AJDAAPL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2

[9] **ibid** pg 58

[10] **Shapin, J.** To Soar with Wings of Desire in Visible Cities: A Theory and Practice of Contemporary Public Art. http://www.pulsate.org/photo/jesse/bio/papers/contemppublicart.pdf

commodity generated and maintained by Western capitalism to ensure its unchallenged supremacy. It achieves these aims through the processes of homogenisation and trivialisation, impressing the stamp of sameness on everything, attempting to drown out all forms of resistance in the oceans of images it provides and commodities it generates for desirable purchase. Thus the system allows no space or time for the individual to even consider that resistance is even possible.

Unsanctioned street art can be seen as a rally point of resistance allowing a voice to counter the occupation by the mediated systems of integration through money and power. It challenges the fundamental notions of commodity and ownership. There is no product to be entered into the capitalistic framework of society – it cannot be sold, bought or owned. It offers an alternative to the subjugation of the individual to the pseudo-needs and desires that the spectacle generates. It is this freedom that is one of the most seductive aspects of unsanctioned street art.

The 'exchange value' of unsanctioned street-art is no longer one of economic dimensions; rather it is transformed into the dealing of interchanging ideas. It becomes its 'use value'. Making no claims to offer satisfaction, indeed quite the opposite, unsanctioned street art can encourage the viewer to challenge the "lived reality [that] suffers the material assaults of the spectacle's mechanisms of contemplation"[11]

Through its many forms (e.g. free hand spray-can, stencil, stickers, temporary installation pieces) it ignores the philosophies of unmovable absolutes and singularity often generated by established and institutionalised art forms. By acknowledging and embracing the complexity of the modern world and its urban environments, street art constantly adds to the varying and perpetually changing layers of the street. Attempting to amplify and intensify realizations of the complexities of our environments, street art can be understood as an expression of the myriad of individual particularities that help define us as human.

The shift, away from the establishment, towards the pluralism of an increasingly global society was reflected in Post-modernism through its opposition to hierarchies of value and innate suspicions of universal judgements. With increased communication, trade and overseas production through the interconnections of globalism commercial, political and intellectual power bases were decentralised. The concept of stylistic unity bended under the pressure of cultural pluralism and public art, particularly in its unsanctioned forms, began to manifest itself reaching beyond the predetermined role of an inadequate translator. Those who had felt sidelined or ignored by the system found new ways of expressing their presence in the world. As Amos Klausner notes

"Contemporary graffiti's connection to post-modernism certainly began as a response to the flaws of modernism but it was able to establish itself as an independent discipline that understood how to manage and employ meaning within a cultural context."[12]

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[11] **Guy Debord:** *Society of the Spectacle***.** Translation: Black & Red. 1967. S8
[12] **Klausner, Amos:** *Bombing Modernism: Graffiti and its relationship to the (built) environment*
http://www.core77.com/development/reactor/04.07_klausner.asp

Civic Statues

Artworks found in public spaces such as monuments are the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness. Their commission is due in part to the 'deritualising' of society producing and maintaining by artifice and by will a people rapt in its own transformation and regeneration, a society that "inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past."[13]

One of the more common forms of sanctioned public space art is sculpture, conventionally memorialising significant historical figures or events. Symbols of warfare are frequently depicted. They are generally rendered at larger than life. Although the aesthetic may be a factor in the initial acceptance of a work of art in public space, it is the symbology of the piece that reveals its true significance.

