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THE ROLE OF ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL PRACTICES IN UNEVEN URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

A reasoning on a few different forms that power relationships between the agents of urban renewal and the local communities can take in processes mediated by cultural and artistic practices within the public sphere and the urban context

Maria Tartari

1010888

Tutor: Prof. Pier Luigi Sacco

Coordinator: Prof. Pier Luigi Sacco

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Abstract

The present research work is aimed at facing a debate that embraces the realms of sociology, geography and cultural studies. It builds upon the gathering of three distinct papers which common purpose is to investigate how art and cultural practices, operating through social phenomena, relate to wider systems of power in contemporary cities. Each of the three papers specifically focuses on a different form that power relationships between the agents of urban renewal and the local communities can take in processes mediated by cultural and artistic practices within the public sphere and the urban context. The conceptual framework underpinning the orientation of my research draws principally upon both the new urban sociology literature, along with the theories of Henri Lefebvre's right to the city, and the theories of some neo-Marxist thinkers, such as those of David Harvey, Peter Marcuse and Sharon Zukin.

Developing from the theories based on these lines of thoughts, I here aim to analyze the debate about the art-led gentrification, reasoning about the role the creative class has played in the main long-established theories of gentrification, looking respectively at culture and capital as key drivers, and on the extent to which it is organically integrated in the gentrification processes. I also aim to contextualize the consequences of these processes in terms of social costs, dwelling on two case studies.

In the first article, "Two versions of heterotopia: the role of art practices in participative urban renewal processes" I put forward a new conceptual frame, built on the comparison between two notions of heterotopia as theoretical alternatives for the reading of cities as social and participatory spaces, exploring the implications of the interaction of artistic practices with the urban space. Within this analysis, Foucault's notion of heterotopia turns out to be potentially conducive to top-down planning processes and to gentrification, while Lefebvre's notion is instead better suited to participatory practices as strategies of reactivation of the right to the city.

In the second article, "Gentrification as space domestication. The High Line Art case", I interpret the gentrification process as a strategy of public space domestication in the context of culture-driven urban regeneration. As a role model of this theoretical construction, I refer to a full-blown case of gentrification taking place in the area of West Chelsea in New York, focusing on its main public art project, the High Line Art, and on its specific involvement to art-driven space domestication processes. I critically question the responsibility artists have towards the environment's identity and social bonds in which they operate once the art-led re-shaping of public space means turning it into a narratively orchestrated context of individualized consumerist entertainment.

The last article finds its foundation in the gentrification without displacement debate: "The loss of place identity: when gentrification perpetuates cultural and economic misappropriation. The NoLo district case" analyses an Italian case of gentrification in its peculiar context. I here aim to assess how hegemonic models of culture-led urban development, with its commodification of public spaces and social amenities in terms of trade, meeting places and aesthetic landscape, can lead to a harmful change in social meanings at odds of local community's identity and consistency.

Why art and culture have a key-role in the relationships of power within cities: a general introduction.

In every single historical period, main cities have expressed a dominant sense of order and power by leveraging the tension between progress and misery, center and periphery, positive and negative symbols.

Urbanization in contemporary scenarios, characterized by an unprecedented scale and pace of massively interdependent urban development, is taking this matter forward and wrecking the sense of places from the roots. As Neil Brenner analyzes, disconnection, peripheralization, exclusion and vulnerability that affect the entire global context (Marcuse & Van Kempen, 2011¹; Brenner, 2014) is fragmenting the spatial, social and economic fabric of local communities with their specific multilayered identities. With his recent article “Theses on Urbanization” (2014), Brenner attempts to reorganize a new framework of the emergent conditions, processes, transformations, projects, and struggles connected to the uneven generalization of urbanization on a planetary scale, following Lefebvre’s (1970) provocative hypothesis that “society has been completely urbanized”, and that urbanization is not confined to any specific place, territory or scale.

Such a contested (Ruddick et al., 2017²) but suitable perspective gives a proper vision of the state-of-the-art of the contemporary urban question in which physical and immaterial subjects of this thesis play.

Brenner suggests to abandon the search for a nominal essence that might distinguish the urban and its subsets as ontologically well-defined areas that suppose political-economical boundaries rather than assuming emergent pathways of planetary urban reorganization such as dialectically intertwined socio-spatial areas.

In this theoretical context in which I inscribed this research, the city is not observed and conceived as an administrative demarcation, as physical kind of settlement historically and politically constructed. Rather, it is a socio-spatial area analytically connected and territorially embedded into larger scale processes of the urban, the “concrete abstraction” in which the contradictory socio-environmental relations of capitalism take place and evolve (Brenner, 1998; Schmid, 2005³; Stanek, 2011⁴).

This consistent re-shaping of the physical and social spaces is inevitably redefined by private interests mediated by the market and lacking territorial commitment. And what a better way to impose a top-down monopolistic dominance on a territory than to weaken the cultural diversity and thus the consistency of a contemporary urban *koinè*, often made up of a precious inter-cultural *mixité*. The urban landscape turns then to be a battlefield in which continuously play power games of renegotiation that typically end up with a gradual erosion of the public space and its identity, to the advantage of the elites that hold political and decision-making power.

In this late-capitalist scenario, metropolitan life’s grammar is not only written by strategic actions and economic structures but is also composed of urban artworks, logos, images and slogans, perfectly embedded within the dialectical tensions of cities, playing the part of the armed branch of the *élites*. This wide spectrum

References that do not appear in thesis bibliography

¹Marcuse, P., & Van Kempen, R. (Eds.). (2011). *Globalizing cities: a new spatial order?*. John Wiley & Sons.

² Ruddick, S., Peake, L., Tanyildiz, G. S., & Patrick, D. (2017). *Planetary urbanization: An urban theory for our time?*. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.

³ Schmid, C. (2005) ‘Theory’, in R. Diener, J. Herzog, M. Meili, P. de Meuron and C. Schmid, Switzerland: *An Urban Portrait*, pp. 163–224. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag

⁴ Stanek, L. (2011). *Henri Lefebvre on space: Architecture, urban research, and the production of theory*. U of Minnesota Press.

of symbolic and socio-economic elements has always been instrumentalized, due to the compelling power of the arts and their historical celebratory and political role in public sites, as tools aimed at legitimize the élites' practices and reinforce their hegemony. Since ancient times, the concept of *kalokagathia* has always been an ethical justification and reason for invading territories, moving assets and allocating resources in cities, by which social and topographic space has been aesthetically manipulated in order to affirm the dominant culture. In contemporary urbanization, the ultimate power strategy that unveils the most brutal and unsustainable form of uneven urban development is gentrification. Gentrification is a planetary on-going and extremely complex process that takes radically different forms and produces a variety of local class-based transformations. It has become a key concept for describing trends that are no longer limited to individual neighborhoods (Holmes & Shultz, 2018)⁵ but encompasses broad central areas of many cities and does not always consequentially provoke physical displacement. There are many aspects of this still-emerging process that we know too little about (Wyly, 2019)⁶. In 2018, not only urban but also rural⁷ process of “new-build gentrification”⁸ has been already widely acknowledged among the academia. As I show in the two case studies I present in this work, its proliferation is context-specific and the way it intertwines with the artistic and cultural dynamics mutates according to the specific characteristics of a territory. Either way, arts and cultural agents play a significant role in perpetuating hegemonic rules of misappropriation.

Considering this scenario from the complex perspective of the symbolic economy (Zukin, 1995), it is important to clarify the reason why art and culture-led urban renewal processes are important to understand the dynamics of misappropriation of the urban public space and how these dynamics are reflected and interpreted. Especially focusing on the public space framework, we can truly experience how arts and culture affect, convey and dominate relationships and feelings, social behaviours and interactions between people. Artists, creatives and professionals who do work in the artistic and cultural sector, are *agents of change*. Referring to creatives, I want to distance my reasonings from the concept of the *creative class* as conceived by Richard Florida, for whom occupations bunched together purely on the basis of educational attainment and social class position, with little demonstrable relationship to creativity. I am here referring specifically to a context-related group of artists and members of related occupations and to their impact, with their artworks and with their influence, on the public sphere in the urban context. Indeed, even if raw agglomerations do not ensure that synergies develop among them, their presence in studios, lofts, galleries and public places puts a neighborhood on the road to changing, like it or not.

These agents work like a medium: they can handle reality with several unexpected means of interpretation. Provoking, impressing, stimulating debates, acting like a lens which focuses thought on specific issues, they interpret transformations, unveil key passages and underline important milestones.

⁵ Holm, A., & Schulz, G. (2018). GentrMap: A Model for Measuring Gentrification and Displacement. In *Gentrification and Resistance* (pp. 251-277). Springer VS, Wiesbaden.

⁶ Wyly, E. (2019). The Evolving State of Gentrification. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*.

⁷ Sutherland, L. A. (2018). Agriculture and inequalities: Gentrification in a Scottish parish. *Journal of Rural Studies*.

⁸ Davidson, M. (2018). New-build gentrification. In *Handbook of gentrification studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

They are bridges between tradition and innovation. They hybrid different forms of knowledge in order to create new meanings. Since they build and rebuild relationships, arts are a key source for relational goods. At the cultural level, they produce meanings; at the social level they combine and confront diversity; at the economic level, they point at alternative modes of exchange - since the presence of cultural participatory activities is continuous. Artists become a source of social innovation once they are able to foster dissemination of knowledge and protection, as well as social support and coordination. (Nuccio & Pedrini, 2014). Artists are often supported by elites, through direct patronage or foundation-channeled grants, but are, nevertheless, frequently opposed to the elite's values-aesthetic and political. They remain a powerful source of articulated opposition to societal status quo and a major force for innovation. In the built environment of the city, they play multiple roles in stabilizing and upgrading neighborhoods and are sometimes caught up in gentrification. (Markusen, 2006)⁹

Since these agents of change fulfil a crucial function in society, it is essential for them to be fully aware and responsible to the local fabric and the public context within they practice; it is fundamental that they do not establish dysfunctional relationships, because this can give rise to impressive social impacts.

In fact, certain aspects of art practices, if uncritically transported into the public sphere, may mirror the very logic of misappropriation, turning art and culture professionals into *agents of domestication*.

Urban artists in particular, are a transient population (Mele, 1994) who represent an inner conflict between their image, which is tied to an authentic, bohemian urban underworld (Lloyd, 2002), and their strategic role for the middle class in stretching its imagination, its desires, even its practices.

Cities' public space is the battleground within the dilemma unfolds. It can be the antidote to the hyper-commodification of art, the elective field of practice for many artists interested in working on the contradictions of contemporary society (Deutsche, 1992) where to explore new forms of art-driven civic constituency and to foster social change (Thompson, 2012); that's what Lefebvre (1974) calls *the space of representation*, where artists and urban dwellers creates symbols and shared meanings according to bottom-up logics.

The same context may functions as a pedestal for personal exposure and competitive social games where wealth, influence and personal connections become assets to guarantee priority access to highly craved status goods (Thompson, 2008).

In places where culture practices re-invent and exchange symbolic contents, thereby reconfiguring both the urban fabric and its aesthetic flavor, there is an undeniable, positive impact on the economic value of space and on its cultural vibrancy. The problem is who benefits from this.

Indeed, the cultural dimension has become a key element of consumer rituals (McCracken, 1986) in those parts of contemporary cities where there's a significant concentration of capitals, such as financial districts, tourist areas and small business and trade areas.

By contrast, in difficult urban environments, cultural production often establishes uneasy relations with local economic and cultural resources. In peripheral and marginal territories, where the need to rebuild relationships

⁹ Markusen, A. (2006). Urban development and the politics of a creative class: evidence from a study of artists. *Environment and planning A*, 38(10), 1921-1940.

is stronger, the cultural activities contribution is vital since they design virtuous pathways for the conception of relational goods (Nuccio & Pedrini, 2014). Yet, the dialectical relationship between cultural capital and limited economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993) often lead to a synthesis in space which is treated as an aestheticized product (Ley, 2003).

Urban peripheries are the perfect breeding ground for occupation by the creative class, who value its affordability and bohemian status, and vehiculate hegemonic cultural contents through its practices.

As the story of many cities shows, when a new wave of gentrifiers comes, the economic structure and the socio-spatial semiotics of a place change dramatically at the expense of local residents, who are no longer able to afford, understand or feel comfortable in their birthplace. If market forces embezzle the original cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993), the dominant aesthetic and *habitus* take over minorities.

This strategic capitalization in creative hubs, quarters, clusters and precincts (Pratt, 2005; Evans, 2009; Dickens, 2010) is part of a wider way of rethinking urban space according to a neo-liberal approach, where the exaltation of representation over function (Ley, 2003) is a strategy to convey cultural and economic hegemony.

When the public space is set up for cultural outposts in the service of élites groups' private interests, artistic and cultural practices come down to hegemonic actions rebounding on lower classes with harsh forms of exclusion. Artists, urban planner and policy makers themselves become then a cultural means of framing space. They perpetuate the city's claim of continued cultural hegemony, in contrast to the suburb and exurbs (Zukin, 1995). They take part to the productive relation of the elites originating a representation of space (Lefebvre, 1974) where cultural practices are not determined by the local communities whose sense and identity of place gets lost.

Only art in public interest (Kwon, 2004) that generates social transformative processes fostering collective empowerment and democratic contexts, can free itself from a purely cosmetic symbology in the service of speculation. In places where inclusion happens, the process of cohesion between culture and local community re-negotiate the spatial status from a place of alienation to a place of shared participation (D'Ovidio & Moratò, 2017) and the artistic practice can take forms that enable the right to the city.

As can be seen from the following three articles collected in this thesis, the focus that strongly characterizes my researches is based on the arguments raised in the last decades by some authors who reasoned on the role that artists and creative practitioners play within the unsustainable course of urban development.

I here provide a brief literature review to give an overview of the current academic context in which this thesis is situated and to describe related researches in the field upon which my articles build.

The main reference author who provides answers about the connections between culture and the city is Sharon Zukin. Building on the experience of New York from about 20 to 30 years ago (1982, 1987, 1990, 1991), Zukin argues that cultures (intended as a complexity of ethnicity, aesthetic, and marketing tools, the main ingredients of the new "symbolic economy") are constantly negotiated in the city's public spaces.

Cultures are reshaping urban places and conflicts over revitalization, while cultural gentrification perpetuates

aggressive private-sector control of public space, a relentless drive for expansion by art museums and other non-profit cultural institutions, and an increasing redesign of the built environment for the purposes of social control. Zukin describes the significant correspondence of the appearance of arts studios, art galleries and the general commodification of contemporary art and living artists and the symbolic and real up-valuation of New York neighborhoods, tracing the connections between real estate development and popular expression, and between elite visions of the arts and more democratic representations.

Richard Lloyd in 2002 and lately in 2006, anticipates key urban trends at the dawn of the twenty-first century and understands artists and the arts as significant tools of gentrification and of the new economy development. He introduces the concept of neo-bohemia, suggesting that traditions of cultural innovation in older city neighborhoods persist, but that these bohemian traditions, to which artists belong, intersect with economic development in new ways in the post-Fordist city. Neo-bohemia supports both residential gentrification and the concentration of entertainment and new media enterprises, creating the context for the consumption of spaces.

