

THE PLACES FOR PARTICIPATION

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Summary

The current upsurge of interest in *street art* with its direct approach to the city emphasizes the need to readdress public arts' role within the wider social and cultural context. As it becomes routine to incorporate art works into city planning and city life, art has become both 'safe' and 'user-friendly'. On the one hand, art is subsumed and immersed into the wider culture through leisure and entertainment policies, socially engaged public art projects, community art and urban design. On the other hand, there are those works which deliberately intend to unsettle or confront the viewer. In recent years the term *intervention* has been ascribed to unorthodox art works in the public sphere which are often illicit, or at least non-complicit in the prevailing hegemony. These practices are disruptive due to their enactment outside traditional art spaces, often in the streets. By occupying the streets, places of democracy and disjunction, these interventions transform public space back into a place of overt cultural and political expression. They also deliberately involve the inhabitants of the city by utilizing everyday spaces in ways which offer an unmediated sense of the artwork.

In recent years the focus within public arts has returned to the social as the source of, inspiration for and site of the work. Cultural institutions and government agencies emphasize the impact the arts can have in ameliorating an extensive range of social ills. This is considered to be achievable through community-led, socially-engaged or participatory practices. In other words, through projects which involve diverse disciplines or directly involve a specific audience. As non-art spaces and marginal practices become the norm, it becomes necessary to turn to other contexts in which art preserves a sense of disjunction. The term *intervention* has been ascribed to unorthodox art works in the public sphere, which are often illicit, or at least non-complicit in the prevailing hegemony. By occupying the streets these interventions transform public space back into a place of overt cultural and political expression by disrupting spaces, habits or attitudes. It is widely acknowledged that public space has increasingly become privately owned and that redevelopment programmes are, at least in part, responsible for eradicating neighbourhoods and displacing people. The installation of visual elements within these spaces used by the public initiates a dialogue with the architecture and the inhabitants of the area. By engaging directly with the built environment new ways of viewing, hence reading, the city are offered. These interventions transform city dwellers away from being simply users of the city into perceivers. This makes the viewer an active reader of messages not merely a passive contemplator of the aesthetic³⁸.

The view that art should be a social practice working towards the greater good of the people is not a new one. Faced with increased slums and poverty due to rapid industrialization the upper classes of the Victorian age responded with public intervention in the planning of cultural facilities, such as the People's Palaces. These were intended to bring higher culture to the depraved East End of London for the purpose of the moral improvement of, what they deemed the degenerate population of the slums³⁹. As a similar response, thinkers such as William Morris and John Ruskin believed that the arts and culture were instrumental in initiating a moral change in society. They were affiliated with the birth of the *Arts and Crafts* movement which promoted

³⁸Foster, H. *Recodings: Art, spectacle, cultural politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985, 7th ed. 1996), p.100.

³⁹Evans, G. *Cultural Planning: An urban renaissance?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.69.

the belief that an increased awareness in design and the revival of the countryside and traditional handicrafts would lead to the improvement of a life suffering from the adverse effects of industrialization. It has now become common practice to measure art, in particular public art, in terms of its social context, its use or its role in urban regeneration. This results in an increase in demand for works which can be easily identifiable as such. However, works which attempt to address issues of socio-political injustice do not necessarily bring about real political or social change. To give art added value by ascribing to it a social function, such as an educational instrument or tool for change, makes art easily understood. It is a tactic deployed by both the government and cultural institutions in order to gain popular support. To bring art to places and peoples which have been marginalized or overlooked does not guarantee an improvement in their conditions.