"Art that is successful in public settings expresses the values of a community…Public sculpture, like all sculpture, is the product of the imagination of a sculptor. But sculpture in public settings also must take account of the community around it, its social uses, its history, and its symbols. Working with a community gives the sculptor a starting point and a framework and is a way to make a private vision into public art".[14]

"The contextualization of the monuments in the sweep of art history is equally adept, not only on iconographic issues but also in its insights into the sociology of art".[15]

States are usually proud of their public statues, touting them in tourist guide books; they are a public display of 'having' a moment in history worth memorializing, they are sculptural symbols of their prefixed national identities. Where unsanctioned street art is predominantly viewed as disfigurements of the urban landscape, and few governing bodies would ever claim it as a positive attribution to the city, the commission of sanctioned public art has the supposed assurance of local conventions. The production of monuments is a multifarious and conditional process whereby many contributors negotiate the conditions of representation in relation to their own interests outside of any concern about the artwork in its own right. This art-by-committee process can result in intentionally unchallenging work that has little potential for offence or bad press. Should even public art challenge the audience, rather than mollifying with the innocuous?

"memorials are now as much a part of the heritage industry and the manufacturing of local history for tourism as they are a part of the practice of memorialisation. The use of memorials for acts of individual or collective mourning here cedes to the act of historical pilgrimage"[16]

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[13] **Pickford, Henry W.** *Conflict and Commemoration: Two Berlin Memorials. Modernism/modernity 12.1 (2005) 133-173*http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modernism-modernity/v012/12.1pickford.html

[14] **Nettleship, W:** *Public Sculpture as Collaboration with a Community (in Artists' Notes).* Leonardo, Vol. 22, No. 2. 1989.
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0024094X%281989%2922%3A2%3C171%3APSAACW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-F

[15] **Brown, Thomas J**. *The Real War Will Never Get in the Statues.* Reviews in American History 26.4 (1998) 699-704
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/reviews_in_american_history/v026/26.4brown.html

[16] **Shanken, Andrew M**. *Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II.* The Art Bulletin, Vol. 84, No. 1. (Mar., 2002), pp. 130-147.
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00043079%28200203%2984%3A1%3C130%3APMLMIT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9

Fig.1 "Redemption Song" by Laura Facey-Cooper

Where once civilly sanctioned public art sought not to offend there have been more contemporary examples of councils seeking sensationalism. The huge tourist draw monuments such as The Statue if Liberty possess has been cynically emulated by more modern equivalents, such as the Jamaican "Redemption Song". This eleven-foot tall work by Laura Facey-Cooper depicts a nude slave couple: a high breasted woman and a well-endowed man. Instead of acting as an icon or expression of national pride and unity, it seems to have been designed to inspire controversy and the accompanying cultural curiosity. The Jamaican government copyrighted the image immediately, which seems to may betray a commercial rather than civic concern. Although public art in the guise of monuments are sold to the locals as "for the people", this paradigm has been perverted to what would now be truthfully know as "about a people for the people & tourists". Indeed, their mythmaking and myth-perpetuating power remains tapped but redirected, as the indigenous population in the main accept the images as a realistic collective embodiment.

"*Redemption Song* has gone from *spectacle* to *commodity* or *attraction,* and at no point was it truly a monument to the emancipation of Africans from slavery. It is perhaps a fitting emblem of our commercial age, an era in which history can be repackaged to make it glossy enough for mass marketing but devoid of meaning and memory".[17]

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[17] **Graham, Narda.** *Whose Monument? The Battle to Define,Interpret, and Claim Emancipation*
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/small_axe/v008/8.2graham.

Un-Sanctioning

Memorials have in the past disappeared during moments of extreme political disorder because of their power to provoke emotional response. The un-sanctioning of public art is sometimes more dramatic and contrived than its original installation, or its replacement. Linguistically, we accept that statues are known by the name of those they depict, which points towards the charged symbology that permeates them. This icon creation and destruction has been recognized by many an administration, tapping a cult of personality otherwise seen in religious figures.

Fig.2
Left: Marine drapes American flag over the statue.
Right: The statue topples on cue.

Firdos Square is an open public space in Baghdad, close to The Palestine Hotel long favoured by western journalists. On April 19th 2003 during what is now considered a staged demonstration by the Americans, the Saddam Hussein was razed by locals and marines. A potentially controversial image of a soldier draping the American flag over the statues head was quickly corrected by his superiors in favour of more media friendly and stage managed footage of this symbolic "emancipation" of public space.