David Ley (2003) in his article “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification”, building upon Bourdieu's conceptualization of the field of cultural production extended to the field of gentrification, considers the role of artists as agents, and aestheticization as a process, in contributing to gentrification. Ley offers some reconciliation to theoretical debates in the gentrification literature about the roles of structure and agency and economic and cultural explanations, casting a more critical historical perspective on the uneasy relations between cultural economy and the creative city, focusing on the power of the aesthetic disposition to valorize the mundane and the appropriation of cultural capital by market forces.

In 2005, the article “Art, gentrification and regeneration—from artist as pioneer to public arts” written by Stuart Cameron and Jon Coaffee marks a turning point about the art-led gentrification actors. They define the role of art and the artist starting from the main long-established theories of gentrification: through cultural analyses of gentrification, they identify the individual artist as a pioneer, as an important agent in the initiation of gentrification processes in old working-class neighbourhoods. Cameron and Coaffee analyze the flows of capitals following the artist into gentrified localities, commodifying its cultural assets and displacing original artists/gentrifiers. They here argue about the use of public art and cultural facilities as a promoter of regeneration and associated gentrification.

Still in 2005, Joanne Sharp, Venda Pollock, Ronan Paddison analyze the consequences that public art projects can have on urban fabric in terms of cultural dominance (and has thus provoked resistance) within the article “Just Art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration”. They show how cultural policy, and in particular public art, intersecting with the processes of urban restructuring, can be inclusionary or exclusionary and how it is a contributor, but also antidote, to the conflict that typically surrounds the restructuring of urban space.

John McCarthy (2006) in “Regeneration of Cultural Quarters: Public Art for Place Image or Place Identity?” focuses on the use of culture that cities are seeking to encourage in particular areas, often designated as ‘cultural quarters’, to achieve regeneration outcomes, and on how public art is often applied in such quarters

in order to promote place image and to enhance local identity. McCarthy critically argues that these aims are potentially contradictory, since the image that is projected may not necessarily reflect local identity. This is a critical issue in view of the need to achieve regeneration outcomes that are inclusive, broadly based and context specific.

In 2010, in “Aestheticizing Space: Art, Gentrification and the City”, Vanessa Matthews explores the relationship between art and gentrification outlining the conceptualization of the arts in the first and second waves of gentrification, beginning with artist location preferences, detailing how and why these areas become attractive for higher income groups, and the agency prescribed to artists within the process. Then, the article places these findings in conversation with current debates taking place in the field surrounding third wave gentrification, in particular, how the arts are incorporated into public-policy and urban regeneration with a focus on public art and arts infrastructure.

Methodologies

In the present work I deal with two different case studies, drawing some methodological tools on the sociological disciplines to conduct the field research.

The former research was held in the end of 2014 in the West Chelsea District, New York. It was geared to get in touch with older residents of the neighborhood, or with those living in the West Chelsea District since before the rezoning leaded by the High Line. It has been organized as a combination of naturalistic observation of attitudes and behaviors of tourist and shopping-oriented users of the neighborhood (High Line Art visitors, shops and restaurants customers, tourists), and participant observation of the incoming business as the result of urban renewal, and of neighborhood residents (Musante and DeWalt, 2010).

I planned 360 attempts at contact through requests for interviews to pedestrians in the neighborhood, with quotas of 60 per day on a total of 6 days over the period October 2-16, 2014. I chose four weekdays and two weekend days, equally dividing the contact attempts in three intervals: 10-12am; 1-3pm; 4-6pm. I obtained a total of 37 successful contacts, with a response rate of about 10%. A semi-structured interview template for residents was prepared, inquiring their opinions about the neighborhood after the restructuring of the High Line, their interest and involvement in the High Line Art public art program, the perceived pros and cons of the overall renewal process. I approached the pedestrians with the following contact question: "Do you live in this neighborhood?". Moreover, I interviewed 7 High Line merchandising staff, 3 local real estate agents, 4 bar owners with a High-Line related brand, 8 staff members of local hotels, and 12 gallery assistants in the Gallery District. In addition, I gathered photographic evidences that clearly showed a massive gentrification process under way and the direct relation with the new-born High Line.

The second case study I here present is composed by some ethnographic material collected during two years of fieldwork in the neighborhood of NoLo, Milan, between November 2017 and November 2017. During my

research I have followed an “Extended Case Method” approach (Burawoy, 1998)¹⁰: I started to conduct my observation with the aim to locate everyday life in its extra-local and historical context. Then, I have found the loss of place identity theory as the most proper theoretical framework to assess the on-going processes. I gathered people’s voices enacting the participant observation (Musante and DeWalt, 2010; Semi, 2010) among the most crowded public spaces and events in the neighborhood. There I collected 64 micro-interviews with local inhabitants and 5 in-depth interviews, 3 with relevant active members of the community and 2 with professionals of different fields. Case study informants include various members of the NoLo district like artists, architects and curators, community leaders and professionals, new and old shop owners, but most of all, new and old residents. I proceeded to interview the residents in order to prove or deny my reading of the phenomenon and to investigate a tangible level of impact of the neighborhood’s urban renewal.

I submitted, via Facebook Messenger, email or in person, a semi-structured survey to residents. The questions touched on the personal, social and economic spheres of the respondents, and included a brief explanation of the answers. The survey related to the affordability and the frequency with which residents frequent new shops, restaurants, galleries and public spaces, and the events proposed by NoLo Social District. An open follow-up question concerned the extent to which they feel aware and involved and their perception/evaluation of these changes’ impact on their lives in the neighborhood, in terms of economic opportunities, social enhancement and cultural belonging (Ferilli et al., 2017). I progressed through an ethnography looking to enrich and extend the aforementioned theory. Primary material collected during the ethnography has been also integrated with secondary material, from photographic documentation to data borrowed from websites, media and published work.

¹⁰ Burawoy, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological theory*, 16(1), 4-33.

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1. Two versions of heterotopia: the role of art practices in participative urban renewal processes

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to take part in the debate about power relationships in contemporary cities between the agents of urban renewal and the local communities, as mediated by cultural and artistic interventions and projects. This study proposes a new conceptual frame, focused on the comparison between two notions of heterotopia as theoretical alternatives for the interpretation of cities as social and participatory spaces. The notions I consider may be traced to two key thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, and lay the foundation for alternative analytical paradigms of the contemporary urban condition, in relation to artistic and cultural practices in the public space. I draw upon these two alternative readings of heterotopia to explore the implications of the interaction of artistic practices with the urban space as a contested terrain from the viewpoint of power relationships. In this analysis, I find that Foucault's notion of heterotopia is potentially conducive to top-down planning processes and to gentrification. Lefebvre's notion is instead better suited to participatory practices as strategies of reactivation of the right to the city.

1.1 Introduction: heterotopies as cognitive frames for urban governance and change, and their implications for cultural practices

Early 21st century urbanization is dramatically affecting the sense of place as cities are facing an increasing spatial, social and economic fragmentation in their fabric. The current, unprecedented scale and pace of massively interdependent urban development entails forms of multilayered, multi-range networking characterized by systems of disconnection, peripheralization, exclusion and vulnerability that affect the entire global context (Marcuse & Van Kempen, 2011; Brenner, 2014). As a consequence of the economic crisis, the principles of postmodern urban organization are increasingly challenged (Vazquez, 2015), and as a reaction, new forms of sharing and appropriation of space in a relational and participative perspective are emerging (Aitken, 2012; Baibarac, 2014; Dargan, 2009; Nakagawa, 2010; Sasaki, 2010). However, in the debate on urban regeneration and city renewal, the pursuit of social cohesion goals and the integration of communities and of marginal areas (Couch et al. 2011; Alden, 1996) has often been addressed, in practice, more in terms of wishful thinking than of concrete solutions, and social urban policies have generally underperformed with respect to their ambitions and collective expectations. On the other hand, global and local elites continue to shape urban spaces and to plan according to their interests and needs, and the increasingly defensive attitudes of disillusioned, and often fragile local communities are still being essentially removed by planners (Forrester, 2012; Ferilli et al., 2016).

In terms of the asymmetry between those who decide and those who bear the consequences of such decisions, whose repercussions reverberate on multiple social, economic and even cultural dimensions, the right to the city exercised by residents towards ‘their’ urban space is being basically questioned. Citizenship itself seems to lose scope, in its disorientation and inability to find a common ground of political and civil commitment to reclaim its rights (Harvey, 2012; Fainstein, 2012), and recover a collectively meaningful sense of place. The urban landscape is then inevitably shaped by private interests mediated by the market and lacking territorial commitment, whereas the elites that hold political and decision-making power benefit from a firm control over a wide spectrum of symbolic and socio-economic tools to legitimize their practices and reinforce their hegemony (Freundschuh, 2006). This constellation of factors has profound effects on the physical and social grammar of the urban space, that does not organize itself any longer in terms of ‘spatial whites and blacks’ (Ilardi, 2007), as it used to be at the origins of suburbanization, but presents porous, constantly shifting borders between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ (Augè, 2009). The constant redefinition of the physical and social fabric of the urban space creates a permanent state of uncertainty, where the balance between the public and private dimension stays perpetually open for renegotiation and typically ends up with a steady, gradual erosion of the former. This is particularly evident in the transformation of most city cores into compact performative spaces, that is, places of cultural and economic simulation (Baudrillard et al., 1982) functioning as theaters of personal consumption tailored on the expectations and needs on non-residents (Augè, 1997; Scott 2000, 2014; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000), rather than as community spaces with manifold functions and meanings. Marginalized groups are not encouraged to inhabit such spaces, and are often actively denied access, on the basis of a segregation built on invisible thresholds but often explicitly securitized. Peripheries are, on the contrary, plural but precarious places, where two groups coexist, not always in peace: those who already are marginalized, and an impoverished middle class, steadily shifting toward the negative side of an increasingly polarized society (Augè, 2009).

The only choice left to local communities seems that of organizing forms of resistance (Uysal, 2012) or practicing a passive opposition through down-to-earth survival strategies (Mathers et al., 2008) against a rhetoric of inclusion that is in fact expelling citizens from those places where the urban dimension has lost its social function. The intended change of perspective from an elitarian, top-down planning attitude to an inclusive one, where social participants have voice and are entitled to action, considers both the role of civil society in the re-conquest of space (Mitchell, 2003; Aitken, 2012; Iveson, 2013; Soresen, 2010; Mayer, 2013), and the need for a deep rethinking of social and economic policies in objectively (and not rhetorically) more inclusive terms (Duke, 2009; Bahn, 2009; Marcuse, 2009; Holm & Kuhn, 2010; Kemp et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2007).

The goal of the present paper is to focus on a specific dimension of this issue, namely the role of arts and culture practices in the construction of an inclusive urban public space. There has been, as it is well known, a vibrant debate on culture and creativity as a main driver of urban renewal (Comunian 2010; Pratt, 2011; Landry, 2012), but most of it has ambiguous implications as to its consequences in terms

of social inclusion and community participation (Ferilli et al., 2017). There is a real risk to abuse the role of culture and creativity in urban processes to legitimize and even encourage organized forms of appropriation of common symbolic and material resources, and of disenfranchising of fragile communities and subjects (Novy & Colomb, 2012; Vivant, 2013; Borén & Young, 2017), as in the case of the many examples of culture-driven gentrification (Zukin et al., 2015). This complex socio-spatial phenomenon needs an adequate conceptualization to be properly analyzed and addressed.

In this paper, I examine two alternative urban epistemologies, namely, the notions of heterotopia developed by Foucault and Lefebvre, respectively. Foucault's heterotopia is centered upon a representational approach to space, and generates a dichotomous urban epistemology structured along polarizations such as center-periphery and elites-community. Foucault's heterotopia is consequently conducive to a top-down dialectic (Fuchs et al., 2003) whose practical application amounts to approaching urban regeneration in terms of hetero-directed processes of privatization, culturalization and commodification, that are typical of the modes of production of space of late capitalism (Marcuse 1985; Harvey 1989; Davidson, 2009). Lefebvre's notion of heterotopia, on the contrary, is un-representational, and proposes a dialectical vision of space as a canvas for social change. From a spatial point of view, Lefebvre's heterotopia focuses upon places where economic exchange is neglected, rather than allowed/denied, thus creating the conditions for re-imagining a collectively meaningful notion of urban habitat. In Lefebvre's view, heterotopias are created by practices: they flourish spontaneously from collective action, and express a romantic idea of urban revolution. The debate on the re-appropriation of the right to the city that follows a bottom-up approach originates from the Lefebvrian perspective, and is linked to the promotion of democratic civism and to the recovery of practices of citizenship (Purcell, 2002; Butler, 2012). However, the dialectical reading of this paradigm can be applied to a non-agonistic perspective on the ways the right to the city can be reconquered. What role can artistic practice play in this context, and how can it promote more authentic, inclusive forms of participation?

In fact, art as a participatory form can happen only at certain conditions. Artistic expressions in urban spaces may potentially overcome their celebratory function to become opportunities for urban regeneration insofar as they engage a wide range of local constituencies on a fair and transparent basis, and empower them to actively take part as co-makers rather than 'audience' (Guida, 2012). The persuasive power of artistic expression is no secret, and has been actively tapped into by corporate interests (Alberro, 2004) throughout the 20th century. As this connection has become increasingly and even programmatically explicit, it has accordingly created a gulf between the social sphere of art production and local communities at risk of social and economic expropriation (Bargna, 2011). The practices of public art paradoxically enable the artist, as well as the urban planner and the policy makers, to provide a unique source of support to the strategies of production of value for the elites, by legitimizing and codifying a representation of space (Lefebvre, 1974) in which cultural practices are not determined by the resident communities, but rather (paternalistically) provided to them.

This practically amounts to sanctioning the community's inability to effectively define the place they inhabit, and then consequently to waive their right to express and defend their own sense of place (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). However, making reference to Lefebvre's (1974) notion of space of representation, one can postulate an alternative possibility, namely that artists and residents co-operate in creating symbolic worlds and shared imaginaries in a context where residents feel entitled to take responsibility and to negotiate with the artist on a fair, horizontal basis. There is a recent growing interest in this new approach to artistic and cultural interventions in the urban space, and there have been attempts at incorporating them into the practice of strategic urban planning, especially in those post-industrial cities where the risk of local community impoverishment is more substantial, and where the call for new viable approaches to socio-economic development is consequently more urgent (Seo, 2002; Paris & Baert, 2011; Ferilli et al., 2017).