This focus on the social function of art often results in works in which the main goal is audience participation. This is used as a method, or indeed an excuse, to secure public funding. In many cases the work does not live up to this criterion. These kinds of works or events easily become patronizing and derogative by dictating the means for participation. Art should not be based on a presumed harmony or a mythic community, but on revealing conflict which is what sustains democratic principles⁴⁰. Democratic spaces are open to conflict because without the possibility to debate opposing ideas there exists only the imposed consensus. Furthermore, inherent within all art works is the potential for participation and engagement through unlimited possible readings⁴¹. When considering the audience for contemporary art it is important to presume a socially aware and engaged viewer capable of independent thought, not a passive spectator who is coerced into participation by the artist's brief. Participatory practices can be criticized for giving the structure, to involve the viewer, more importance than the actual contents of the work. This reaffirms the authority of the author as the arbiter of meaning⁴². Assuming a harmonious subject from within a harmonious community is naïve idealism. Of greater relevance are those art works which resist incorporation into the surroundings and instead rely on discomfort and friction with the dominant order⁴³.

Radical art practices are often equated with the emergence of works in the sixties and seventies which moved away from the art object itself to how it was shown and the processes involved in making the work⁴⁴. This is also the period in which practitioners further developed the idea of merging art and life, calling into question the actual function of art. The term *site-specific* was introduced to describe works which engaged directly with a chosen site with the intention of creating new spaces of presentation. These spaces would question the role of the gallery and its concomitant ideological frame. Often cited examples of these forms of work are Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* in Utah (Land art) and Daniel Buren's *Within and Beyond the Frame* which sought to expose the limits of institutionalized conventions. Two influential artists concerned with merging

⁴⁰See for example Deutsche, R. *Evictions: Art and spatial politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996) and Bishop, C. 'Antagonism and relational aesthetics' in *October* Vol.110, Fall 2004 for a discussion on democracy and the public sphere.

⁴¹Bishop (2004), p.62. I am using Bishop's interpretation of Umberto Eco which concludes that 'every work of art is potentially "open"'.
⁴² *Ibid.*, p.63ff.

⁴³See for example, Bishop (2004), Deutsche (1996) and Kwon M. *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Causey, A. *Sculpture since 1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 8ff. It is important to note that radical art practices and theories antedate the sixties in the work of for example, the proponents of Dada and in the Russian Constructivists, and is for some, inherent in the concept of what art should do. The sixties are generally considered the time where this type of art becomes accepted practice. Therefore, this is when the debate on radical art not only becomes important in rethinking the concepts of art but paradoxically, also contributes to the beginnings of the institutionalization of these methods.

art and life are Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys. Kaprow's *Happenings* and *Environments* sought to keep 'the line between art and life...as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible'⁴⁵. His *Environments* sought to bring art out of a specialized art zone into everyday life. Beuys advocated a social idealism whereby art could, or indeed should, bring about social change. His notion of *social sculpture* was based on the incorporation of the 'invisible materials used by everyone'⁴⁶, such as speech and thought. For Beuys, everyone was an artist who could contribute to society as 'a sculptor or architect of the whole social organism', not merely as a producer of art objects⁴⁷.

In the following decades, postmodernism attacked the modernist qualities of elitism, autonomy and aesthetic judgement. Gradually, commercial values reappeared at the centre of art. The generation of Young British Artists (YBAs) introduced the artist as an entrepreneur in control of the market. The previous avant-garde notions of opposition and transformation were replaced by strategies of complicity⁴⁸. In recent years, the pendulum has swung back to the emphasis on the importance of the social inclusive role of art. The many artist-led initiatives that have sprung up suggest that in these spaces the art produced is in tune with the artist's intentions and does not compromise artistic values. These initiatives usually view the role of facilitator or curator as part of being an artist. Criticism against such initiatives focuses on their lack of real critical engagement; the spaces are used mostly as a means to launching the career of new artists who have been excluded from mainstream galleries⁴⁹. This has two effects, the proliferation of substandard art and an increase in self-reflexivity which in turn results in the *separation* of art from socio-political concerns, not a raised social awareness. 'It seems that recently 'artist-led' has become a cultural brand, a one-size-fits-all piece of terminology that has been appropriated by institutional culture in order to validate incredibly diverse activities'⁵⁰.

