

*A support scheme
for emerging creators of contemporary circus in Europe*



Think Circus!

**From street art to public space craftsmanship :
micro politics of a presence**

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Doctor of Urban sociology

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These thoughts are mainly from a thesis in sociology entitled 'Working public space: the craftsmen of street sports, in situ dance and street art in Montpellier'. These are not focused on the circus, but they still have the ability to stimulate thinking on this activity especially when it is the public space that is invested. The following text is not the exact transcript of the public intervention. It simply summarizes the main questions that fed the discussion.

Public space is one of those terms that can lose consistency by being used. We also have a quite vague idea of it. It is at the same time the receptacle of a myth and a very concrete materiality (Berdoulay et al., 2001). Each of the two words that make up this notion implies the presence of certain characteristics without which its use is overused. Michel de Certeau (1990) reminds us that space is a place to which a soul is added. Space has no reality without the energy that unfolds there. Moreover, for this one to be public, it is not enough to declare it. Its legal delimitation is not sufficient to circumscribe it (Levy & Lussault, 2003). It is not a question here of proposing a definition that deserves much more time, but it is possible to quickly recall that a public space must first be accessible. This opening abroad must also be permanently revived (Joseph, 1998). It must also be heterogeneous in terms of audiences and flows. And finally, public space is not a fixed reality. It is a reality in tension and in perpetual transformation. Public space is never defined once and for all. It is the object of permanent construction (Grafmeyer, 1994). A form of social friction can result, but these everyday transactions are in fact a sign of its vitality.

Artists have the ability to turn any place into a public space that meets these criteria. They participate in this process through their tendency to "take their place" (Joseph, 1995) within the city. In the street arts, as in certain sporting activities, appropriation is experienced in the usufruct mode (Gibout & Mauny, 2009). The artists are not owners, but they grant themselves a right of use (*usus*) and a right to enjoy the fruits (*fructus*) of a space whose substance they must, on the other hand, retain. There is no question of transforming the place of everything, but rather tinkering with reality to give a novelty to the real. To go further, the people I met during my research work the public space. In the manner of a potter who works the clay, some artists work the public space to increase the range of possibilities. For this, they must learn to observe, gauge, and test urban matter. And like any artisan, they learn by trial-and-error, develop schemes and routines (Schwint, 2002) and work the matter through the body (Sennett, 2010).

These actions that question or even produce public space have a micro political dimension in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980). They released flows and created lines of leakage in the urban space. To appropriate, even ephemeral, the public space is a form of expression that in the case of the street arts often seems to be an extension of the situationist reflections on the city (Gwiazdzinski, 2014). The speeches collected attest the search for a form of interstitial utopia that is not expressed in radicalism and extremism, but in the perpetuation of many micro actions that disrupt daily life (Maffesoli, 2004). However, one should not especially fall into the trap of heroising. The context surrounding the production and distribution of shows can sometimes lead to an attenuation of the micro political character described above. Reaching windows of visibility (Faure, 2008) is sometimes at a price. When certain artistic productions participate in the contestation of the norms of the contemporary city, others seem, more or less unconsciously, to generate their reinforcement (Riffaud & Recours, 2016).

Take the example of choices made in terms of spatial registration. Some shows finally question quite little place in which they take place. They happen "outside the walls", but on a "stage" more or less delimited. This configuration implicitly indicates where the audience should stand to look and where artists should act to be seen. There is no question here of an artistic judgment. However, my sociological perspective makes me say that these ephemeral scenes are a form of self-construction of a dedicated space that certainly simplifies the implementation of the representation, but which also has repercussions on the potential production of a public space by artistic action. The contemporary city is often thought of as an addition of dedicated isolated spaces ... There is a space for eating, sleeping, playing, etc. These ephemeral stages finally respect this norm being a delimited space exclusively reserved for those who will participate in the performance. The space is therefore less open, less likely to create debate and interaction, and may even be less heterogeneous because of the preservation of the norms of the "classical" show. In this case, it is the ability of art to produce public space that can be interrogated. Recall that the public space becomes "pseudo public space" (Mitchell, 1995) much faster than one would like to believe.

To conclude, it seems that the current context encourages artists to question the consequences of their actions on the territories. It is therefore not enough to question the impact of a show on the public. The difficulty of thinking about the links between arts and territories lies in the fact that we must not be content with conventional wisdom. All shows transform the city, but they do not participate in an equivalent way to the appearance of the desired, ideal and utopian city. Let's be clear, the artists do not bear all the responsibility ... So that each city dweller and therefore each artist can really contribute to the production of a really public space, it is necessary that those who manage the city accept as a matter of urgency fun sense, but especially in the mechanical sense of the term (Paquot, 2015) ... The major mistake is to want to tighten everything, organize everything, predefine everything because it limits the ability of everyone to become artisans of the city.



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