The big issue, however, is to what extent it is possible to preserve a vital tension between the role of art and cultural practices as community activators and enablers that work toward social and economic inclusion (Mekdjian, 2018), and the role of art and culture initiatives that basically point at improving the positioning of cities on the global marketplace. The global boon of festivals, biennials, and mega-events of cultural consumption have been transformative of the role and meaning of culture within the new symbolic economy of signs and spaces (Lash & Urry, 1994). Cities have heavily made use of culture as a key lever of rebranding along two axes (Grabher, 2001): at the global level, to effectively place themselves on the map of flows of ideas, information, people, money and techNoLogies (Castells, 1996; Appadurai, 1996); and at the local level, to build consensus for urban regeneration and development projects with massive economic (and often vested) interests at stake. Culture has therefore been acknowledged as a basic dimension of urban habitats, and consequently a key factor of socio-economic transformation (Zukin, 2017), and it is not surprising that culture-based urban regeneration has become a permanent item in the urban planners' toolbox to pursue global competitiveness goals (Evans, 2003). Failing to reconcile this undeniably important dimension with that of the empowerment and inclusion of the local communities, however, is a dangerous source of conflict and contradiction (Pratt, 2011; Scott, 2000; Zukin, 1989), that threatens the social credibility of culture as a pillar of active citizenship in the first place. The ambiguous effects of culture-driven local development policies (Ferilli et al., 2016) reinforce the oxymoron between the 'creative city' as an aspirational concept where culture makes the difference for the benefit of all (Florida, 2002), and its actual consequence, namely an aesthetic embellishment of brutal forms of privatization and dispossession of public spaces and resources (Pratt, 2011; Florida, 2017). If this contradiction is not properly addressed, art and culture practices in the urban domain are at risk of further exacerbating the asymmetries in local power relations, that represent and promote only a very limited range of local (yet very influential) interests. I therefore need to start from the acknowledgement that artists and cultural practitioners may either operate as gentrifying agents or as community enablers, according to circumstances (Pradel, 2017), and the most appropriate strategy to unravel this ambiguity is to root the discussion into a comparative

analysis of the alternative notions of heterotopia and the interpretations of space that derive from them, to properly distinguish and evaluate seemingly similar practices but with opposite implications and consequences. To build the basis of my argument, I first discuss the potential role of the artist as pioneer of gentrification (Cameron & Coafee, 2005) as a practical consequence of the epistemology of urban space as conceived according to Foucault's notion of heterotopia. I will subsequently explore the issue of participation as an alternative paradigm for culture-driven urban governance and change, as a derivation of Lefebvre's notion of heterotopia.

1.2 Foucault's heterotopia as alienation of the right to the city: art practices as a driver of social inequality and urban dispossession

In this section, I discuss Foucault's heterotopia as an urban epistemology, and analyze how art and cultural practices are conceptualized in their role of drivers of urban governance and change. Foucault (1967) introduces the term heterotopia to define the place where devices take shape: a portion of an autonomous, centripetal territory, separated from the rest of the world, a space that lives for itself and which is closed in itself (Orsenigo, 2009). Foucault's heterotopias are spaces that question existing relations and create a moment of displacement, disconnection from an existing social, cultural and aesthetic order. As Augé (1992) underlines in his speculations on heterotopia, shopping malls, road connections, ensembles, theme parks, sport centers, airports, suburban housing units, artistic urban furnishings and public artworks are the 'other' spaces, the heterotopias (Foucault, 1967) with which capitalism has transformed the urban cartography of *surmodernity* by leveraging upon well-orchestrated forms of surprise, aesthetic shock, estrangement. In its extreme formulation, also 'iconic' cultural projects may be conceived of as Foucaultian heterotopias. The point is, however, that such heterotopic valence may be fully read and appreciated only from the top-down perspective of the planner or of the expert, whereas for most city residents it stands as either a functional, recreational, or a downright meaningless artefact. Although the list of heterotopic sites is unsystematic and fragmented, the concept of heterotopia has had an impact on urban and architectural theory through a wider debate (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008), that connects to the hyper-economization of all aspects of social life as determined by the global prevalence of the neoliberal paradigm (Palladino & Miller, 2015), and in particular to the 'customerization' of all aspects of human existence, and more specifically of urban life.

The premise of heterotopia in the modern conception of space and its most common representative form, cartography, springs from its legitimization as an unquestioned application of modern scientific thinking to the representation and understanding of spatial relations. With the Galileian revolution, for the first time in history, humanity was opening up to radically new ideas of space where the principle of extension was being replaced by that of localization (Foucault, 1967). Since then, modernity has gradually established a profound correspondence between the action of market forces and the social representation of space through an implicit conceptual equalization of *minorité* and *altitude* (Braudel,

1977). The cartographic expression creates, through the representative principles of modern geometry, a fracture between geographical space and social space. Space is un-complexified and turned into a mere quantity, to become a physical mediator of trade, political and commercial colonization, and development of military force (Farinelli, 2009; Sohn-Rethel, 1990). The map, as a vertical form of representation and domestication of space, establishes an ideology of the spatial form that can be regulated, prescribed, and ultimately controlled. The dominance of cartography as a form of social and political control that is functional to the economic colonization of space, however, needs two basic conditions: the takeover of capitalism as the 'end of history', i.e. as the final, undisputed organizational form of human economic and social activity, and an underlying spatial epistemology that stabilizes and normalizes spatial hierarchies at all scales, in terms of inequality of status and power between 'center' and 'suburbs', where the former is the site of economic and political power at the appropriate scale, and the latter are marginal and tributary sites (Braudel, 1977; Sales 1991; Kantor et al, 1997; Bayart 2007; Gleaser, 2011). Thus, the spatial epistemology of capitalism is organized along vertical plans at multiple scales. At macro level, in the (uneven) balance of power between the periphery and the center of the world economy. At a micro level, in the socio-economic divisions and fractures of the urban fabric. At a material level, in the architectural-heterotopic traces of the constant remodeling and reconfiguration of the urban space operated by the ultra-mobile global capital. At a symbolic level, in characterizing space as an instrumental medium of production and exchange in opposition to the multilayered notions of social space (Vagaggini, 1980) and anthropological place (Augè, 1992).

To operate these market-regulated spaces, structured by asymmetric strength relationships, cities respond to the organizational needs of capitalism with a heterotopic logic of fragmentation. Empty spaces give way to a widespread urbanization, while business centers are concentrated and segregated, defining partly visible, partly elusive networks of communication shaped by the agendas of the interests they represent. The logic of global flows articulates itself through these communication networks, and determines which spaces are highlighted and why, which ones are not, and how value creation and extraction practices are conceptualized and deployed by means of such epistemology of space, and its carefully maintained bright and dark spots (Castells, 1977). In this system, social groups who govern the decision-making processes prescribe their top-down, carefully coordinated models of spatial representation and organization, at all the relevant scales (Miconi, 2011; Castells, 1977). The top-down imprint fosters a disconnection from space itself as a personalized, human scale dimension, and is therefore a major force that blocks not only the exercise of the right to the city, but the very awareness of its relevance at the individual and collective level. The end of the grand narratives, with their role of fostering critical thinking in postmodern societies, has further contributed to downplay the role of the sense-making agencies that inspired the dialectical motives of modernity, now reduced to "opaque" and "noisy" factors (Lyotard, 1979), if not even lost altogether. In this context, where specific private interests constantly overrule the public ones and where heterotopies become mere instances of meaninglessness, how do artistic practices fit within the incumbent distribution of power and

negotiation capacity in the governance of public space? The most convenient role that artists can carve for themselves in this scenario is as high-end decorators, e.g. as designers of environments that reaffirm the symbolic dominance of the elites, possibly even while paying lip service to social and institutional critique. The apparent reference to instances of social progress and inclusion ingrained in such rhetorical evocations of social radicalism only contribute to a restatement of the alienating valence of heterotopic spaces (Zebracki, 2018).

The only viable way out of this impasse for artistic practices in the public space is that of giving a tangible contribution to the re-appropriation of the right to the city by local communities. But this is neither straightforward nor easy, as operating in the public sphere may lead to scenarios of unpredictable complexity where it may not be easy to make decisions and to take positions (Thompson, 2012). Not incidentally, these issues are among those that have sparked the most heated debates in the international art sphere in the last decades (Wang, 2017). Whatever the agency – a single artist, artists benefiting from some institutional grant, or groups of independent artists, galleries, curators or cultural professionals – when it comes into contact with a territory, there must be an awareness that its logic of operation will have to come to terms with a consolidated fracture, which mandates a precise choice: siding with, or trying to distance oneself, from the social production of space that is reserved to dominant social groups (Castells, 1996). Engaging with the latter course of action means acknowledging the existence of the socio-spatial dimension of the public domain with all of its entitlements in terms of citizenship, and purposefully addressing the historical tension between hegemonic expressions and resistance processes (Clements, 2008). And a proper approach to such tension calls for an ethics of responsibility and not of intention: as art and culture practices overcome the "spaces of representation" with the intention of "representing spaces" (Lefebvre, 1974), the actual social fabric of the community, if left concretely unsupported, irreversibly deteriorates. Condescending to aesthetic manipulation, whatever the intention, amounts to paving the way to hegemonic 'law and order'.

The most recent literature is increasingly critical of explicit or concealed practices of artistic colonization of peripheral communities and dilapidated neighborhoods, as on the basis of a by now large and diverse collection of international experiences, a clear pattern can be recognized, that is conducive to the neighborhood's eventual social and economic takeover (Zukin, 1982; Ley, 1986; Sharp et al., 2005; Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Stabler, 2004), as part of a globalized, corporate-driven re-urbanization strategy (Brenner, 2014). Those artists who are more or less consciously accommodating the dis-integration of the right to the city in favor of the elites, are in fact part of that very system of urban governance as active agents. The aestheticization of the urban space as a way to symbolically remove conflict and displacement is a breeding ground for the emergence of Foucaultian heterotopies, and is easily inscribed within a clear-cut trajectory of gentrification. Foucaultian heterotopies respond to a representational and not to a social logic, and therefore what connotes such spaces is their appearance rather than their place in the local system of relations, many of which are subtle and difficult to decipher without a committed embedding into the local social sphere.

Accordingly, artistic practices that operate as agents of gentrification give up committing to the place and its communities, but rather engage them both by means of an intentionally transitory, ephemeral relation that is more functional to their own career building and artistic profiling than to the real needs, expectations or preoccupations of the community itself, and in particular to reaffirm their entitlement to the space it inhabits. The penniless artist who colonizes a new urban environment looking for cheap residential and studio space is, according to the Foucaultian heterotopian logic, seen as a pioneer (Cameron and Coaffee, 2005; Grodach et al., 2014), and thus in practice as a messenger of the real estate development to come. The gentrification machine keeps in high regard the artists' sensibility in scouting up-and-coming urban hotspots due to their capacity to identify and appreciate those leftover pockets of local, highly specific cultural capital that makes certain neighborhoods vital and energetic (Ley, 1996). In their raw form, with its conspicuous display of bohemian charm (Caulfield, 1994; Lloyd, 2002), such neighborhoods are still unpalatable to the middle and upper class due to their unabridged *mélange* of popular and multi-ethnic elements. But once such elements have been patiently digested and domesticated through the social filter of artistic coziness and have become domesticated urban spaces full of *couleur locale*, they turn into opportunities for attractive real estate investment with a particularly favorable return on investment – where what makes the ROI so favorable is precisely the possibility of dispossessing the most fragile and defenseless local communities (Zukin, 1982, 1995). The successful formula of the “creative class” (Florida, 2002) has done the job of turning this zero-sum urban game into an apparent trickle-down neoliberal fantasy where the takeover of urban space by the creative class becomes the way to collective prosperity. Florida himself has recently (2017) disowned this view, but way too late as ‘creative class’ subcultures (gay people and multi-ethnic minorities, young creative professionals, students in the arts and humanities) are increasingly targeted as convenient scapegoats by populist narratives that try to capitalize upon the rage of the new urban poor. Paradoxically, they have a point, as the “creative classes” as inscribed in the global imaginary by Florida’s successful narrative, are clearly compliant with the neoliberal imperatives of hyper-mobility, self-centricity, demonstrational transgression, and so on. Their value systems are antithetical to those of the most informal and dispossessed working class, and therefore the ‘hip makeover’ of urban neighborhoods carried out by creative professionals entirely redefines the social use of space and its meanings, and becomes the ideal gateway to the ‘normalization’ that makes it palatable for bourgeois urban rituals (Guinard & Margier, 2018), at the bargain price of some temporary real estate concessions (Rosler, 2012). No wonder, then, that art and culture practices are not only often disqualified to the eyes of local fragile communities, but even increasingly identified as downright hostile, as the real estate development cycle is anticipated in its final consequences (Grodach et al., 2014). As the old abandoned industrial buildings are repopulated, public housing slashed or converted into luxury shops, condos and offices (Stabler, 2004), neighborhoods are reshaped from within, and incumbent residents are displaced, new urban heterotopies emerge, and their ambiguous, deceptive beautification nicely implements the Foucaultian epistemology of space, that is, the re-affirmation of existing power relations through their

apparent transgression.

Clearly, in places where art and culture practices (re-)invent and exchange symbolic content, thereby reconfiguring both the urban fabric and its aesthetic flavor, there is an undeniable, positive impact on the economic value of space, and possibly on its cultural vibrancy. The problem is who benefits from this. As far as the artists, legitimized as the 'creative class', 'do their job' without having to come to terms with the local community, it is clear that the latter is excluded from the very beginning, to eventually become an obstacle to the neighborhood's 'renaissance' that needs to be removed. It does not have to unfold like this necessarily, but insofar as the incoming artists and cultural professionals do not prioritize the difficult, challenging, often frustrating dialogue with a local community with which they may initially have little to share, and even more if this happens in the context of temporary art projects in the public space carried out by artist globetrotters and their assistants, it is not difficult to guess what is coming next. Public administrations, through improved tax revenue, and private investors, through real estate capital gains, are the only real winners (Marcuse, 1985; Hackworth, 2001; Lasner, 2017), and the preexisting residents are the losers, until they lose their very resident status to be relocated in some remote urban periphery (Zukin, 1989; Marcuse, 1985). The alienation of community residents from their *koinè*, organically woven through years of cohabitation and a primary barrier against socio-economic marginalization (Betancur, 2011), on the one hand involves a silent but deep-rooted disenchantment with the culture-led urban renaissance narrative, and on the other hand implies a fragmented urban reconfiguration that feeds deep pockets of social anger, further cultivated by the ensuing practices of exclusion, peripheralization and atomization (Brenner, 2014; Augé, 1992). This perverse feedback chain calls for a much more insightful and self-critical analysis of arts and culture projects in the urban space (Grodach et al., 2013), in the interest of the social credibility of such practices as a widely recognized public good, and as a form of real community empowerment that may countervail hegemonic forces. This calls in turn for a deep rethinking of the notion of heterotopia as the urban epistemology through which is possible to understand art-and-culture-driven urban change.

1.3 Dialectic participation as a philosophy of practice in the re-appropriation of the right to the city: heterotopies according to Lefebvre

Although the representational epistemology of urban space has had a major impact on the spatial configuration of cities and on its evolution, the psycho-geographic, socio-anthropological rival epistemological paradigm maintains, especially today, a strong potential and a substantial relevance. Human adaptations to environmental and social challenges are often very complex and difficult to anticipate, also due to the subtleties of individual and collective learning processes (Tobler, 1963). Therefore, despite the critical picture drawn out in the previous section, there is scope to imagine an alternative possibility for social inclusion and collective empowerment through art and cultural participatory practices in the urban space.