With Saddam's disappearance, all that was left was a non-event produced and framed for our consumption as the definitive and predictable sign of the regime's end… the Iraqis did not see that they were only the extras, providing local colour and a guarantee of authenticity and legitimacy for the western audience for whom the event really occurred.

It seems vital for us to topple the icons of those made impotent as soon as they are overthrown. In this sense regimes are not properly ousted until their personifications are torn from the public landscape. To memorialise oneself in ones own lifetime is to condemn the legacy of your cultivated likeness to die with you.

The Saddam statue was eventually replaced with a green, abstract sculpture said to symbolize freedom. Concrete barriers and barbed wire guard the nearby home to foreigners The Palestine Hotel. April 19th is now dubbed "Freedom Day" by the American and Iraqi administrations. The

delusion of liberty is erected for those well outside of Baghdad, and not for the disillusioned local people:

"We thought the fall of the regime would bring freedom, reconstruction but as the days passed we saw it was lies. This new statue is of injustice, inequality. The fall of the statue is now the broken dreams of Iraqis."[18]

Subvertising

"The important thing is that it is universal and continuous; and in its sum total it is regimenting the public mind every bit as much as an army regiments the bodies of its soldiers."[19]

When we understand the definition of propaganda as 'the particular doctrines or principles propagated by an organization or movement' and recognise the ubiquity of advertising, be it for products, people or politics, and the scale of mainstream mass media; we come slightly closer to the realisation that the conscious manipulation of our opinions, habits and ideas are largely moulded and formed by an invisible minority.

We are dominated by the entrenched capitalistic ideology of society, which aims to perpetuate its continual dominance through the visible displays of commodity fetishism and lifestyle branding. By creating and overwhelming us with a vast array of choices (not only what brand, but what flavour, what colour, what scent, what horsepower, what resolution…the list is immense); by associating particular lifestyles with particular products; by suggesting we are somehow imperfect how we are and that this can fixed by some kind of physicality be it a pair or trainers, a soft drink, a set of motivational CDs or plastic surgery; the manipulators of this profoundly visible, yet 'unseen mechanism of society'[20] ensure that we remain in a paralytic state of pseudo-needs and desires and do not question or challenge the status quo. For, to do so would create a rupture within the intertwining democratic, cultural and capitalistic mechanism.

"By subjecting the whole of life to the demands of its maintenance, the dictatorial minority guarantees, together with its own security, the persistence of the whole" [21]

Of the organized 'networks of falsification'[22] advertising is the most blatant within the urban environment encroaching into the everyday instructing us to conform to the overarching commercial logic that dominates our public space. By directly addressing the consumer with the illusion of choice the chimera of personal freedom is maintained. As Adorno notes "The culture

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[18] **Khan, Philippe.** Broken statue of Saddam, symbolic of broken Iraqi dreams
http://www.islamicafrica.com/Readers_Articles_Posted/Broken_statue_of_Saddam_symbolic_of_broken_Iraqi_dreams.htm
[19] **Bernays, Edward**: *Propaganda.* 1928. http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/bernprop.html
[20] **ibid**
[21] **Adorno, Theodor & Horkheimer, Max**: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; translated by John Cumming.
 London Verso, 1997
[22] **Guy Debord**: *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. 1988 http://www.notbored.org/commentaires.html

industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product"[23], and it has created a cast ocean of images for our cities to swim in.

"Ideas improve.......Plagiarism is necessary"[24]

Advertisers have recognised the potential of unsanctioned work. Wanting to target a youth market and to gain 'street-cred' that their sanctioned space might not provide they have adopted the tactics used by street artists.

Guerrilla advertising techniques such as graffiti, wild poster campaigns, guerrilla projections and influence marketing have been taken up by large and small, local and multinational, companies including Linux who stencilled peace, love and Linux penguin logos on New York pavements, and Sony who commissioned stencils of kids playing with consoles in cities through out the Unites States.