The boundaries between disciplines and practices have become increasingly blurred. Sculptors make street furniture, fine artists are invited to be part of design teams together with architects and other designers, crafts people make art objects, everyone is borrowing and stealing from each other. The main issue to be addressed was once viewed as how to integrate art into life, creating a more socially aware artist. Now, however, if the collapse of art into life has resulted in the eradication of boundaries, then what is left to determine what makes art art? Although art is inseparable from its social conditions, it should not be reduced to them. The moral, ethical and political criteria introduced to judge art in postmodernism are not always art's main concern, nor should it become servant to this orientation. The case against pluralism maintains that it renders criticism 'impotent'⁵¹ by the 'anything goes' mentality in which all criteria are rendered useless. Whereas early modern art was adversarial through strategies of withdrawal or transgression, these tactics have now been fully subsumed into contemporary practices to the point where

⁴⁵Allan Kaprow 'Assemblages, Environments and Happenings' 1959-61, in Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (1992), p.706.

⁴⁶Beuys quoted in Bishop, C. *Installation art* (London: Tate, 2005), p.104.

⁴⁷Joseph Beuys 'Not just a few are called, but everyone' 1972 in Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.), *Art in theory 1900-1990: An anthology of changing ideas* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell: 1992), p.890. Some politically-engaged artists, such as Martha Rosler are critical of this and the associated 'Cagean idea of the transformation of everyday life into a series of aesthetic encounters' because it takes the political out of the art. Martha Rosler herself could be criticised for restricting her art to a gallery audience. Quote taken from (De Zegher, C. (ed.), *Martha Rosler: Positions in the life world* (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery and Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1998), p.31.

⁴⁸Bishop (2004), p.71.

⁴⁹See Claxton, R. 'Trading Places' and Thompson, S. 'Show some initiative!' in *Shifting Practice, Artist Newsletter*, 2005.

⁵⁰Claxton (2005), p.4.

⁵¹Foster (1996), p.13.

'transgression is a given'⁵². In which ways can art, in particular art in the public realm, escape this dead-end?

From the debate over what art should do two opposing discourses on the nature of public art have emerged. The first attempts to define public art in emotive terms. Weary of the disengagement they considered to be evident in many public art works, practitioners and critics in the mid-nineties wanted the isolated modernist artist to move into a community and produce socially-engaged work. The term *new genre public art*⁵³ was coined to distinguish this new art, which took into account the need for communication and dialogue with the audience, from previous forms of public art. It looked towards a self-reflexive artist attuned to the interactive character of reality. A radical relatedness was introduced in the idea of *connective aesthetics*. Here, modernist art was criticized for isolating art from society which 'crippled art's effectiveness and influence in the social world'⁵⁴. The most recent manifestation of this line of argument can be found in the concept of *relational aesthetics* which maintains that art must take into account the realm of human interactions and its social context. This leads to an upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art⁵⁵. *Relational aesthetics* claims to have a political agenda because it encourages art which produces positive human relationships, not the kind of art which invites mere contemplation of an art object.

Critics⁵⁶ of *relational aesthetics* oppose the naïve use of the terms democracy and dialogue, which do not represent a unity. Instead both terms should be understood as sustaining conflict, which in fact is the prerequisite for a true democratic space. His convivial art denies the public the ability to engage in independent thinking, reserving this exclusively for the artist. The problem with this kind of art is that, in complete contradiction to what it claims to do, it places the artist at the centre as a facilitator or negotiator of an event. Another criticism is that this kind of approach creates user-friendly, complacent art. Instead, the importance of a disruptive use of space is emphasized as important in revealing the true diversity of the public sphere. The continual demands for the social benefits of art and the widening of access to the arts through participatory events encourage the proliferation of art which relies on a false harmony between the viewer and the maker. There are many contemporary projects which emphasize either a process-based or open-endedness in art, instead of creating objects for consideration. These approaches 'actually foreclose "open-ended" readings since the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is open'⁵⁷.