The humanistic or social perspective on space is opposed to the vertical, representational one (Straus, 1963). In particular, it points out how every society produces its own forms of representation that defy institutionalized practices. In Lefebvre's view, there is a fundamental difference between the representation of space and the space of representation. The former is linked to the production of relations and the imposition of order by means of the dominant ideology of space as conceived by urbanists, architects, planners, and by the forces of capitalism. The space of representation is underground, clandestine, with an emotional focus and, therefore, rooted in the experiential dimension of practices. Here, capitalist ideology shows its intrinsic limit: its lack of awareness of the deep causes, effects, motives and implications of the action of social forces, that it constantly attempts to embezzle, but at best with partial success (Lefebvre, 1974). Whereas representational heterotopic spaces push toward the removal of social conflict through a panoptical form of social control where all tensions and aspirations are ideally converted into domesticated forms of aspirational consumption (De Certeau, 1980), the human practices of everyday life may constitute an antidote to this attempt at normalization. The limit of representational epistemologies as vehicles of the hegemonic classes' attempts to impose an aseptic, carefully orchestrated sense of place that fosters passive adaptation rather than active civic involvement lies in the reality of material life. This is the omnipresent, pervasive and repetitive base along which the history of humankind's common actions unfolds (Braudel, 1977; 1979). Material life is the canvas that inspires individuals to overcome the grids of social control. It is made of silent actions that enable an appropriation of space, bypassing the prescriptions of the dominant, imposed social order. It is made of collectively or subjectively embraced activities aimed at re-directing the uses of space, and subverting its assigned functions (De Certeau, 1980). Starting from this fracture between material and economic civilization, a different urban epistemology from the one inbuilt in Foucault's notion of heterotopia is proposed here. This alternative approach, which focuses itself on use value as opposed to exchange value in the regulation of social interactions in the public domain, can provide a basis for re-claiming the right to the city. As remarked, what once was the working class described by Lefebvre in the '70s, has nowadays been replaced by a more fluid, fragmented *surmodern* "urban class" (Harvey, 2012). However, such marginalized class is still able to produce its own heterotopies, and to realize a different sense of (practice-based) place, and a new form of urban revolution. Even though the social connectivity function of organized political action and of the grand narrations of modernity has been eventually lost, new forms of mobilization can still be found not in terms of confrontational upheaval, but as spontaneous, self-organized forms of participatory actions aimed at re-negotiating the right to the city one step at a time.

The traces of material life inscribed in the practices of the ordinary human (De Certeau, 1980) give way to actions that branch out in the urban space in the most diverse ways, but constantly addressing the recovery of the right to the city and of the sense of place through a re-humanization of the world-space: namely, a space that is shaped by the de-territorializing logic of globalization and of the world-economy, but that, at the same time, can be re-territorialized on a spatial basis by its community of belonging

(Mattelart, 1991). By seeking a reciprocal engagement between the spontaneous collective action sparked by individual and social practice and art and culture interventions in the public space, it becomes possible to pursue new forms of social value production through collective participation and empowerment, insofar as artists and cultural professionals are prepared to critically question the predetermined roles and prerogatives of their practice in the public domain, to embrace a perspective of art-making in the public interest. This means in particular de-emphasizing the formalization of artistic practice and its main focus on individual authorship, to encourage a shared capacity to intervene on the architecture of social relationships and on their deep symbolic connotations, to suitably de-construct and re-construct them according to a shared agenda of community development.

In terms of the periodization proposed by Miwon Kwon (2004), the passage is clear. According to Kwon, there are three phases of public art. The first, “art in public places”, is connoted by the protagonism of site-specific artworks. It is provocatively re-labeled as “plop art”, as it is solely addressing the aesthetic function of space, and therefore typically ends up failing in terms of the creation of a lasting connection to the place it insists upon. The second, “art as public spaces”, is less focused on the artistic object and more aware of the space it is placed within. In this case, the artist seeks an integration with the territorial context, and becomes more aware of the interaction of his/her practices with the community and with local policy agendas. The last one, “art in the public interest”, is primarily focused on social instances, on the building of collaborative environments, especially with the marginalized, and on the participation of the local community as co-creators and co-enablers of the artistic practice.

Only in a truly participatory context the artwork in the public space can go beyond a mere aesthetical-cosmetic connotation, to be embedded within the social life of the place, to become a nexus of social exchange. When this happens, the artist and the local community can join forces to re-negotiate the status of the urban space with all kinds of agencies, redeeming it from a place of alienation to a place of shared sense-making (D’Ovidio & Moratò, 2017; Pradel, 2017). The informal practice of inhabiting the urban space can thus be channeled through the artistic practice into a political action that enables the right to the city, that challenges the social and economic conditions for gentrification and that, at the same time, overcomes the aggregative limits brought about by various kinds of political, institutional and symbolic obstructions (Harvey, 2012). In this context, the practices that De Certeau described as spontaneous and intrinsic processes of subversion find a possible reframing in highly prosocial forms of cultural participation.

The main challenge for artists working in the urban public domain is then how to practically spark social transformative processes that support community empowerment through the involvement of residents in the various steps of art and culture practices. Whether or not the practice is conducive to effective community making does not depend upon abiding by some abstract procedure or set of prescriptions, but upon the concrete capacity to establish a conversation on issues that matter for the community, and in eliciting ways to tackle them constructively and specifically (Bourriaud, 2002), thereby promoting

cooperative forms of interaction and the production of intangible community assets that improve social, cultural and political resistance (Bishop, 2004, 2006). Artists are called upon to refer to specific places, as a nexus of their relations with the local community more than in their mere materiality as stages of the artistic intervention. They must be able to read the local social and symbolic cues to establish a common vocabulary and a common epistemology of space and relations as the shared conceptual frame for the deployment of the participatory process. These are the practices that transform the space into a space of representation (Lefebvre, 1974), namely a space tied to the use value, and disconnected from the scripts imposed by external forces that emanate from hegemonic agencies. To be inclusive, the urban space intended as a place with a socially sustainable identity (Davidson, 2009), must guarantee basic principles of accessibility, equality and respect (Agnoli, 2009) that do not always conform to, or are not adequately prioritized by, the intention of the artist or of the commissioner of the artwork. The willingness to walk the extra mile (or lack thereof) makes the difference between staged and adequately supported community participation, and therefore between Foucaultian vs. Lefebvrian heterotopies and their economic and social consequences.

Re-negotiating its artistic intention through the participatory practice calls for a clear statement of trust from the artist's side in the actual capacity of the community to cooperate with him/her to turn the practice from virtual to real in mutually meaningful ways. This is a far from trivial step, and in a sense the moment of truth to gauge the real gap between the stated and the actual agenda. Trust building (and its maintenance through time) is the mandatory passage to reconstruct the social credibility of artistic practice in the public space to the deeply dis-encharmed eyes of marginalized communities. And it is built patiently through a long string of successful prosocial reciprocations. Is this timing compatible with the frantic calendar and the thirst of novelty and excitement of the global art world? Not entirely, as a shared sense of belonging is built through the concrete, active presence in the fabric of everyday life and in the calendar of rituals and events that set the pace of the local community history. Real community impact therefore calls for careful social research (Vivant, 2018), participant ethnography (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014), and capacity for social orchestration of a narrative that can be re-affirmed and re-appropriated by residents (Pradel, 2017), coupled with effective capacity to generate community assets that are valuable to the community beyond the practice itself (Ferilli et al., 2016).

On the other hand, the active involvement of the local community in bottom-up collaborative and co-creative practices (Tomka, 2013) is not a binary concept: 'participation' actually denotes a full spectrum of possibilities, that can take different forms, be expressed through different practices, and point to different spheres of meaning (Cornwall, 2008). Participation may translate into contribution, influence, and sharing or redistribution of power and control (Arnstein, 1969), as well as of knowledge and expertise gained through an explicit involvement in decision-making processes (Saxena, 1998). At the same time, participatory practices are very exposed to instrumentalization by all kinds of vested interests that seek legitimization for their own choices and deliberations. Passing superficial, ad hoc participative involvement for community consensus may be politically and economically rewarding, and the

community itself might easily be unaware of the extent and implications of the manipulation. The abuse of participation is not new to the literature, and concrete negative examples abound, ranging from promotion of hidden agendas (White, 1996), to deceptive participation (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995), to the instrumental involvement of minorities (Bailey, 2012). The mere invitation to take part and the evocation of radical thinking and social change may be a smokescreen (Cornwall, 2008) unless the participation process concretely entails the attribution of a certain level of power to the community, enabling the latter to pursue its own goals and to affirm its own cultural orientations (Tomka, 2013) – in other words, to assign the community a role in the complex hierarchy of urban governance and a consequent capacity to decide upon the use of resources, to get some relevance in the public debate and deliberative processes, and to acquire a fair level of ‘social existence’ in the wider urban context.

The acid test for participatory art and culture practices in the public domain may then be expressed in terms of the strength of the affirmative action of the community’s social and individual right to the city, under the form of trust building (Aitken 2012), and improved bargaining power as supported by the creation of community assets (Cornelius & Wallace, 2010) and individual capabilities (Saxena, 1998). A different sense of place can be collectively and intentionally pursued by residents once they realize they are entitled to negotiate change as a natural consequence of participative engagement (Muir, 2004). The re-appropriation of the right to the city is inevitably mediated by a purposeful collective commitment toward socially transformational practices. An autonomous rather than hetero-directed trajectory of local community development is therefore physically and symbolically instantiated by the discovery of the public space as a territory of social and political agency which needs to be constantly reclaimed, maintained, and re-energized as an act of collective responsibility. It is not the reference to participatory practices that sanctions the existence of a public community space, but the extent to which the community acknowledges its existence as a socially objectified reality, that is not relying on the practices themselves to be legitimized, but that expresses its legitimacy through them.

Whether participatory practices will be read as a temporary fad among others or as a turning point of a more inclusive idea of urbanism will then largely depend on their capacity to harness real experiences of social transformation (Leal, 2007). As Fals Borda (2000) puts it, it is necessary to create a “SpaceTime”, a place where aspirational visions of life and culture, mutual assistance and cooperative endeavor coalesce, and where collective rights come before individual rights. As Saxena remarks (1998), the outcomes of participation are the learning, empowerment and strengthening of the local constituency, which lay the premise for a bottom-up drive to the re-appropriation of urban space. In this perspective, the absence of participation can be seen as a lack of freedom of choice that compromises the pursuit of positive freedom (Sen, 1999) and the exercise of the right to the city by local residents. Participatory art and culture practices may therefore become an essential ingredient of active citizenship, and this perspective opens up a tremendous scope for action and engagement on the artists’ side, provided that they opt for community empowerment as the focus of their practice as opposed to the symbolic legitimization of hegemonic agencies and interests. Re-negotiating the community’s right

to the city then becomes a participatory non-agonistic practice in itself, as it harnesses the regeneration of a space of collective creation that redirects the function of urban space toward shared, deliberated goals (Harvey, 2012) – in other words, a Lefebvrian heterotopia as the germ of a viable alternative idea of city-ness and urbanism.

1.4 Conclusion

The conceptual frame I presented in this paper aims at providing an alternative point of view to interpret current urban regeneration trends, and in particular the role and function of art and culture practices within them. There are several implications that follow from the two opposite notions of heterotopic space I discussed: Foucault's one, that theorizes an heterotopic model based upon the center-periphery dichotomy and more generally on a strictly representational vision of urban space; and Lefebvre's one, that eschews the representational trap to focus upon the underlying social processes, and in particular upon the need to reconquest the right to the city through the creative re-appropriation of urban space by local communities.

The capacity to reclaim public space as a new form of urban heterotopia is all the more urgent in a moment where the privatization of public space, even when meant in its more down-to-earth, reductive meaning, is rampant in cities worldwide. This gives to art and culture practices a new, fundamental sense that is only partly acknowledged by artists and cultural professionals in the first place (Clements, 2008). There is a clear need to introduce these practices at a new, unprecedented scale within urban planning strategies, but not as a cosmetic element of cheap consensus building (White, 1996) – rather, as an innovative form of civic empowerment and capability building, in the context of a fairer allocation of power and control of resources within urban regeneration processes (Peto, 1992).

The social credibility of arts and culture practices in the public space is at stake. They can either legitimize themselves as decorative exercises to embellish the hegemonic refurbishing of urban space with more or less gracious ornaments, or may take the risk to accept the reality of social inequality as reflected in the control of planning of, and decision-making on, urban space by vested interests, and consequentially reclaim the right to agency for the most marginal and disenfranchised urban communities as an imperative of social sustainability and justice. *Lex ignorantiam negat*: the art and culture world is autonomously able to choose whether to give up responsibility (Ai Weiwei, 2012), effectiveness (Bruguera, 2010) and community empowerment in exchange for some fringe benefit, possibly of considerable professional and/or financial value. Lefebvre's notion of heterotopia provides an extremely powerful and precise conceptual canvas to build an alternative vision of community agency and active citizenship, but it calls for bold choices. Appropriating the cultural heritage and identity of a local community for personal purposes, no matter how artistically daring, is nothing short of parasitizing it. It is a new form of symbolic alienation that functions as a perfect stage for the functioning of representational heterotopic devices that make people immemorial of their place and role

in the city and of their right to it. This is a conceptual crossroads that will not remain open forever. Simply failing to take position implies that art and culture implicitly support the current trend without even taking the responsibility to make it explicit. Now more than ever, it is fundamental to critically analyze and appreciate how specific art and culture projects in the urban public space work, and what are their practical and symbolic consequences. In particular, we need examples of practices that seriously accept the challenge of inclusion and empowerment and proceed consequently. The issue is not to create an elite collection of flawless examples, but a deontologically appropriate repertoire of cases that, through experimentation and trial-and-error, illustrate viable possibilities and try to make them happen.

1.5 References

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2. Gentrification as space domestication.

The High Line Art case

Abstract

In this paper, I critically examine the role of artistic locational choices and practices in the context of gentrification processes in urban renewal contexts. I characterize gentrification as a form of domestication of space, and explore the extent to which artistic choices and practices relate to such process with reference to the deontological dilemma of legitimization within the art system vs. responsible empowerment of vulnerable local constituencies. I illustrate my argument with an analysis of the High Line Art project, and show how this can be considered as a textbook example of art-driven space domestication leading to brutal forms of gentrification. I comment on the threat that this provides to the social credibility of artistic practices as an agency of responsible social change.