Fig. 3.
Left: Sony's attempt at street art guerrilla marketing.
Right: A Local Response

With less to fear of the imposed fine if caught by a state body and the bonuses of increased visibility and possible additional media coverage there is little to loose and much to gain in the battle on the street.

The current Ask.com advertising campaign operating in London purports to be an activist body against the global domination of Google. With posters around the Tube network and beyond, the public is invited to go to a website www.information-revolution.org.   Here it becomes apparent that it is an advertisement for a search engine but it still manages to claim 'we've been forced to go underground to get the word out about Ask.com'.   Yet how underground is creating a comprehensive advertising campaign saturating the city? Initially there was a comments page on

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[23] [23] **Adorno, Theodor & Horkheimer, Max**: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; translated by John Cumming.
 London Verso, 1997
[24] **Guy Debord:** *Society of the Spectacle*. Translation: Black & Red. 1967. 207

the site but this has subsequently been removed possibly due to the fact that most comments were complaints from people who had thought that the poster they saw was for a genuine debate rather than an ad for a second-rate search engine.

Is it really the improvement of an idea? Perhaps is it more of an indicator of the depths to which we are surrounded by the invisible machine and how that machine devours and repurposes most resistance it meets in its path; where

'….real factors which set in motion real deforming acts; all the more so when the materialization, in the form of the spectacle, of the ideology brought about by the concrete success of autonomous economic production in practice confounds social reality with an ideology which has tailored all reality in term of its model'[25]

Perhaps one of the more recent (31st January 2007) spectacular guerrilla advertising campaigns and fallout thereof, has been the Turner Broadcasting System Inc.'s promotion of their upcoming movie *'Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters'* in Boston. It resulted in several bomb scares through out the city with authorities shutting down sections of highways, subway lines, bridges and the Charles River for parts of the day. On behalf of Turner Broadcasting, a guerrilla advertising marketing firm, Interference Inc., hired two video artists, Sean Stevens and Peter Berdovsky, to display LED signs, depicting a character, Mooninite, from the cartoon *'Aqua Teen'* , in high traffic and high visibility areas of the city. Members of the public spotted the 'devices' and reported them to the police who in turn called the fire department and the bomb squad. It is a true Debordian moment when the spectacle eats itself.

The reverse of this can be seen in some street art projects that repurpose existing signs.
Common signage within public space us provides factual information for the public – including various restrictions (e.g. no parking, speed limit, pedestrianised street, location direction etc.) It exists in a purely functional realm. Roland Barthes once asked "Is it not better to distort the signs than to destroy them?"

Mark Daye, student at Ontario College of Art and Design has created official looking signs to draw attention to Toronto's homeless problem and fixed them to poles in the downtown area. They display captions such as "Homeless Sleeping QUIET" and "Please Have Change Ready for Homeless" This has irked city officials who claim that the signs that they put up are for public information including way-finding and restrictions within the given area[26] and the signs have been taken down.

Street Art

Unsanctioned street art can be seen as an easily accessible method of reclaiming or repurposing territory and ideally promoting public discourse. Arthur Stace, a sometimes homeless eccentric wrote "Eternity" in distinctive script throughout the public areas of Sydney through the 1950's. A foot messenger, TAKI 183, became one of the first recognisable graffiti artists in New York, his

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[25] **Guy Debord:** *Society of the Spectacle.* Translation: Black & Red. 1967 212
[26] http://spacing.ca/wire/?p=1723

tags proliferated "city-wide" as he worked the five boroughs. From the chalk and paint mediums of its genesis, street art has begun to extend its mediums encompassing wheat paste posters, flash mobs, LED throwies and projections

Where tagging can be seen as essentially about territory an 'aesthetic means of occupation'[27], reclaiming ownership of the built environment street art can be best understood as a repurposement of the space. It is generally more concerned with the location of the piece and how it works with and within its environment, as opposed to deliberately worked against it. Some may delineate by espousing that street art is usually imbued with some kind of message or meaning outside of itself and its creator, whereas tagging at best may be superficially stylish, and at worst merely territorial pissings.