An alternative way of viewing public art is as part of a wider urban discourse. To view art in terms of an urban paradigm is to emphasize that art is also an integral part of the city and its occupied spaces. To understand how art functions it is necessary to look at its place within the city and the experience of the city itself. Spaces are not self-contained and coherent but are embedded with conflict and social exclusions. Art in the city can act as an accomplice to detrimental urban programmes whose main purpose is to reassure and humanize the built

⁵²*Ibid.*, p.25.

⁵³*New genre public art* was coined by Suzanne Lacy in the mid-nineties. Others at the forefront of advocating a more collaborative and engaged public art include Lucy R. Lippard and Mary Jane Jacob. See Lacy, S. (ed.), *Mapping the new terrain: New genre public art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

⁵⁴Gablik, S. in Lacy (1995), p.77.

⁵⁵This is a paraphrase of Nicholas Bourriaud's definition of *relational art*. An extensive definition can be found in Bourriaud, N. *Relational Aesthetics* (Les presses du réel 1998, English translation 2002), p14.

⁵⁶Critics include Bishop (2004) and (2005) and Beech, D. 'The art of the encounter' in *Art Monthly* Issue 278, July/August 2004.

⁵⁷Bishop (2004), p.62, a thought she expresses in her footnotes, no.30.

environment⁵⁸, or it can function as a disruption to the prevailing hegemony. Different models of public art co-exist. In the eighties art in the public sphere was generally criticized for not being genuinely engaged with the public. Therefore art works were developed which became integrated with the physical site. This requires negotiation with the public and local authorities, and use of various bureaucratic methods, such as competitions and selection from proposals. These pieces were to offer sustainability and the possibility for communication and interaction with a non-art audience. Good public art was concerned with creating harmonious surroundings and a sense of shared space. In contemporary practices the site is argued to be a discursive site separate from the physical reality, and one that is endlessly open and fluid⁵⁹. In this site the artist is converted from being a maker of aesthetic objects to one who *provides* services, as an educator, a facilitator and a co-ordinator⁶⁰. This often results in art lacking in critical meaning whereby site-specificity 'has come to *represent* criticality rather than performing it'⁶¹.

As a reaction to this kind of 'safe art' it is necessary to distinguish works which are more disruptive. These interventions accept an element of unpredictability and opposition, using the city as their canvas. They also engage with the continual pursuit of bringing life into art. Gordon Matta-Clarke is perhaps the artist who is most readily associated with engaging in an immediate way with the city. In the seventies he intervened directly with the architecture in New York and Paris by cutting through buildings, thereby radically altering their usual function. For him, architecture was not design but a social reality that could be interfered with to reveal other socio-political dimensions. One of his projects was the group *anarchitecture* which investigated the spaces left over from urban planning programmes by 'interrupting' them. Matta-Clarke also involved the inhabitants of the city by inviting people to tag his van. He would then sell the tagged sections upon request by cutting them out on the spot. Furthermore, he would sell parts of Bronx floors and slices of buildings from the back of his truck⁶². A contemporary of Matta-Clarke's, Richard Artschwager also made works which altered the experience of the urban fabric. His *blps*, black lozenge shapes of various sizes, appeared on all parts of the city, on walls, around windows or on the back of a truck. One larger white one was painted on the tall black chimney stack of an old factory in New York. Small, but highly visible, their function was precisely that they were apparently useless. The *blp* is a useless insertion into the urban fabric. 'It [the *blp*] is a mindless invasion of the social space by a logo-like, totally useless art element'⁶³.