2.1 Introduction. Art and urban regeneration: A troubled relationship

The deployment of art-based public projects, the relocation of artists in former rundown neighborhoods and their subsequent revitalization as new, hip urban hubs have been quintessentially part of the urban regeneration processes of the past three decades (Cameron and Coaffee, 2005). Although initially welcomed as a demonstration of the capacity of the arts to inflate new life into once anonymous, decayed fragments of the urban fabric (Wynne, 1992), these practices have taken with time less shiny colors, and their implications have become more ambiguous and controversial (Amin and Thrift, 2007). The powerful rhetoric of the creative class has paved the way to the legitimization of gentrification practices as necessary steps toward collective prosperity (Peck, 2005), with artists unknowingly turned into involuntary change agents and symbolic heralds of the new *koine* (Billard, 2017). As the lesson was being learnt the hard way, local communities have started to look at the arrival of new dwellers in the arts business as the vanguard of a worrisome cycle of eviction and displacement (Stabler, 2004), to eventually make space for high-end shops, residences, and offices (Zukin, 2009a). Is it therefore still possible for the arts to credibly pursue their role of critical opposition to social inequality, and disruption of diversity and inclusion, when they are objectively collaborating with the very subjects and forces that are their primary causes (Makagon, 2010)? The progressive dis-articulation of the incumbent cultural diversity into a racial/ethnic ‘otherness’ to be displaced (de Oliver, 2016), and the consequent destruction of a patiently weaved social fabric (Casellas et al., 2012) – often the main antidote to socio-economic marginalization, and whose dissolution exposes major relocation-related vulnerabilities (Betancur, 2011) – are the pillars of a brutal, traumatic form of urban change whose aestheticization, voluntary or not, becomes highly problematic, and puts the arts and the artists in front of difficult moral and deontological dilemmas (Mathews, 2010). The functional interrelationship between artistic practices and gentrification is,

however, neither necessary nor inevitable (Miles, 2005). The common notion of urban ‘revitalization’ associated to gentrification practices is driven by the substitution of vernacular, situated identities with a staged representation of bohemian authenticity which is both surprisingly homogeneous at the global scale (with minor local cosmetic variants) and entirely functional to consumer rituals (Zukin, 2008). This is a sort of radical subversion of the role of the arts in fostering civic empowerment and agency as an expression of community-driven sense making (Sommer, 2014) and construction of a place-specific discourse (Sommer, 2004). The exploration of alternative approaches to the relationship between artistic practices and urban change is therefore necessary to both reaffirm the potential of the arts as a credible, generative, inclusive community asset, and to imagine more socially sustainable, fairer routes to arts and culture-driven regeneration (Sharp et al, 2005).

Clearly, as pointed out by Zukin (1995a) and Miles (2007), the crux of the issue lies in the social governance of public space (or lack thereof). Public spaces are the ‘central nervous system’ of urban life, and therefore they can either become, according to cases, theaters of community empowerment or of community subjugation and alienation (Lefebvre, 1991). Investigating the nature of the relationship that artistic practices establish with, and within, the public space is therefore fundamental for the understanding of their role and impact in urban regeneration processes (Miles, 1997).

The purpose of this paper is twofold. On the one side, I introduce a conceptual framework for, and some brief examples of, art practices in the public space that prioritize social inclusion and represent viable examples of non-gentrifying approaches to urban regeneration. On the other side, I present and discuss, with the help of the previously introduced conceptual framework, one of the most iconic examples of public art projects of the last decade, that of the High Line Art project in West Manhattan, which is heralded as a success story of art-based regeneration, and which, in my perspective, turns out to be one of the most dysfunctional instances of how art can become an agent of displacing gentrification. What makes the case study interesting is not only its impressive social impact, but also the lack of awareness of its criticality by both the project agency and parts of the civil society and media. There is therefore an urgent need to develop appropriate, usable conceptual frameworks to assess the social sustainability and fairness of art practices in the public space.

2.2 The domestication of public space

In plant and animal breeding, domestication means the forced adaptation to a captive environment through suitable genotypic and phenotypic re-engineering (Price, 1999). Through domestication, humans can tweak the evolution of living organisms to their needs and goals by suitably modifying the adaptation landscape with respect to which organisms optimize their fitness (Kareiva et al., 2007). As a consequence, the adaptation landscapes of the domesticating and domesticated species establish a stronger co-evolutionary link between themselves, which may be the source of new forms of dynamic complexity (Kauffman and Johnsen, 1991). In the social science context, the concept of domestication of public space is not new. Zukin (1991;1997) reconstructs, through the historical evolution from modernity to post-modernity, the process of change in the

material and symbolic fabric of cities, and in particular how the domestication of urban spaces turns the landscapes of production into landscapes of consumption. Wellman (1999) identifies seven broad trends linked to the domestication of contemporary communities such that the public dimension of interaction and networking is essentially substituted by a private one, with the consequent shift from communal to individual interests as the focus of the social relationship. Jackson (1998) transports this notion in the context of public space in terms of the reshaping of the social norms, habits and behaviors that rule the perception, access and use of communal portions of the urban space, with the purpose of turning public governance into a *de facto* private one (Kohn, 2004). Atkinson (2003) explores the social control implications and hidden social costs of domestication, whereas Koch and Latham (2013) give the notion a positive valence by refocusing it to denote the ‘terraforming’ process of making urban space hospitable to its inhabitants.

Here, I’m especially concerned with the dysfunctional aspects of domestication, and with its original reference to the conflict between public and private governance principles for communal resources. In this light, the gentrification process can be characterized as a domestication strategy, insofar it is coherently pursued by a group of subjects that are entitled to act as the domesticating agent. Whether or not artistic practices in urban spaces targeted for regeneration are organically integrated in the gentrification process or counteracting it, basically depends on the extent to which they function as domesticating forces or, to the contrary, help the local community preserve its capacity to maintain and pursue collective goals that are not superseded by those of the domesticating agent (Fraser, 2004; Long, 2013). I characterize domestication in terms of three key dimensions of special relevance for the characterization of the impact of art practices on public space in the context of culture-driven urban regeneration.

The first dimension I highlight is *commitment to the place*. In domestication processes, the domesticating (privatizing) agent makes no special commitment to the place as such: it does not *belong* to the place, attaches to it no special meaning or value, and maintains its interest and active involvement with the place only insofar as this remains convenient. This lack of commitment reflects the perfect mobility of capital in neoliberal economies, where the locational dimension is entirely irrelevant: it merely reflects the availability of temporary opportunities and is readily overturned as soon as better opportunities materialize elsewhere (Cox, 1993). In this vein, the domesticated space surrenders to being economically, socially and culturally re-engineered, to secure for as long as possible the conditions for the permanence of the interest of the domesticating agent toward the place (Cox, 1995). The whole logic of commitment is thus turned outside down: it is not the domesticating agent that commits to the place, but it is the place that commits to the expectations and interests of the domesticating agent (Smith, 2002).

The second dimension is *role negotiation*. In domestication processes, the domesticating agent sets the interaction rules in advance, and if any role negotiation is contemplated, it is designed to merely reconfirm the pre-determined arrangement through a purely formal process of public consultation and deliberation (Tang et al., 2011). Although the negotiation is embedded in a context of democratic participation, the process may be strongly biased by the superior capacity of the domesticating agent to manipulate its phases, turning the formal compliance to the rules into a legitimization of the negotiation outcome as the result of rational collective

deliberation (Jones, 2003). What could have been a measure that guarantees fair representation and pluralism then turns into a sanctioning of the imbalance in negotiation power as the key outcome predictor (Taylor, 2007).

The third dimension is *community empowerment/entitlement*. In domestication processes, the domesticating agent strives to dis-articulate the local community's sense of *joint* entitlement toward their own communal resources by refocusing them as a constellation of *individual* entitlements (Pow, 2007). As a consequence, the recognition of the community as a collective agent, and its empowerment to (re)act cohesively is undermined. Domestication thus aims at disrupting a pre-existing social equilibrium by emphasizing its latent social dilemma character, favoring the emergence and diffusion of individual free riding as an optimal solution to the social uncertainty introduced by the domestication process itself (Tonkiss, 2006). Once individuals cease to identify themselves as members of a local community with common interests, and to refer to a sense of shared, collective authenticity and historical memory, the very idea of a collective entitlement to the public space, and of the necessity to cultivate social skills and capabilities to maintain the community's collective social capital, is lost (Zukin, 2010). The privatization of the public space and the eviction of former residents thus find no organized form of opposition (Chum, 2015). Domesticating a public space ultimately means reducing it to a fungible canvas that can be conveniently, heterogenetically remodeled according to the priorities and goals of the domesticating agent.

2.3 Between two worlds: The key dilemma of artistic practice in the public space

There are several reasons that explain the current, increasing relevance of artistic practices in the public space in the context of the contemporary artistic discourse.

First of all, the public space may function as an antidote to the hyper-commodification of art caused by the global proliferation of art galleries and fairs, and by the increasing attention paid to the art-world glamour and power play by the mainstream media. The cultural dimension has become a key element of consumer rituals (McCracken, 1986), turning artworks into 'absolute commodities' (Martin, 2007) and expanding the scope of the traditional forms of art-based distinction based on education and the construction of taste (Trigg, 2001) into a competitive social game where wealth, influence and personal connections become assets to guarantee priority access to highly craved status goods (Thompson, 2008). This has sparked the artists' interest for relational art as a de-commodified form and as an implicit critique of consumerism, finding in the public space a natural context of practice (Miles, 2009). Moreover, the public space is a naturally contested terrain (Mouffe, 2008), that becomes the elective field of practice for many artists interested in working on the contradictions of contemporary society (Deutsche, 1992). Furthermore, in the public space artists can address and engage individual and social subjectivities that would generally not be reachable within art's institutional perimeter, to explore new forms of art-driven civic constituency and to foster social change (Thompson, 2012). This inevitably short, partial list suffices to illustrate the richness of motives and themes that accompany the current flourishing of art practices in the public space.

However, interest toward public space is far from enough to guarantee that art practices oppose, rather than facilitate, domestication processes. In fact, certain aspects of art practices, if uncritically transported into the public sphere, may mirror the very logic of domestication. As to commitment to the place, the construction of reputational capital that currently functions as the main selection criterion in the contemporary art system mandates a hyper-mobility of artists (Dodd, 2014), who need to build a career out of their regular participation in high profile biennials, exhibitions and projects in major institutions all over the world (Zorloni, 2013). As a consequence, their relationship with specific places is necessarily temporary and precarious (Schulman, 2017). Moreover, as accomplished artists are often engaged in several projects at a time, their relationship with the place tends to be further mediated by their assistants and studio crew (Slowinska, 2014). Ironically, then, the mobility of artists here seems to reflect the mobility of capital, as their interest in a specific project in a specific place is typically more linked to the professional opportunity it entails than to any specific sense of commitment to the place, let alone of belonging. In this condition, carrying out community-based projects may raise substantial ethical and deontological concerns (Keidan, 2008). Not so differently from what a typical domestication agent does, working on a project in the public space without a real commitment to the place is at risk of appropriating sensitive aspects of the daily living and struggles of all sorts of fragile collective or individual subjectivities, to showcase (and even commercially exploit) them in privileged social and economic circles (Bishop, 2006). Therefore, independently of the stated intentions, the lack of commitment may turn the artistic practice into a symbolic celebration of the domestication itself. In terms of role negotiation, if the artist addresses the community through a pre-defined conceptual script that the latter is simply called to interpret, whereas the artist's institutional status and vision is affirmed as unquestioned due to his/her institutional legitimization, we have another replication of the domestication logic in this further aspect (Zolberg, 2010). The involvement of the community may thus become a rhetorical expedient to simulate a democratic process or even a radical social critique intention while, as a matter of fact, what is being implemented is an authoritarian role-play (Bishop, 2012). And finally, as to the empowerment/entitlement perspective, if the outcome of the project remains a private asset of the artist to which the community has no entitlement (Kimball, 2014), and if the project does not become an opportunity for the community to develop a stronger capacity for collective action for the common good, it ends up consuming the community's shared cultural resources by deconstructing their authenticity, and by turning them into an appendix or social footnote of the project itself – once again in a striking analogy to domestication (Zukin, 2009b). Therefore, if the art practices being deployed in the public space are not backed by a strong awareness of their potential implications for the three main dimensions of domestication, they may end up turning the practice itself into a close ally of some domesticating agent, or in extreme cases into the domesticating agent itself. In its essence, the dilemma of artistic practice in the public sphere may be traced back to the clash between the roles, rules and expectations of two different communities of reference: the art system one, which is mainly interested in the selection and legitimization of a certain type of practices (Baumann, 2007), and the target local community, which is mostly extraneous to the agenda and goals of the art system, and only wants to ensure itself the conditions for decent living and the physical permanence in the urban space with which it has developed social, economic, cultural,

affective, cognitive ties (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). From the viewpoint of the art community, the artistic process is a self-contained, self-sufficient entity: once the project has been properly devised, conceptualized, carried out and documented, this is what is needed to make it credible and artistically validated (Roelstraete, 2012). But from the community viewpoint, insofar as the project only provides a momentary opportunity of voice and external attention, its practical effect is marginal or even counterproductive (Kwon, 2002).

The gulf between the art-world and community perspectives might lead to paradoxical but telling outcomes (Moskowitz, 2017). Imagine, for instance, an artist working on a public art project with a community at risk of eviction. The artist produces an artwork based upon the project (e.g. a photo elegantly mounted on an aluminum panel) that is expensively sold in a gallery and bought for his dining room by the same real estate developer who is evicting that community (real estate developers are often avid collectors of contemporary art). This far from unrealistic situation (Medina, 2016) lends to a sinister comparison with big game hunting and trophy-making, that is, long-established forms of self-celebration of predation (Gillespie, 2002). The dispossession is amplified and symbolically legitimized by the fetishistic appropriation of the *representation* of the victim, and by transforming it into a personal asset (Brower, 2005). It is not incidental that game trophies are symbolically effective insofar as they the captured animal is an *undomesticated* one. Nobody would be excited or impressed by a taxidermy of a pet as a hunting trophy, and the obvious reason is that the slaughter of a docile victim would devoid the trophy itself of any ritual meaning. Likewise, the artistic commodification of social interactions in the public space maintains a strong ritual value, in that it may express a similar intent of symbolic, self-serving appropriation of an extraneous, resistant social subjectivity. And once that subjectivity has been symbolically appropriated, it loses its undomesticated otherness, to become a fungible object. Art projects in the public space that do not add to the community's resilience to domestication therefore end up enabling the latter, both symbolically and factually.