Eltono, a street artist who initially started writing his name and has since moved on to distorted representations of a tuning fork as his icon, notes how the site of a piece influences its creation

"With my work the space that I choose goes first and then the intervention so I work composing with the elements that surround the piece. A tag or a throw-up doesn't usually respect the place and simply covers it to be the main visual element there."[28]

While the accessibility of the street and its myriad of works it has to offer must be lauded it is exactly this cacophony of overlaid pieces that could be considered as its detriment. With no defined boundaries between pieces, apart from the physical determinations of the environment, and with more people having less concern for the surroundings of their work as Eltono, can result in a large noise to signal ratio. This in turn leads to difficulties of legitimisation. High quality works occur amongst low quality and so, as a whole, street art is generally considered at best defacement or at worst vandalism.

Unsanctioned street art also challenges the fundamental notions of commodity and ownership. There is no product to be entered into the capitalistic framework of society – it cannot be sold, bought or owned. It offers and alternative to the subjugation of the individual to the pseudo-needs and desires that the spectacle generates. It is this freedom that is one of the most seductive aspects of street art. It is beyond the 'aura' of Benjamin – each piece, be it reproduced elsewhere or not, has its individuality provided not only by the work itself but also by the environment surrounding it.

Unsanctioned street art and graffiti are generally perceived by both mainstream society and state bodies as vandalism. With New York operating a 'Zero tolerance' policy (three strikes and you're out) and the English Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 enabling English local authorities to issue an on the spot £80 fine, unsanctioned public art displays are predominantly considered to be indicators of poor neighbourhoods, violence and community distrust. Labour MP Hazel Blears states that:

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[27] **Armstrong, Justin:** *The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings*
http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/ameriquests/viewarticle.php?id=54&layout=html
[28] http://www.subaquatica.com/en/index.php/2006/06/01/

"Graffiti is a depressing and unsightly menace in many communities. It affects people's quality of life, increases fear of crime and reduces pride in a community. It also costs us all millions of pounds a year to clean up - money which could be better spent on other valuable services."[29]

However, there is a change in perceptions of some street art with more recognition of it in the mainstream media and also from echelons of the 'other world' be it high art or popular figures with Britain's Banksy being one of the most prominent artists to cross the sanctioned—unsanctioned divide. Initially an outlaw, he gained public then institutional approval, to such an extent that his work has been awarded a 'no removal' policy by some councils, which if disobeyed could ironically lead to prosecution.

Brighton and Hove city council have sanctioned a graffiti wall and a certain amount of street art in Brighton. Initially reluctant to do so they have discovered that by providing 'legitimate' wall space for artists too work on and by allowing certain unsanctioned pieces to remain on walls the number of low quality tags has significantly diminished. Head of environment at the Council, Gill Mitchell, notes that both the New England development, which has the country's longest mural and the collection of works by international and local artists alike along Kensington Street have "become a bit of a tourist attraction, with people stopping and taking photos." [30]

Fig 4.
Left: Banksy: *Maid in London* making use of the surroundings
Right: Banksy: *Kissing Coppers*

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[29] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4878686.stm
[30] http://archive.theargus.co.uk/2007/3/14/229716.html

Banksy's piece portraying two uniformed police kissing outside The Prince Albert pub in Brighton was painted over one night in late 2006. The men responsible pleaded guilty to the offence as CCTV footage of their van parked directly opposite captured them and their company's phone number which was displayed prominently on its side. The piece has subsequently been repainted and covered with a Perspex sheet in an attempt to extend its longevity. This is ironic when considered against the fundamental ideals of change and addition that are essential to dialogue within unsanctioned street art.