One of the main differences between site-specific public art and interventionist art is that an intervention is 'given' to the place and becomes inseparable from it. It is the intentional engagement with a site. Whereas a site-specific work is superimposed onto a site, an interventionist piece is activated by the site and immersed in it. Intervention implies acting in space. It avoids the problematics of 'public space' by seizing space. Public space is not simply passive space, but constructed space which is often privately owned. Acts of intentional interruption work in ways which offer a critique of the legibility of urban spaces, the construction

⁵⁸Deutsche (1996), p.66. See also Kwon (2002) for in-depth critical analysis of the different ways art engages with the public realm.

⁵⁹Kwon (2002), p.30ff She calls this 'unhinging' and maintains it is more a result of increased pressures from the museum culture and the art market than a concern for aesthetics. See also Bishop (2004) and (2005).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p.50ff.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p.38. See also Phillips, P. Spring 2004 article for the *Public Art Forum*: <http://www.paf.org>.

⁶²Discussion of Gordon Matta-Clarke's interventions in Lee, P.M. *Objects to be destroyed: The work of Gordon Matta-Clarke* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2000) and Diserens, C. (ed.) *Gordon Matta-Clarke* (London and New York: Phaidon Press Ltd. 2003).

⁶³Schaffner, I. 'A revised history of the *blp*' in *Richard Artschwager: Up and across* (Verlag für moderne kunst: Nurnberg: Neues Museum; London: Serpentine Gallery, Wien: MAK, 2001), p.78.

of the city and its inhabitant's engagement with it. Interventions exist outside allocated art space and should be read as inseparable from everyday life. They form part of the reorganization of our experience. Ownership has a short time span in so far as once the intervention has been executed; the maker or doer, no longer has the authority over it. It could be used in a way not considered, its appearance might be altered, something might be added to or removed from it or the whole piece might be dismantled or destroyed. There is, of course, the financial and bureaucratic aspect. An intervention can be carried out with no regard for planning permission or budgets and without the negotiation and collaboration required for public art pieces.

Interventions are not dissimilar to the idea of *street art* which was introduced in the late eighties as a generic term applied to those art works which were located in the streets but which were not part of contemporary graffiti practices. The relationship between street art and graffiti is contested. The modern concept of graffiti originated in the late sixties and early seventies in New York. It identifies strongly with hip-hop culture, a movement dedicated to giving voice to the dispossessed black urban youth. Graffiti has its own distinct topography and style⁶⁴. Street art, on the other hand, could literally be anything. On a stylistic level, street art borrows from graphic design using stencils, stickers, posters, mosaics and text; things which can be carried out with speed. Finsta, a graffiti artist working in Sweden has expressed the view that although some graffiti is lacking in content, it at least is saturated with style, as opposed to street art which often lacks both, pandering to corporate tastes⁶⁵. One of street art's most notorious practitioners is Banksy. His work is not only found on city walls in Great Britain and abroad, but has also adorned album covers, such as Blur's, and his stencils were used as part of a *Greenpeace* campaign. His flirtations with mainstream culture, he even sells prints of his work, have caused many to view him as a sell-out, exemplifies this rift between graffiti and street art. More in tune with the politics of graffiti culture are Banksy's gallery interventions, whereby he successfully manages to hang up his own creations alongside national collections, such as in the *Tate Gallery* in London and in the *Metropolitan Museum* in New York last year. Recently, he has placed work in Palestine along the wall which divides Palestine and Israel⁶⁶.

Graffiti balances on the provocative by skirting the outside of cultural codes. It could once be read as empty and illegible due to its total disregard of 'proper places' for siting the pieces. Using literally any part of the city as its canvas, graffiti appeared on signs, maps, doors, street furniture and other unorthodox places. It claimed anonymity through the use of tags which functioned as aliases. However, most graffiti has now begun operating within coded systems whereby 'anonymous tags have become celebrity signatures'⁶⁷. Any art on the streets not authorized by a commissioning body typically becomes an act of vandalism. Unfortunately, a distinction is not made between different acts of destruction and embellishment. Instead, any 'defacements' are legislated against through zero-tolerance and *asbo* (anti-social behaviour order) schemes on the grounds that they contribute to making areas unsafe and act as a gateway to other crimes. Public money is disseminated into huge clean-up programmes to rid the streets of this public nuisance. On the other hand, advertising and popular culture have adopted these practices as cool. Clothes companies, record labels and even *Greenpeace* (see above) are using art from the streets in its various forms to promote their brands, artists and campaigns. This creates friction in the graffiti culture itself which has its roots in the disenfranchised urban youth, whereby the pieces are perceived as more 'real' the more they resist assimilation into the mainstream.