2.4 The spatial consequences of domestication, and its dialectical opposite

Although the process of gentrification as domestication of space is eminently visible in the public space, its premises and consequences are best appreciated by reasoning in terms of the public *domain*. Gentrification is not simply a transformation of patterns of space use or of the social constituency of the space. It is a profound reorganization of the urban geography (Gaffney, 2015), which is part of a broader logic of capitalist displacement (Sims, 2016). It entails profound changes in attitudes, value systems, and identities. A gentrified space not only changes function – it also changes its *social meaning*. The implicit model of a domesticated urban space is the theme park (Sorkin, 1992; Semi, 2015), that is, the re-shaping of the space into a narratively orchestrated context of individualized consumerist entertainment (Zukin, 1990), which expels any dissonant element (Papayanis, 2000). The social dimension of the theme park is basically reduced to the physical coexistence of many different people in the same place. The concrete occasions for interaction, exchange, let alone dialogue, are made impossible by the invisible working of the social bubbles that encapsulate each microgroup of attendants into their own private, impenetrable leisure space. Nevertheless, the social dimension

of this individual interaction is substantial, for instance in terms of positional competition for the access to certain identity signifiers, such as status goods (Sivanathan and Pettit, 2010). In the theme park, conflict is concealed by role playing. The palimpsest that defines the theme is the same that assigns the roles, and there is no possibility to critically distance oneself from both. This is the essence of the domesticated space: the logic of social interaction is pre-scripted, and therefore prescribed. Nothing can really happen in that space, which has not previously imagined, planned, and policed (Arefi, 1999). Not incidentally, many of the most interesting dystopias of the cinematic production of the consumerist era have to do with the tragic de-stabilization of the theme park script, from *Westworld* to *Jurassic Park*. An even more conscious instantiation of the same point can be found in the contemporary art sphere in Banksy's *Dismaland* – not incidentally, a work by an artist who has chosen to remain anonymous and operate mostly outside the commercial realm of the art system (Brown, 2015). An ideal contraposition to the domesticated space of the theme park can be found in the model of the European public spaces with a strong civic connotation, of which the paramount example is the square (Krier, 1979). The European square is a place of commerce and consumption. But at the same time, it is a place of social exchange and confrontation. In its essence, the European square is not a domesticated space because it has no script. It is a 'theatre of encounters' of paramount social significance (Holland et al., 2007). It is the place where people build, and prove, their reputation. It is the place where private disputes become public. It is the place which instantly and naturally embodies the community's sense of belonging (Romano, 2015), that is, the essence of civic conviviality (Miles, 1998). It is not incidental that, in the contemporary examples of European squares that have mostly maintained their historical meaning and function, the undomesticated nature of the space is strikingly apparent (Panagia, 2009). The most paradigmatic example is perhaps Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy, which not only still fully performs its function of a social theatre of encounters, but even maintains a primary symbolic role of theatre of conflict through the ritualized war of the Palio, the centuries-old horse race which still occupies a central, vital role in the social architecture of the Sienese community (Dundes and Falassi, 1984). The Sienese strive to keep their community ritual clear of concessions to commodification or tourist-friendly domestication, and have successfully resisted countless attempts at instrumental deconstruction of its social meaning, including declining an invitation from the Queen of the United Kingdom to perform the ritual outside of its natural setting for the celebrations of her 90th birthday, and accordingly inviting her to attend the event in its proper context: the square (Squires, 2016).

Maintaining an urban space undomesticated, therefore, primarily implies empowering the local community to feel entitled to the economic, social and cultural curation of that space (Pollock and Sharp, 2007), as an integral part of their right to place (Slater, 2008). And such an act of empowerment can only occur in the public domain, as a shared community asset. Only a common code of meaning in the public domain can allow community members to cohesively act to define, maintain and enforce their urban culture (Alexander, 1979). But this is often difficult in contexts where the local constituency has been forming itself through successive waves of culturally and ethnically diverse incomers, and is constantly facing issues of inter-cultural trust building. The domestication of space thus often finds an easy way through the strategic exploitation of the socio-cultural divisions of the local community, that fails to solidify a common basis of local identity and agency (Fuller,

2012). This is where artistic practices may make the difference through a responsible interrogation and involvement of the many, diverse local stakeholders, to create an inclusive, easily accessible, symbolically conspicuous public space as a common, recognizable community platform in the public domain (Mazer and Rankin, 2011). In a sense, the task of artistic processes in the public space (and before that, in the public domain), is that of re-creating the conditions for its social usage as a square rather than as a theme park. And by so doing, helping the local community maintain and nurture the necessary social abilities to recognize, resist and counter the attempts at domestication (Sacco et al., 2016).

To concretely see these tensions at work, I have chosen an exemplary case of art-led domestication of the urban space, namely, the High Line Art project in Western Manhattan. I will analyze this case by means of the conceptual toolbox previously introduced, after a short review of the current state of the art-and gentrification debate.

2.5 Artistic gentrification, its discontents, and its alternatives

The artistic gentrification of SoHo, New York (Zukin, 1995b) and Hoxton, London (Pratt, 2009) provide wellknown, widely studied examples of processes where artists' locational choices have been drivers to radical social and economic transformations with massive relocations of pre-existing inhabitants. The creative class paradigm has provided a rhetorically effective justification for such processes (Lees, 2000). The (dis-)locational history of the creative districts of New York, from Greenwich Village in the early '900 to Bushwick today, provides a pictorial illustration of the whole cycle's working, from the artists' urban scouting to the real estate value increases, to the penetration of targeted capital investment, to the eventual, overall gentrification (Zukin and Braslow, 2011). We can make sense of art-driven gentrification processes through different theoretical lenses, such as Lefebvre's (1991) social production of space and the "combat for spatial representation of the repressed"; Molotch's (1987) "growth machine", and Smith's (1996) space value production. Each of them sheds light on different aspects of the gentrification process. They share, however, a common focus and concern on the social control consequences of targeted refurbishments of the urban space and of the consequent rezoning practices (Pratt, 2011). In these perspectives, artists' locational choices are instrumentally tracked by corporate interests, which give them space in the colonization phase to carry the burden of the symbolic renovation, to subsequently take over once the goal has been recognizably accomplished, and expel the artists themselves, who will migrate to another location to start the entire cycle over again. Artists can therefore be regarded as 'victims' of the process themselves. However, their locational mobility opportunities tend to be superior to those of the local inhabitants that are concurrently evicted by the gentrification. Creative class thinking, on the other hand, attempts at partially deconstructing the very notion of gentrification by including into a same social constituency, the creative class (Florida, 2002), all kinds of professional, entrepreneurial and administrative profiles that entail some level of problem solving and a relatively high level of human capital. Therefore, the inflow of affluent new dwellers and businesses that characterizes the advanced phase of urban space domestication may be regarded as an 'internal' substitution

between different categories of 'creatives'. By linking creative class prosperity to the prosperity of the collectivity as a whole, then, the creative class discourse basically dissolves gentrification issues into the familiar trickle down neoliberal argument that creating the best possible conditions for the thriving of the most talented/privileged is ultimately the best way to benefit the whole of society (Peck, 2005). Grodach et al. (2014) discern between different forms of art-related locational choices, showing how the most commercial art forms tend to be more associated with gentrification outcomes than less commercial ones, which may be more conducive to revitalization effects.

The maturation of a critical awareness of the multifaceted relation between the arts and urban transformation processes has led to a more cautious and targeted framing of artistic practices into urban policy design, with some appreciable results (Glow et al., 2014). A stream of research has likewise more thoroughly investigated cases of artistic practices as facilitators of neighborhood revitalization without gentrification (Grodach, 2011; Jackson et al., 2006; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010; Stern and Seifert, 2010). Markusen's notion of the artistic dividend provides an alternative systemic vision of how the presence and practice of artists can generate systemic effects that may benefit the local economy, which are in principle independent of gentrification processes, and which may improve opportunities for the area's original social constituency (Markusen and Schrock, 2006). There is a range of beneficial social effects that arise from artistic practice in the public domain which does not cater for space domestication: enhanced social cohesion, improved local image, decline of local crime, promotion of interest in the local urban environment, development of self-confidence for marginalized subjects and communities, development of private-public sector partnerships for local community development, intercultural dialogue, capability building at the individual and social level. Public art projects that effectively counteract domestication must directly address and subvert its defining characteristics: lack of commitment to the place, lack of role negotiation, lack of empowerment/entitlement. Although a thorough review of interesting experiences in this field is beyond the scope of the paper, it is useful to present a few examples. The activity of art/architecture collectives that root their practice into specific urban contexts, such as Assemble in London (Moore, 2015) and Raumlabor in Berlin (Rick, 2014), is of special interest. In both cases, I can see a long-term commitment in working on specific urban environments to which they belong and in which they are deeply socialized, while explicitly incorporating the gentrification-related impact of their practice into their own design process (Raumlaborberlin, 2015; Rodríguez, 2015; Saval, 2015; Wood, 2016). Moreover, there is an open-ended role negotiation as local communities are constantly involved not only as co-creators, but often as the main drivers of the project, with the collective playing the role of the facilitator. Finally, the support to the collective agency of the community is often the very focus of the work, that is generally located within the community space in a permanent and not ephemeral fashion, with a full entitlement for the community to both usage and further development. Similar characteristics can be found in the work of individual artists like Theaster Gates, who has made his own practice to coincide with art-driven, community-centered urban regeneration processes (Mcgraw, 2012) that demonstrate the concrete possibility of anti-domestication in an urban context like

Chicago's South Side (Colapinto, 2014). It is possible to find once more the three defining conditions directly and clearly addressed: Gates' project is *defined* by its long-term commitment to a specific urban location. Gates has deconstructed the traditional figure of the artist/demiurge into a reflexive, open-ended community activist role. Gates has entirely defined the project legacy in terms of the empowerment/entitlement of the local community in terms of self-sufficiency. It is meaningful that diverse artistic approaches like those of Assemble, Raumlabor and Gates widely concur in their focus upon the critical dimensions of domestication, and on their systematic subversion as a defining feature of their practices.

2.6 Domesticating space: The West Chelsea District and the High Line Art project

Manhattan could probably be considered, together with London, the laboratory of artistic gentrification (Deutsche, 1996). The spectacular transformation of the Meat Packing District in West Chelsea into New York's (and the world's) main contemporary art hub is only one of many examples. However, the particular role played by a public art project such as the High Line Art with respect to a particular area of West Chelsea merits specific attention due to its especially readable contribution to art-driven space domestication.

This analysis draws upon on-site ethnographic research started in October 2014, prompted by the vast media resonance of the project, which was generally lauded in view of the alleged beneficial regeneration effects on the interested urban area, its environmental friendliness, its innovative character. The possibility for a vast public to enjoy free access to artworks by internationally renowned artists was also emphasized. The project's development has been successfully storified in terms of a seductive urban epic linked to the persistent commitment of the Friends of the High Line Committee to the revitalization of the elevated railway (David and Hammond, 2011), and has developed a distinctive urban architectural signature style that has come to be known as the *High Line Effect* (Zambelli and Alves Pessoa, 2012). In other words, it qualifies as a sort of textbook example of art-driven urban renaissance (Currid, 2008).

The research has been organized as a combination of naturalistic observation of attitudes and behaviors of tourist and shopping-oriented users of the neighborhood (High Line Art visitors, shops and restaurants customers, tourists), and participant observation of the incoming business as the result of urban renewal, and of neighborhood residents (Musante and DeWalt, 2010). The West Chelsea District is frequently crowded by stores' customers and High Line visitors, who amount to about 5 million a year. The neighborhood is presented by tourist guides and review sites as an up-and-coming hipster hotspot, characterized by an architecture that combines stylistic recovery of late '800 factories and glittering new skyscrapers, and recommended for luxury shopping and craft brands, for the international cuisine of the Chelsea Market, for art investment at the Gallery District, and for the inevitable experience of the stroll along the elevated High Line. Tourists visiting the West Chelsea District clearly live all such dimensions as a unitary experience, making no distinction of intent. The majority of visitors walking along the High Line pack into a river of people and bring with them shopping bags with brands of the most attractive shops around the 10th Avenue or the Chelsea Market. Visitors proceed fast and distracted, without paying special attention to the presence of artworks. The places where they rest are the

benches in the sun on which to read or have a snack, or the food gadgets sales points. The cultural motivation seems thus largely under-represented with respect to the commercial and entertainment motivation of the vast majority of tourists. The visitors' gaze is often captured by the work in progress in the dense pattern of construction sites developing along the course of the High Line. Many of the real estates under construction or recently finished display huge billboards boasting the virtues of the apartments for sale. Luxury and location overlooking the High Line are values, unequivocally related to the success of the restructuring of the High Line itself. Between Gansevoort Street and W24th Street, at the time of observation one could count more than 20 new buildings under construction or recently completed, which, thorough the High Line Rail Yard, granted direct access to the new Hudson River Park. The close connection between the aggressive urban development of the West Chelsea District upper class residences and the presence of the High Line was immediately noticeable and nearly quintessential. Already in 2008, there were about 370,000 square meters of residential space under construction or planned (Cortese, 2008), and the provision has quickly escalated ever since, with a flourishing of new buildings signed by some of the global archistars, as well as by emerging international studios. New stores include both well renowned fashion and technology brands selling points, and small independent shops and restaurants. Many of them have brands that refer to the High Line, such as for example The High Line Hotel at 180 10th Ave. All newly established businesses I interviewed gave concurrent information. Most of the customers are tourists and not local residents. Most of the tourists who come to visit the West Chelsea District focus upon three main hubs: The High Line, the Chelsea Market, and the Gallery District. Most business owners or employees have never visited the High Line and/or are not aware of the public art program. Most of them do not live in the neighborhood.

All my efforts to get in touch with older residents of the neighborhood, or with those living in the West Chelsea District since before the rezoning, actually failed. I planned 360 attempts at contact through requests for interviews to pedestrians in the neighborhood, with quotas of 60 per day on a total of 6 days over the period October 2-16, 2014. I chose four weekdays and two weekend days, equally dividing the contact attempts in three intervals: 10-12am; 1-3pm; 4-6pm. I obtained a total of 37 successful contacts, with a response rate of about 10%. Based upon the media cues, I expected to encounter at least a few residents satisfied by the redevelopment of their neighborhood, and by the possibility to have free access to a park full of high-end artworks. A semi-structured interview template for residents was prepared, inquiring their opinions about the neighborhood after the restructuring of the High Line, their interest and involvement in the High Line Art public art program, the perceived pros and cons of the overall renewal process. I approached the pedestrians with the following contact question: "Do you live in this neighborhood?". The explicit request for information created an effect of observational disturbance, which led many of the contacted pedestrians to refuse the approach suspiciously, or to decline the interview request. However, among the pedestrians who did respond, I could not find anyone who declared himself a resident of the West Chelsea District. This difficulty in meeting residents on the streets of the neighborhood, along with the massive presence of the sale and rental placards exposed outside of the older buildings, suggested an alternative strategy: interviewing local employees, professionals and entrepreneurs. In particular, I interviewed 7 High Line merchandising staff, 3

local real estate agents, 4 bar owners with a High-Line related brand, 8 staff members of local hotels, and 12 gallery assistants in the Gallery District. Local realtors, once again in wide agreement, declared that many of the recently built properties had been previously bought by major developers, entirely renovated and transformed from mediocre flats to luxury ones. As a consequence, a huge part of the previous inhabitants had relocated, either spontaneously or compulsorily under request by the new landlords. They were literally displaced (Yoon and Currid-Halkett, 2015). All the gathered evidence clearly showed a massive gentrification process under way. Moreover, the new urban environment presented all the recognizable traits of a High-Line themed theme park. The neighborhood, once hosting a diverse community of medium-to-low income residents, had been quickly reshaped according to the familiar gentrification formula of brand, trendy and tourist shops and luxury residences. The next question was then the role of the High Line Art project in the deployment of the regeneration process.