The Vandal of Vandals

If one of the basic premises of unsanctioned street art can be considered as addition – adding to an otherwise generic urban environment – the Splasher who has been active in New York late last year and earlier this year could be seen as a subtractive movement within this. The Splasher who throws paint at existing street art pieces and pastes, with glass wheat paste, manifestos on the work stating that street art is merely a bourgeois fad and should be euthanised. With obvious influences from Debord and Jeanette Winterson, "Revolutionary creativity does not shock or entertain the bourgeoisie, it destroys them" and "Only in a culture obsessed with its own excrement are the by-products of action elevated above action itself."

Works by Swoon, Faile, Banksy and Shepherd Fairey have been targeted possibly because they have attained differing degrees of success within the environs of the established art world an so it could be argued that they have commoditised their work. However, it is not just works by the more recognised practitioners that has been splashed and advertising murals have been ignored. So who do we blame the artist who creates for the spectacle or the larger, dominant enforced economic controls and their use of such work? The continual co-option of voices of estrangement and rebellion by the art world and the current infatuation with productivity will invariably result in the underground, as the underdog moves toward the mainstream.

The Splasher's actions have generated both main stream media attention and obviously a certain amount of attention within the street art community with a large number of people saying that it should not be given any coverage believing that it is merely someone's search for their 15 minutes of fame rather than a political artistic statement. If we are to consider Debord's rally against the spectacle and abhorrence for society's adoration of commoditisation then all recognition of and subsequent blogs, photos and comments on the Splasher in a sense defeat his objective. In response to the Splasher Visual Resistance says "Now you are submitting work to the banality that you exclaim to be rampant in street art."[31]

While it can be disappointing when a good work, be it technically or politically effective, gets buffed or replaced with inferior tags and possibly extraneous pieces, it is exactly this very transitory nature of street art that is fundamental to its continuation and evolution.

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[31] http://www.gothamist.com/2007/01/24/street_art_spla.php

Projections

As John Plowman notes in his essay, *Local and Convivial*,
"the established hierarchy art, artist and institution …. indicate that the audience is almost conceived of as an afterthought "[32]

From its roots in public cinema indoors or outside projections are traditionally associated as part of a shared experience. Advances in more recent technologies have extended the possibilities of enhancing this experience through interaction and participation allowing for new forms of collaborative production and exchange. Projection is temporal, translucent, and scalable. It can be tailored to a specific building such as mapping where each window would be located at projection time. It also permits more malleable content to be displayed on a variety of environmental surfaces, from walls to trees to glass.

Alongside these technological developments, audience participation has recently begun to gain importance in artistic and institutional considerations when creating and sanctioning new pieces. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's pieces require public interaction to happen. His public art work *'Under Scan'* was originally installed in the East Midlands of the UK before touring the globe. It featured over a thousand video-portraits of people from the area which were projected onto the ground of the main squares and pedestrian thoroughfares covering an area of approximately 1,500 square metres. Initially invisible to the public participants, the projected portraits are revealed by their shadows as they walk around the square and gradually animate within the shadow, turning to face the participant and appearing to interact with them. The employment of motion tracking cameras allows for the work to be immediately responsive, such as when the participant and their shadow move, the projected portrait also loses interest, and likewise turns away.

Lozano-Hemmer evokes the kind of public space where active participation is vital to its dynamic creation. His work encourages

"The users to deviate the customary aims of contemporary public space (transit, trade and consumption and advertisement) and instead promotes a from of spectral intersubjectivity, the meeting of visual fantasies in the guise of social illusions."[33]

The surveillance techniques used within the work (e.g. cameras, motion trackers) encourage the user to display their presence rather than hide away. This open, obvious structure is the antithesis of the established, concealed methods of supervision and observation commonly used within a public space.