⁶⁴Manco, T. *Stencil Graffiti* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p.9.

⁶⁵Svensson, P. 'Graffiti utan kompromisser' in *Sydsvenskan* 05-08-2004.

⁶⁶Haraldson, M. 'Graffitikonst på omstidd mur' in *Svenska Dagbladet* 09-08-05.

⁶⁷Foster (1996), p.51

There is also an element of control being introduced by society's standardizing forces with the acceptance of graffiti into the mainstream. By showing graffiti works in galleries, or using them to advertise trainers, the competing graffiti crews are taken off the streets, thereby silencing the protest often found in these pieces which engage with run-down sites and disenfranchised voices.

Although it is not only illicit art practices that are interventionist in nature, it is often on the streets that an immediate response is invited. This is partly due to the unpredictable nature of the streets and partly due to the imposing systems of law and order, such as police and traffic controls. Christo and Jeanne-Claude blocked off rue Visconti for an eight-hour period without permission in 1962 and created a barricade from oil-barrels. This wall temporarily altered the urban fabric and restricted movement. The political references of the oil-barrel wall were to the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Algerian crisis. It was both a sculpture and an act of intervention⁶⁸. 3Nós3 carried out clandestine interventions in São Paulo in the late seventies and early eighties. They maintained that their works were linked to the visual arts tradition through the 'installation of visual elements within spaces of public circulation', and should not be read as performance pieces. Their 1979 piece, *Interdição*, consisted of suspending strips of coloured plastic across road intersections near the São Paulo Museum of Art. The intersections remained blocked until cars decided to drive through them⁶⁹.

As in any city these days, London is characterized by a rift between the image-conscious official promotion of London as a 'cultural capital' and the reality of lived places. The large-scale regeneration programmes leave many spaces neglected, displacing people and leaving buildings abandoned. Contemporary practitioners intervening in these kinds of spaces are OSA (*office for subversive architecture*) and Tim Mitchell. OSA is a German outfit with 'cells' in different cities, including one in London. In September 2004, OSA in collaboration with 'freelance urbanist' Trenton Oldfield, converted an old signal box above a disused railway track in Stepney into a mock Tudor cottage, complete with a window box full of geraniums, fake grass on the balcony, a chair and a barbeque. A light was set on a timer to go on at nine every evening. Having initially asked for permission to use the signal box which was denied, the group proceeded to go ahead with the project anyway. This highlighted the fact that regeneration programmes and even the established public art funding bodies render many spaces inaccessible⁷⁰. Tim Mitchell's intervention in Dalston Lane in August 2003 also engaged with the current state of the built environment. He installed two large wooden frames covered with a bright red pleated cloth across the doorway of an abandoned theatre in Dalston, an area which, at the moment, is just out of reach of the arm of redevelopment. Their bright colour contrasted with the state of neglect in the rundown street. Reminiscent of stage curtains, they provoked the passer-by to wonder whether something was in fact happening in the building, an opening or perhaps a show.

Both of these interventions were destroyed. The signal box-cum-Tudor cottage had its roof partially removed, the floors ripped up and the grass and flowers flung away. The OSA and its collaborators suspect that this was done by the railway authorities who own the building amid concerns that it might have been or would become a squat. If this was the case, this raises issues of homelessness and property ownership. However, maybe the bright colours of the fake flowers and the newly painted gloss walls provided a tempting invitation to vandalize it. The Dalston Lane intervention was in place for several weeks, a long time considering the arbitrary nature of the streets, before one of the frames disappeared. In the following week, the remaining frame was set

⁶⁸Causey (1998), p.94. Their piece was titled Wall of Oil Barrels – Iron Curtain, rue Visconti, Paris, 27 June 1962.