To answer this question, some historical information to illustrate the relationship between the High Line construction and the wave of gentrification that swept the West Chelsea District is needed. The High Line was built as an elevated rail line between 1929 and 1934 in the Manhattan West Side. It is located between 10th and 11th Avenue East to West, and ranges from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street South to North. It runs for 2.33 kilometers to the height of 8.8 meters from the street level up to its Northern end, known as Rail Yard, which downs to the ground to end on the 34th Street, and its width varies from 9 to 27 meters. The High Line passes through buildings, covering up to twenty-two blocks of three districts of the Hudson Rail Yard, the Far West Chelsea and the Gansevoort Meatpacking District, all of which were once an industrial cluster and meat processing area. The built environment reflects this intended use, with the obvious presence of garages, factories and warehouses. The High Line also runs parallel to the Hudson River and to the Hudson River Park. It develops ideally in three sections, the first from Gansevoort Street to 20th Street, the second from 20th to 30th Street, and the third, which crosses the Rail Yard, ending at ground level at 34th Street. Its current use, as park and public space for events, is the result of a competitive call for ideas and projects. The Friends of the High Line Committee, headed by Joshua David and Robert Hammond, was engaged in a long advocacy for the renovation, which started ten years before the project opening on June 9, 2009, with design by James Corner Field Operations, Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Piet Oudlof.

The High Line Art public art project was launched in the same year and directly promoted by the Friends of the High Line. It commissions and produces works of public art along and around the park. High Line Art presents throughout the year a series of works ranging from commissions to exhibitions, performances, video and artworks on Billboard, a large hoarding close to the railway. First curator Lauren Ross took service in 2009 and developed a program, which includes a site-specific installation a year, as well as four or five more works on display, and videos. Currently, the project is curated by Cecilia Alemani who, since 2011, is curator for the main project funder Donald R. Mullen, and director of High Line Art. The idea of the art program comes from the co-founder of the Friends of the High Line Committee, Josh David, who initially planned to install a work of public art every year. In 2007, the project unexpectedly met the attention of Donald R. Mullen Jr. – a successful manager and senior partner of Goldman Sachs Group, who approached

the art-project promoters with the proposal of a generous funding. Mullen suggested the project's expansion into a full-fledged art program, with a director and a curator, offering his full financial support to create a dedicated venue for public art in an urban context already characterized by an exceptional density of private art galleries. The West Chelsea area, a former manufacturing core and currently the main cluster of arts and cultural industry in New York City, was characterized by two major urban design interventions, the Chelsea rezoning in 1999, and the West Chelsea rezoning in 2005. The 1999 rezoning had set a pro-development tone in the whole Chelsea area, and implemented a pilot action in West Chelsea. The 2005 rezoning institutionalized the redevelopment of West Chelsea and further intensified the economic restructuring already in progress (Yoon and Currid-Halkett, 2015). The West Chelsea District Rezoning Proposal paved the way to the massive urban renovation around the High Line. The numerous construction sites and new buildings in the triangle surrounding the railway, between Gansevoort Street, 24th Street and 11th Avenue overlooking the banks of the Hudson, is a statement of intent about the district's urban revival.

But to what extent the High Line had a propelling role in the process? The resurrection of the High Line occurs in a peculiar historical moment for New York, which corresponds to the three terms of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in office since the beginning of 2002 until the end of 2013, characterized by a frantic real estate development activity, resulting in an impressive array of new building complexes, parks, streets, bicycle paths, as well as by the reformulation of the zoning of the 37% of the metropolitan territory. Bloomberg's electoral program explicitly prioritized the Chelsea urban redevelopment, started in 2005, through the West Chelsea District Rezoning Proposal. On October 6, 2004, Bloomberg announced that the State of New York and CSX Transportation had joined the City of New York in the formal request to the Federal Surface Transportation Board to transfer the elevated railway into the *Railbanking* program, to enable its transformation into an urban park. On June 23, 2005, the West Chelsea Rezoning District Proposal was approved for the area between the 11th and 10th Street, and between West 30th and West 16th Street. The renovation focused upon residential and commercial development, while preserving the highly specific nature and function of the already long-established Gallery District. The recovery of the High Line as a park was a key element of the rezoning concept. To facilitate the operation, the owners of areas under or above the High Line could now transfer their development rights in other areas provided for in the rezoning. On January 28, 2010, the Friends of the High Line announced that the Western Rail Yards rezoning was approved, and therefore the third section of the High Line could be opened to the public. Mayor Bloomberg wished, by supporting the High Line, that the whole arrangement could become a model intervention. The Friends of the High Line were in high demand to illustrate the success story and the social and economic benefits from the area's apparent gentrification, and the 'beautification' of the district that ensued. In a sense, the process can be considered a textbook demonstration of creative class thinking at work. There was practically no concern for the viewpoint and interests of pre-existing residents, and its consequences in terms of social exclusion, increased social inequality and "corrosion of neighborhoods" (Kirkberg and Kagan, 2013) were simply ignored. Nor any similar concern was raised by the many leading architects who, commissioned by real estate agents, immediately began to design and build condominiums, hotels and offices along the route or near the

High Line.

The key role of the High Line in the heavy gentrification of the West Chelsea District was denounced by the *Vanishing New York* blogger, Jeremiah Moss. In August 2012, Moss explicitly evoked the theme park *topos* as the implicit model of the renovation project, attributing the popularity of the High Line to its transformation into a Disney World, and denouncing that many local residents and workers, ravaged by the increase in rents, were forced out of the district. Moss believes that the gentrification of West Chelsea was not only due to the popularity of the park, but mainly to the Mayor's Office administrative decisions, and attacked its policy of "rezoning for luxury development" that began in the early stages of the park (2005), talking about the population of the district as a community "blinded by false promises of not compensated benefits" (Moss, 2012). The scale of the process was perceived as unprecedented: "the High Line has been to usual gentrification what a bomb is to bottle rockets." (Schjeldhal, 2014). The debate about the High Line raged across all sorts of blogs and mainstream institutional media, often equating the project to a hipster urban makeup, predating the material and symbolic traces of the poverty and degradation of the pre-renovated area as (domesticated) signifiers of authenticity. Numerous articles have recently attempted to raise public awareness on the issue of the social inequality brought about by this Godzilla-style gentrification, and on the increasing pressure on middle-class families living in nearby zones and failing to keep up with the rapidly soaring cost of living, as well as on the clear mismatch between the benefits for real estate developers and owners, and the rezoning related damage inflicted to the pre-existent, low-income resident population (Kohn, 2014). The space domestication itself was at least partially financed through cuts to low-income family benefits. For instance, compared to a cost of 238.5 million dollars of public money invested in the construction of three sections of the park, a coincidental cut of \$ 170 million in childcare financing was proposed (Mirbabee, 2013).

2.7 Public art or *en plein air* museum?

Rothenberg and Lang (2017) point out the importance of understanding not only the social, political and economic processes through which development takes place, but also how the deliberate manipulation of aesthetic experience itself is deployed in the planning and outcome of projects. In the context of the West Chelsea rezoning, the public art project has been basically hijacked to serve as a symbolic marker – a domestication trophy – of the entire operation, using the packaging of high-end art as a distraction from the perpetrated social injustice. Nevertheless, rather than rescuing or even just critically commenting the project's brutal domestication of the urban space, the public art intervention lends itself to be assimilated into it, and to play the role of the decorative appendix, to be thoughtfully savored by the connoisseurs as an *en plein air* finale of their Gallery District tour. The project then becomes a monument *to* gentrification, that entirely adopts the viewpoint of the domesticating agent: "If you are part of the community pushed out... then the High Line's precious attention to symbols of decay and ruin – all those meticulously landscaped weeds – will seem calculated to piss you off. If, on the other hand, you are part of a gentrifying wave, as so much of young New York now is, then the High Line will seem to be singing from your hymnal, and you will revel in the distressed

steel girders and exposed brick walls” (Bourne, 2012).

This doesn’t imply that the public art project was originally conceived in this vein: “Born as a passion project, it became a branding experiment” (Friedrich, 2017). The discourses that framed the High Line Art’s initial funding appeared to aim at reconciling the inherent contradictions between the growth machine’s logic of capital accumulation and the generation of exchange value, and the use values and aesthetic concerns of the community (Logan and Molotch, 2007). The Friends of the High Line attempted at involving the local community before the renovation project started. The Community Input Session, a participative workshop tailored to the planning phase, started in a climate of attention toward the New Urbanism agenda for urban renewal (e.g. González et al., 2012). Robert Hammond emphasized how he and Joshua David struggled to maintain a constant, deep contact with the community, calling designers, Friends of the High Line members and local residents to participate actively in the decision-making process, overcoming the initial reluctance of planners, and initiating a simple, direct participatory consultation (Hammond and David, 2011). But despite the intentions, these workshops had no real impact on the process, and the relationship with the local community was *de facto* disregarded during the implementation. Friends of the High Line, as evidenced by Danya Sherman (2017), an internal member of the group, largely lacked representation of many demographic groups in the neighborhood, namely low-income individuals, communities of color, and other marginalized groups who apparently were not considered part of the constituency that was entitled to negotiate the redesign and future management of the High Line. They made a rhetorical use of the term “community” in the external communication of the organization and, in many ways, intended it as a socially homogenous block, demonstrating a limited ability or interest to listen and analyze its inherent internal diversity, and its consequent variety of real needs. When the first section opened, actual attendance immediately demonstrated that the park was not equally attracting all categories of residents: park visitors seemed to skew wealthier and whiter than the population of the surrounding neighborhoods (Sherman, 2017). Many of Chelsea’s original, poorer residents – mostly a large, aging population of longtime dwellers, had never even bothered to climb the stairs in order to see for themselves what the hype was all about. In fact, Chelsea public housing residents do not use the High Line much. While it is almost always crowded, the lack of visible presence of still remaining low income Chelsea residents on the High Line is apparent, as confirmed by volunteers, guides and security guards interviewed by Lang and Rothenberg (2013). Not only the contradiction still persists, but it is going to be exacerbated over time (Rothenberg and Lang, 2017), as the aesthetic experience is subdued to securitization, legitimization and reproduction of class inequality and social exclusion. The spectacular cityscape offered by the High Line experience becomes a recreational expedient which obstructs the historical and cultural meaning of the place rather than revealing it. Visitors can enjoy hipster-tailored forms of socially responsible consumption through the food stands and wine bars, featuring locally sourced, artisanal ingredients on the High Line Park, as the morally self-serving counterpart of the luxury shopping, but will find no cue to spark their curiosity about the previous inhabitants and their silenced voices. They will be effectively shepherded to their consumer destinations through suitably placed pedestrian High Line entrances at street level, from the Gallery District to Chelsea Market, to the fashion retail center, restaurants, hotels and stores. Aesthetic gaze

and conspicuous consumption are seamlessly linked, but the public art here reassures visitors that they are something more than shopping addicts, by offering them a balancing contemplation of “beauty for beauty’s sake”. On the other hand, the development of the High Line has provided the undeniable anchor and capstone to the “Chelsea phenomenon”. The High Line overlooks the Gallery District, which boasts the most important, powerful, and expensive contemporary art galleries in New York. This spatial positioning creates an ideal association between the art exhibitions of the High Line Art program and their market counterpart, as if the park were a showcase space on the upper floor of the galleries themselves. As food and star-architecture were both key aesthetic signifiers and propellers of West Chelsea's transformation, the rise of the Gallery District, and West Chelsea's growing reputation as the center of a rapidly expanding global art world, was a monumental force in the neighborhood's rebranding (Rothenberg and Lang 2017). During the rezoning, a special treatment was reserved for the Gallery District: non-commercial art exhibition and gallery use continued to be permitted as-of-right in the remaining manufacturing areas, where open floor plans and high ceilings of industrial venues were well suited for exhibitions, but less appealing to any other uses. In areas with a dense gallery presence, land use was not changed but remained as manufacturing districts, so art galleries could keep taking advantage of their architectural characteristics (Yoon and Currid-Halkett, 2015). Art galleries began to buy up relatively inexpensive warehouse spaces in West Chelsea in 1994, displaced by rising rents in SoHo, and by 1998 most of them had relocated. Real-estate prices were still affordable for all but a few experimental or cooperative galleries. In 2014, the number of art galleries in the area had almost doubled (Halle and Tiso, 2014) and most of the major art auction houses had branches in West Chelsea. By 2005, West Chelsea had sprouted over 239 commercial galleries (Halle and Tiso, 2006; Rothenberg, 2012) and was ready to welcome a Chelsea branch of the Whitney, as well as to bid farewell to many of the mid-sized galleries, priced out by the market. Indeed, today art galleries themselves are suffering the consequences of real estate speculation: as expected, the contemporary art scene is a victim of its own success. Since the beginning of 2015, only two (besides the richer galleries, owners of their spaces such as Gagosian and David Zwirner) of the first seven galleries opened by young art dealers in former loading docks remain, as the rest relocated because of high rents. Some of them moved to Chinatown, looking for affordable business premises, once more pivoting the social and economic landscape’s change of their new settlement location (Moy, 2016). In addition to the Whitney, the Culture Shed, a 170,000-square-foot visual and performing arts institution for rental and more permanent tenants on the Hudson Yards site, funded largely through the city budget, is slated to open on the far-Northern reaches of West Chelsea (part of the new Hudson Yards development) in 2018 at a projected cost of \$360 million (Rothenberg and Lang 2017).

To get some direct insight into the process, I have interviewed the High Line Art curator Cecilia Alemani; Jason Morgen, a major gift associate of Friends of the High Line; and Ryan McNamara, an artist involved in the program. The vision of the High Line Art curator seems to reflect the idea that the purpose of the public art project was functional to the space domestication strategy, entirely immemorial of the nature of the place. At the beginning of her mandate (Weist, 2012), she was keen to emphasize the High Line Art concept as an *en plein air* museum, whose two major issues are the weather conditions, and the attraction of the huge

tourist flows. The theme park aesthetics is all there. The city fabric is used as a pedestal, a mere extension of the museum environment, eschewing any specific responsibility toward the public good dimension (Pioselli, 2011). The works on display have sometimes been conceived for a different environment, and their relocation in the High Line Art space inevitably reduces the interaction with the public, if any, to mere playfulness, as in Olafur Eliasson *Collectivity Project*, conceived for the Tate Modern and temporarily exhibited on the High Line from April 2015 to March 2016, where visitors are invited to intervene on the sculpture by toying with the little bricks of which it is made. The High Line Art curatorial concept is, as a matter of fact, an exercise of denial, of removal of the historical memory. The instrumentalization of the social discourse here is not even a concern, as the latter is ignored altogether. Also the artworks presented on the huge Billboard surface are often simple enlargements of works already prepared, or self-referential contemporary art gimmicks, wrapped up as aggressive advertising. For example, in September 2014 Louise Lawler presented *Triangle (adjusted to fit)*, a shoot of a Sotheby's room featuring works by Minimalism and Conceptual Art icons Donald Judd, Frank Stella and Sol LeWitt, a commentary on the rhetoric of display that avoids any involvement with the surrounding environment. In rare cases, some artists attempt at critical reflection upon the ongoing gentrification process, as in the case of *Above the Line*, a mural by Kerry James Marshall. The piece depicts a semi-dystopian urban future in which even water towers have been transformed into glassed-in condos overlooking the city, and visual references to the very Chelsea residential skyline rising up behind the High Line are clear and explicit. The curatorial reading of the artwork, though, is a mix of denial and distancing, as if the High Line Art project had nothing to do with the socio-economic processes under way: "This is very much a vision of a futuristic imaginary city, maybe New York City, I don't know!" Alemani says of Marshall's work. "We hope that is not what's going to happen next to the High Line, but it's almost there." (Chayka, 2015). The artist's level of awareness and critical understanding of the context where s/he intervenes is a crucial aspect with key political consequences (Garaicoa, 2011). Without a purposeful, consistent curatorial intent, even critically aimed artworks become one fragment among many of an unstructured rhapsody of visual texts where all content is 'normalized', by its very horizontal juxtaposition, not differently from what happens to 'socially sensitive' contents in advertising where the shocking effect (and purpose) is strategically calibrated to overcome, and basically neutralize, social reflexivity. Likewise, in the High Line Art context, critical references to the gentrification issue become fragments of the kaleidoscope of forms and shapes, stripped of their meaning, and reduced to a decorative element (Friedrich, 2017). Rather than failing to resist to the domestication of space, the High Line Art project theorizes and implements it as a basic curatorial premise. It strives to engage the disoriented river of visitors that walk around the High Line, but the purpose and sense of such engagement is barely distinguishable from that of the street advertising all around. The High Line Art is a consciously commodified space, which fully identifies with this definition, and operates accordingly.