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[32] John Plowman *Local and Convivial*: Under Scan, EMDA, Nottingham 2007
[33] Median, cuauhtemoc, *From Within Shadows* Under Scan, EMDA, Nottingham 2007
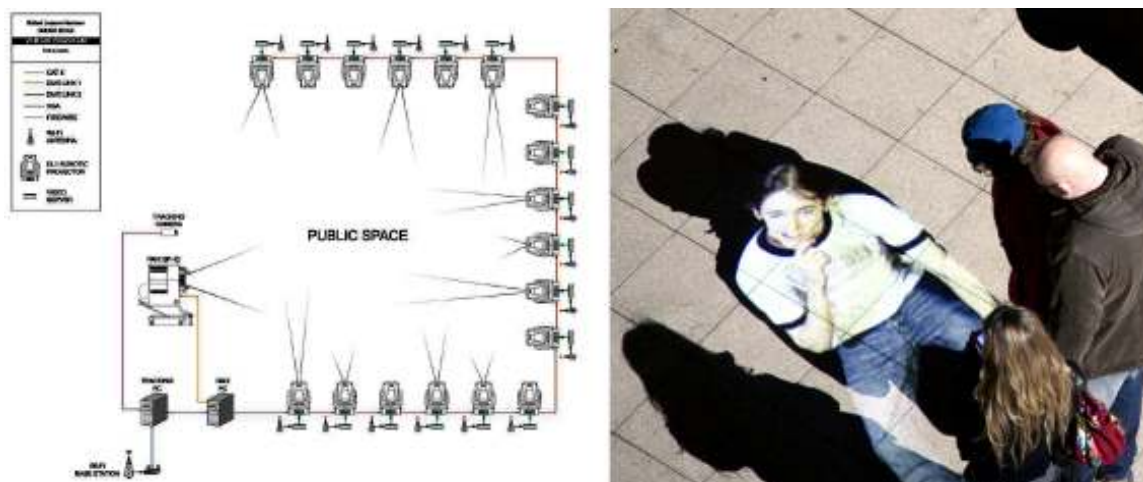
Fig. 5. Under Scan: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

His work plays on the indistinguishable spheres of the image and life, and is more than the 'straightforward continuation' and overrunning that so concerns Adorno, where one mimics the other. *Under Scan* calls upon the participant to recognise the interplay of the real and the virtual, and enters into dialogue with them.

"Relational architecture transforms the master narratives of a specific building by adding or subtracting audiovisual elements to recontextualise it. Relational buildings function as hypertext, since they have audience activated hyperlinks to predetermined spacio-temporal settings that may include other buildings, political or aesthetic contexts, and histories"[34]

It is public discourse on a new level, an interaction with the expected and the spontaneous aspects of the layers of experience. Existing architecture, as with street art, is considered and recontextualised, made reactive Interactive Art is itself a course unfolding, an occurrence not a final result or finished artwork. It is participatory in that it morphs spectators into users or participants, as each play an active role in the direction of the experience. Interactive installations may be construed as systems that harbour patterns constantly re-structuring themselves in relation to those present. In this context, the user's participation is a spontaneous and unpredictable interaction. The audience is activated by the innovative intersections and overlays of the built environment, the art installed within, and the people experiencing "the technological actualization of buildings and public spaces with alien memory." [35]

Due largely to the technological complexity this project demands, both terms of funding and setup, his work in invariably sanctioned, by civic councils, galleries, or arts festivals. The necessary recourses required are far beyond those of the individual so it still remains part of the high-art world which limits the availability of its work by the sheer scale of its prices.

Unsanctioned, non-commercial, projections necessarily operate on a smaller scale and generally for a shorter period of time. In an attempt to open up the field a little, The Graffiti Research Lab in

[34] **Fernández, María.** Postcolonial Media Theory. *Art Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), pp. 58-73.
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00043249%28199923%2958%3A3%3C58%3APMT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2
[35] Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Relational Architecture*, in nettime, Jan 30, 1998.

conjunction with Eyebeam OpenLab and Paul Notzold have created a tutorial[36] on how to create your own guerrilla projections. Guerrilla projections are still more cumbersome that their wheat-paste or stencil cousins but they offer a completely different experience one that genuinely encourages active participation rather than appreciation. They can be understood as a 'promoter of new aesthetic values such as real-time remote interaction, intersubjectivity, and negotiation of meaning.'[37] Unsanctioned projection based pieces allow for the possibility of subversive content creating awareness of issues that sanctioned work may not be able to due the required approval of the endorsing body.