⁶⁹Ramiro, M. 'Grupo 3Nós3: The outside expands' in *Parachute*, autumn 2004, p.46.

⁷⁰See <http://www.i-n-t-a-c-t.org> and Knutt, E. 'Guerilla Designers' in *ICON*, February 2005 for further information.

on fire. Perhaps the first frame was removed and used for a purpose by someone, or perhaps it was merely stolen. The fire was most likely started by bored youths from the neighbourhood. What these projects clearly illustrate is that ownership is surrendered once an intervention is located on the streets. Any sadness or contempt for what happens afterwards is possibly a failure on the part of the practitioner, because it is precisely this dialogue with the city which gives the work its strength.

Within the framework of the art institution the work of Santiago Sierra could be regarded as interventionist because it highlights social inequalities and exclusions in an unsettling way. His work is not 'participatory', although he will often use participants in order to expose these injustices. For the Spanish pavilion at the 2003 *Venice Biennale*, Sierra sealed off the space just inside the entrance to the pavilion with concrete blocks creating a wall which was impossible to go beyond, making the galleries inaccessible. Only visitors carrying a Spanish passport were invited to enter via the back of the building where immigration officers inspected their passports. Once inside the space, all that was to be viewed was paint peeling from the walls from the previous year's exhibition⁷¹. 'It is important that Sierra's work did not achieve a harmonious reconciliation between the two systems, but sustained the tension between them'⁷². His work is confrontational and discomforting. Similarly, Roman Ondák's work relies on collaboration. He introduces a disruption into the patterns of the everyday, such as forming a queue outside the entrance to the Kölnischer Kunstverein for half an hour in 2003. Another of his works consisted of parking seven Skoda cars with Slovakian number plates behind the *Secession Building* in Vienna for two months. Ondák's 'Conceptual incisions into reality expose and subvert the boundaries of institutions, countries and individuals'⁷³. Both Sierra and Ondák acknowledge that rarely do things come without a cost and for some of their projects they remunerate those who participated to make it happen.

The question is how is it possible to be radical in today's pluralist culture in particular when the traditional radical approaches have been assimilated by the mainstream? The adversarial practices working outside the cultural establishment developed by artists in the sixties and seventies have now become well-integrated into the contemporary art world. Planning and funding are inextricably linked with censorship, licensing and control. By not relying on state patronage, interventions transcend the demands to tally with governmental criteria. There is often a discrepancy between the statements made in artists' briefs advocating participatory practices and the true nature of the work which is lacking in real critical engagement. As a result the distance between academic discourse and the actual art works is widened. By engaging in interventionist practices it is possible to reduce this gap between theory and practice. This is because interventions engage critically with notions of public space, the built environment and public art programmes in the form of jest, displacement or through cultural interference techniques. Intentionally intervening in the city is always a political act by virtue of its occupation with contested spaces; abandoned spaces neglected by the regeneration programmes or dangerous spaces which are difficult to access due to physical or political circumstances. Interventions might also function simply as an act of decoration, emphasizing the aesthetic value of art above the demands for a social purpose. These works which occupy the streets suggest alternative places for participation.

⁷¹Bishop (2005), p.120ff.

⁷²Bishop (2004), p.73.

⁷³Verwoert, J. 'Taking a line for a walk' in *Frieze* Issue 90, April 2005, p.87.



Dalston Lane by Tim Mitchell in East London



The transformation by OSA and Trent Oldfield of an old signal box above a railway in East London



Wall painting by Banksy in South London. A similar painting can be found on the Palestine side of the wall dividing Palestine and Israel.