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in the Contested Urban Contexts  
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## Street Art and Political Aesthetics in the Contested Urban Contexts

### Editorial

Tijen Tunali 6

### Articles

**Juan Carlos Guerrero-Hernandez**

*Activism, Textuality, Cinema, and Feedback in La Nueva Banda de la Terraza's Graffiti-Projections* 8

**Tijen Tunali**

*Artistic Activism and the Carnavalesque Aesthetics in the Urban Social Movements* 24

**Milos Moskovljevic**

*Linguistic Landscape of Hong Kong 2019-20 Protests: A Discourse Analysis of Political Graffiti* 40

**Jenna Altamonte**

*Ephemeral Activism: Un/Making Images of Dissent* 54

**Mareike Schwarz**

*Planting Commons through Art? Aesthetics of Commons and Commodification in Two Community Gardens in Berlin and Dakar* 68

### Art Project

**Catherine Clover**

*Listening, Walking and Languaging in the City: An Incomplete Field Guide to the Voices of the Birds of Amman* 80



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## Editorial Note

Tijen Tunali, Columbia Global Centers, Columbia University.

### Street Art and Political Aesthetics in the Contested Urban Contexts

#### Abstract:

This special issue delves into the profound and transformative influence of a variety of artworks within urban environments characterized by political contention, with a particular emphasis on their capacity to facilitate activist engagement and dialogue. By challenging prevailing power structures, advocating for inclusivity, and reshaping the dynamics of public spaces, street art emerges as a potent political force in the process of democratizing public spheres. These unconventional modes of artistic expression, when situated in the public domain, serve as influential platforms for amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, thereby promoting civic engagement and reimagining the contours of the public sphere. Through an in-depth exploration of the communicative, participatory and political potential of street art this thematic issue entitled *Street Art and Political Aesthetics in the Contested Urban Contexts* seeks to shed light on the intricate interplay among art, urban culture and civic rebellion. This exploration delves into the unique capacity of art to thrive within urban spaces that are perpetually fraught with uncertainty, challenges, and political instabilities. It encompasses discussions pertaining to the critical domains of freedom of expression, public protests, social critique, political engagement, aesthetic tactics, and urban commons in the realm of street art. These discussions underscore the remarkable ability of street art to nurture the aesthetic foundations of political and social actions within the public sphere.

#### Editorial

The contemporary era marked by crises and insurgencies has facilitated a paradigm shift towards self-representation and self-determination. In the last three decades, there has been a notable surge in global protests that have undertaken a profound interrogation of prevailing economic institutions and political conventions. This phenomenon encompasses such significant occurrences as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, the pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, and the anti-austerity campaigns across Europe. These diverse mobilizations in the urban space share a common aspiration: the establishment of a more horizontally structured, democratic, and inclusive arena for the exercise of political agency.

The aesthetic and political architecture underpinning the contemporary struggle for democratic representation has, in turn, disrupted established paradigms within the realms of aesthetics and politics. This disruption has, in effect, equipped us with analytical instruments essential for the scrutiny of our perception of power and political dynamics in the urban space. This shift has provided art with an opportunity to inhabit spheres traditionally dominated by politics. This special issue underscores this transformation, which observes that as art fills exhibition spaces with enlarged reproductions of ordinary items and symbols from consumer culture, it simultaneously extends into the public sphere, positioning itself as a type of social intervention. Engaging in unmediated social interaction, art on the

streets emerges as a potent force capable of influencing and controlling the spatial and social dynamics within urban environments. Furthermore, it offers the potential for fostering cohesion, sociality, and conviviality, serving as desired outcomes conducive to instigating social change. This special issue endeavors to expand upon this by positing that the actions, performances, artifacts, and interrelations embodying urban creativity have collectively repossessed the urban milieu. In so doing, it has heralded a departure from a century-long discourse centered on the capacity of activist art to articulate, depict, and instruct on political matters, towards a deeper inquiry into the inherent political character of art itself. In the current epoch characterized by widespread uprisings, the aesthetic dimension of the political encounter emerges as the linchpin for comprehending the political prowess of the collective multitude. This pertains to its faculties of observation, agency, and enactment. The contributors in this special issue delve into the two main questions: To what extent radical street art can inform political action? And under what conditions could street art become effective in reclaiming the cities as sites of resistance and change?

The intersection of street art and political aesthetics in contested urban contexts serves as a rich field of inquiry, exploring the dynamic interplay between visual expressions of dissent and the socio-political environments in which they emerge. Juan Carlos Guerrero-Hernandez takes a unique approach by examining the intersections of activism, textuality, cinema, and feedback in La nueva banda de la terraza's graffiti-projections, offering a nuanced understanding of how visual interventions can operate within multiple cultural and artistic realms. Tijen Tunali, on the other hand, explores the role of artistic activism and carnivalesque aesthetics within urban social movements, shedding light on the transformative power of unconventional and festive forms of resistance. Milos Moskovljevic's contribution, "Linguistic Landscape of Hong Kong 2019-20 Protests: A Discourse Analysis of Political Graffiti," employs discourse analysis to unravel the linguistic dimensions of political graffiti during the Hong Kong protests, providing insights into the communicative strategies employed by activists. Jenna Altamonte, in her article "Ephemeral Activism: Un/Making

Images of Dissent," delves into the transitory nature of activist imagery, examining how it contributes to the fluid and evolving landscape of political discourse. Mareike Schwarz's research "Planting Commons through Art? Aesthetics of Commons and Commodification in Two Community Gardens in Berlin and Dakar" delves into the realm of public art as a catalyst for fostering social and ecological cohesion, highlighting the potential of artistic interventions to transcend traditional boundaries and cultivate shared spaces for communal growth. Together, these articles contribute to a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted relationships between street art, political aesthetics, and urban dynamics. Finally, internationally renowned artist Catherine Clover's essay documents the preparation and practice of the sound art walk that the conference participants of *Art and the City: Urban Space, Art and Social Change* hosted by Columbia Global Centers, Amman had the privilege to become a part of.

#### **Acknowledgments**

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