Fig. 6.
Right: TXTual Healing in Rome.
Left: TXTual Healing in Hamburg.

Notzold's *TXTual Healing[38]* projection projects involve public participation using mobile-phone instant messages (SMS). Large speech bubbles are projected onto the façade of a building and positioned near windows. Members of the public can text in ideas of what is being said within the walls. These are then displayed within the speech bubbles providing imagined thoughts or dialogues between the unseen occupants of the building.

TXTual Healing brings to the fore issues of public and private space, where they begin and end and how we interact within them. In contrast to *Under scan* which is largely a monologic process – there are a fixed number of pre-recorded clips each of a certain duration - Notzold's unsanctioned *TXTual Healing* is a dialogic piece which 'remains open to differentiated levels of contingency and indeterminacy'[39]. It will never follow the same path twice set to remain unpredictable, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, sometimes not really saying anything at all. A lot like life.

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[36] http://www.instructables.com/id/EIDH3WPPZSEPD7QVIA/

[37] **Fernández, María.** Postcolonial Media Theory. *Art Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3. (Autumn, 1999), pp. 58-73.
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00043249%28199923%2958%3A3%3C58%3APMT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2

[38] http://www.txtualhealing.com

[39] **Kac, Eduardo**. *Negotiating Meaning: The Dialogic Imagination In Electronic Art.* Proceedings of Computers in Art and Design Education Conference, University of Teesside, UK, 1999
http://www.ekac.org/dialogicimag.html

Conclusion

Roland Barthes asks "Is it not better to distort the signs than to destroy them?".[40]

The blurring of boundaries between sanctioned and unsanctioned work in public space and the re-appropriation of techniques used by each continues. One imitates the other. One is often in direct response to the other. Unsanctioned work has an aura of potential subversiveness, in contrast to the "responsibly" sanctioned work carefully selected for public consumption. Once it is sanctioned we become accountable, and at the same time the artwork becomes part of our identity.

Public art should strive to create unique and involving public spaces and urban environments by espousing and exploring the notions of difference by highlighting the personal and the local. Kindling a sense of curiosity in the viewer and attempting to guide it in a positive way, street art can address pertinent political concerns, the perusal of individual dreams, and the role of the individual in the community.

The Internet and other networked digital environments can be looked at as a collective of private spaces made public to be accessed as part of a private experience. The networking of people and the powers at their disposal has long been of interest to the military and corporate complexes which originally developed technology that led to the internet as we know it today. With the broadening of the information access horizon, groups can be mobilized and communities that never meet formed over vast geographical distances, facilitating greater awareness of projects and enabling the involvement of larger numbers of individuals. Discussion is encouraged, ideas shared and morphed.

"The communicative significance of art extends beyond its textual meaning to include the active work that is ongoing in a social context in which its meanings are created, contested, and changed; and to include the social relationships and practices that swirl around the art piece." [41]

The institutionalised art world has lately been considered too small and limited, too marginal and weak, too bogged down in its outdated aesthetics to have any significant effect on the world. Museums are now morgues, places to mourn a past life rather than celebrate a contemporary existence. Public space with its perpetual motion and incessant reinvention demands that the artworks it contains be dynamic, engaging, and a reflection of the tensions, dreams and aspirations that exist within it. The very temporality of the works is a materialisation of the shifting faces within the space and their heightened expectations.

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[40] **a.f.r.i.k.a. gruppe.** *Communication Guerilla - Transversality in Everyday Life?*
http://www.republicart.net/disc/artsabotage/afrikagruppe01_en.htm
[41] **Mattern, M:** *John Dewey, Art and Public Life.* The Journal of Politics, Vol. 61, No. 1. 1999.

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