This marks a significant difference with respect to the previous art-related gentrification processes in SoHo or in the East Village, where artists largely took a critical if not confrontational attitude, allying themselves with low-income residents to oppose gentrification and displacement (Rothenberg, 2012). West Chelsea's artists seem to pay no interest in the plight of the local community under displacement. Their social

reference is only, and simply, the art world, whose status ladder they aspire to climb as much as possible. The basic social responsibility dilemma is not even a dilemma for them, whether or not their practices make room for social engagement. The relationship between the Chelsea art people and the surviving fringes of the historical community of residents is simply non-existent, and the interests and stakes of the former are way more aligned with those of the domesticating agent than with those of the latter. The consequence is the self-exclusion of the art community into the neoliberal consumerist sphere. A legitimate choice, but with consequences: from the integral commodification of the artwork, to the loss of credibility and entitlement of art as a socially responsible agency of critical debunking of the perverse socio-economic consequences of the aggressive colonization of valuable urban space.

2.8 Conclusions: When all is said and done

This analysis of the High Line program shows how, in this case study, the key conditions that define the domestication process are met almost by design. Total lack of commitment to the place and absence of any meaningful relationship with the surrounding urban environment other than commercial outlets. Strict top-down control despite the inclusive intention that initially sparked the project. Total lack of any form of empowerment of collective action, or of entitlement of residents, seen as one group of potential customers among many, as polemically denounced by the increasingly frequent actions of local graffiti writers who mark artworks as a gesture of re-appropriation. The fact that a project with such features may be trumpeted as a success story of art-based urban renovation speaks volumes about the general lack of awareness of the key issues raised by art interventions in the public space.

The public art program on the High Line is a textbook example of art-driven domestication of space, in the context of a brutal gentrification process that has been justified and communicated as promoting the common good (Slater, 2009). Its closeness to the world's strongest gallery hub eloquently illustrates why its only rationale is to serve as an *en plein air* diversion of the gallery tour for the art people in the know. The dilemma between the conflicting agendas of different communities is removed to please the art system's self-referential logic, in close alliance with the interests of the developers. Even the cognitive accessibility of the artwork for subjects outside the connoisseur circle is more apparent than real. Each piece is illustrated by a dry caption, only intelligible for the expert viewer. The issue of the accessibility for low-education, low-income pristine residents is *de facto* not even contemplated, nor is any specific initiative in this regard planned.

The High Line's destiny as a theme park of privilege and exclusion illustrates the social irresponsibility which is inscribed into the neoliberal discourse (Brenner et al., 2010), and draws a serious blow to the credibility of artistic practices as a platform for inclusive participation and social justice. The structural connection of the High Line project to the Chelsea Gallery District looks like a statement of principle as to which side the art system is taking in the current debate on urban gentrification – and this is sadly no surprise provided that, as already remarked, domesticating agents often are dedicated collectors of contemporary art. Despite the abundance of critically responsible artistic practices in the contemporary global scene that pursue

an entirely alternative approach to art in the public space and in the public sphere, the extreme visibility and implicit normativity of a public art project sitting next to the art system's main global hub cannot go unnoticed, and inevitably functions as a reference – and example. But ultimately, the victims of an alliance where art becomes a decorative element of space domestication will be the artists themselves. Once it loses its key role of social critique and counter-hegemonic discourse, there is an embarrassingly thin difference between art in the public space and urban furnishing. Domesticated legitimization comes with strings attached in terms of independence and credibility. And if artists trade the latter for the former, there might be other social agencies claiming that role, and filling the void.

The current evolution of the High Line illustrates the point, as the remaining available neighborhood space is systematically colonized by further real estate development. The new wave of luxury, empty condos physically circumscribes the High Line more and more, turning it into a sort of urban wormhole. The view on the Hudson River's sides is obscured, and the sun doesn't shine anymore on the flowerbeds due to the projected shadows of the new tall buildings. The benches overlook the worksites, and the visitors feel like they're intruding the private space of the (invisible) residents of the nearby buildings, as they can literally peep into the windows at their eye level, while at the same time walking down the aisle of an open-air mall. In this dysfunctional context, the artworks simply stand as casual objects, devoid of any ambition of critical commentary, like mute witnesses: a stunning statement of decorative irrelevance that unconditionally concedes to the theme park aesthetics and (lack of) ethos. The domestication process has unfolded to its full consequences, and the High Line Art is a symbolic certification of the final act. In Collodi's *Pinocchio*, the wooden puppet is lured into a glittering *luna park* to be eventually enslaved. Sometimes, fiction shows us in one single image what ponderous social science analyses barely achieve in a few hundred pages.

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3. The loss of place identity: when gentrification perpetuates cultural and economic misappropriation. The NoLo district case

Abstract

Gentrification around the world deals with very different contemporary urban spaces and, while the process inputs are often similar, outcomes and consequences can reveal context specific impacts on the community. This article reports on research into the experience of long-term residents of NoLo, the most multi-ethnic district in Milan. The ongoing process smells like gentrification (Davidson, 2008) even if the impact on housing and direct displacement does not reflect the typical trend assessed by the literature, for it lacks any actual physical displacement.

I will analyze it through *the loss of place identity theory*, which integrates economically and culturally determined processes of gentrification and displacement, because it combines interrelated elements about management, flows and the power of political, social, economic and cultural capital. This case study suggests that the transformation of the NoLo district in terms of social practices tied to trade, meeting places and aesthetic landscape may result in uneven development as well as significant threats of social and cultural exclusion for cultural minorities and a loss of place identity for local residents. I will examine this case by means of the conceptual framework previously introduced, after a short review of the current state of the debate over the way gentrification causes direct and indirect displacement.

3.1 Introduction

According to *new urban sociology* (Gottdiener et al., 2014) studies, metropolitan life isn't just about economic structures: it becomes culturally meaningful, especially through socio-spatial semiotics analysis. This approach shows how an environment's symbolic nature, composed of urban artworks, logos, images and slogans, when integrated with traditional aspects, makes up social behaviour, thus affirming that space is a compositional factor in human behaviour. Space not only contains actions but also affects relationships and feelings, behaviours and interactions. Space, or 'place' when considered in its noblest (Malpas, 2018) and more social (Lefebvre, 1991) sense, is closely related to the economic, political and cultural contents that it conveys and dominates. In every single historical period, main cities have expressed a dominant sense of order and power by leveraging the tension between progress and misery, centre and periphery, positive and negative symbols, through the aesthetics. We are not facing anything new when looking at contemporary urban gentrification, a process in which culture and the arts are the ultimate instrumentalized tools of hegemonic rules of misappropriation. Clearly, the ancient concept of *kalokagathia* has always been a priority and reason for action in cities, by which social and topographic space is aesthetically manipulated in order to affirm the dominant culture. In places where culture practices re-invent and exchange symbolic content, thereby reconfiguring both the urban fabric and its aesthetic flavor, there is an undeniable, positive impact on the economic value of space

and on its cultural vibrancy. The problem is who benefits from this. Indeed, cities' structure has always been shaped by hegemonic tastes and needs, at the expense of the identity of minority social groups. It has been widespread practice to impose architectures, urban artworks and public places according to an aesthetic logic based on the economically leading social group.

In our contemporary age, the powerful cultural contents conveyed by processes of gentrification, through district renewals and rezoning all over capitalist towns, are often very similar to each other and easy to identify. The consistent pattern reveals urban peripheries as the perfect breeding ground for occupation by the creative class, who value its affordability and bohemian status, and vehiculate hegemonic cultural contents through its practices. As the story of many cities shows, when a new wave of gentrifiers comes, the socio-spatial semiotics of a place changes dramatically at the expense of local residents, who are no longer able to afford, understand or feel comfortable in their birthplace. Districts transition from a position of high cultural capital and low economic capital to a one of steadily rising economic capital (Ley, 2003). Cultural production in difficult urban environments often establishes uneasy relations with local economic and cultural resources: market forces embezzle the original cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993), and the dominant aesthetic and habitus take over local communities' social identity. Identity here is not intended as Carmelo Bene's description of "an entertainment of the being with oneself", but is closer to the concept of urban-related identity (Lalli, 1992). Especially within marginalized spaces or small localities, it is a vulnerable value, socially constructed, produced and reproduced over years' worth of history, rather than being an imposition (Julier, 2005; McCarty, 2006). It therefore should be treated with care rather than be instrumentalized. Imposed dominant cultures throw away the key of access for minority and low-income groups, threatening their decisional power over how to manage their places and habits, exploiting and capitalizing their resources, putting their memories and traditions aside. This process of identity alienation is well recognizable in the case study I am addressing in this paper: a multi-ethnic quarter on the outskirts of a town experiencing dynamic cultural innovation that is provoking very different results on the local residents. My aim is to analyze these results in terms of the consequences of a growing gentrification process, in a specific context in which displacement is not generally intended as physical but as the marginalization of subaltern cultures.

3.2 Beyond the opposition between economic and cultural framework in gentrification literature: the loss of place identity theory

NoLo, a multi-ethnic district in Milan, has recently been facing an urban renewal which shows the early threatening symptoms of gentrification. It is a context-specific ongoing process that is causing very different reactions from various city actors and the community residents in terms of economic and cultural access and identity. A newborn phenomenon of re-reading and re-functionalization in the area is carrying with it symptoms of gentrification, but it has no clear-cut direct causality of physical displacement, due to the specific real estate market conditions of the city of Milan and Italy itself. Indeed, gentrification is not just a housing issue (Semi, 2015). The most susceptible neighborhood elements that are affected by economic and cultural

transition in the gentrification process are local businesses and meeting places, the aesthetic landscape and the area's social structures. When an urban landscape turns into a series of upscale restaurants, cafes and boutiques, symbols and agents of a middle-class revitalization, the share of traditional local stores and services greatly declines. New retail investors actively change the social class and ethnic character of the neighborhood, distressing community identity (Zukin, 2009). The recently arisen debate about this urban process revolves around whether such outputs can bring benefits or threats to local residents.

There are relatively few studies of residents of gentrifying areas where the absence of physical displacement is sufficient to prove that gentrification doesn't have negative impacts. As Shaw and Hagemans demonstrate, transformations in shops and meeting places, as well as the nature of local social structures and government interventions, cause a sense of loss of place even without physical displacement (2015).

The first step in dealing with an indirect form of displacement is to rethink gentrification and displacement as more than merely economic processes and to transcend the oppositional thinking produced by the dualism between economic analysis and cultural analysis - a postmodernist interpretation in which the accumulation of knowledge and not economic power and processes is at the heart of social structures (Hassan, 1985). Authors such as Rose (1984), Jager (1986), Smith (1987) and Caulfield (1989), Hamnett (1991; 1992) and Smith (1991; 1992) have attempted to take this path of analysis. Since the 1980's, Zukin (1982) has investigated the production of gentrifiers through the cultural workings of capital. Rose (1984) argues for the integration of ideas on capital and culture, looking at the lifestyle and production of gentrifiers as well as the production of gentrifiable property (Lees, 1994). Hamnett (1991) attempts to integrate cultural and economic interpretations referring to the dichotomies arisen in the gentrification literature to the opposition between a Marxist economic framework of analysis and a cultural one.

In 1994, Lees proposed to address the opposing theories through a dualistic relationship between a Marxist and a postmodernist viewpoint, directing her research towards an integrated economically and culturally determined explanation of gentrification and displacement. Even so, much of the gentrification literature considers displacement to be a relatively simple and direct economic process involving the replacement of household occupation, analyzed in its direct form as physical expulsion of low-income social groups (Fraser, 2004). Yet in reality gentrification has many expressions and physical displacement is notoriously difficult to quantify (Atkinson, 2002; Shaw, 2005).

Slater recalls Marcuse's (1985) concept of "exclusionary displacement" in his discussion of Freeman and Braconi's equivocation (2002) that "only indirectly, by gradually shrinking the pool of low-rent housing, does the re-urbanization of the middle class appear to harm the interests of the poor" (Freeman and Braconi, cited in Slater, 2006: 749). While these recent studies, and others (Vigdor et al., 2002; Freeman, 2005; Freeman and Braconi, 2004; and Hamnett, 2003), are related insofar as they question the extent of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods, they are also united by a particular understanding of displacement, constructed as a spatialized migratory process. The occurrence of displacement is constituted as the out-migration of individuals from a particular urban space. This understanding severely limits the extent to which we can understand how the gentrifying transition of a neighborhood occurs. In this sense, the "staying put" of local

residents within a prescribed space is seen as evidence for the absence of displacement, whereas it should not be used as evidence for a lack of displacement per se (Davidson, 2009).

Many gentrification studies have recognized that gentrifiers change neighborhood governance and place identity (Butler and Robson, 2003; Freeman and Braconi, 2004; Mele, 2000; Slater, 2002; Zukin, 1989). However, with the exceptions of Davidson (2009) and Fraser (2004), there is little work that sets out to understand the impact of gentrification on the everyday lives of residents who remain in gentrifying areas.

The first conceptualization of a form of indirect displacement comes from Peter Marcuse (1985; 1986). Indirect displacement is not only related to changes in the housing market, but also to the economic and cultural externalities that a gentrifying reinvestment of capital can generate. Marcuse uses two theories to explain how community trial and class transition can emerge due to changes that come from the environment of a gentrifying neighborhood: the exclusionary displacement theory and the displacement pressure theory. The result is that low-income members of a community are excluded from living where they would otherwise have lived (Marcuse, 1985: 206): “When a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the neighborhood less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe” (Marcuse, 1985: 207).

Davidson (2008; 2009), following Slater (2006) and Marcuse (1985), explores other ways in which displacement, and sense of loss of place, is experienced. He helps and renews the debate on gentrification by arguing that the absence of relocation is not sufficient evidence for the absence of displacement. He reviews the classical conception of displacement in order for it to be understood entirely as a phenomenological dimension of the gentrification process. In Davidson’s frame, displacement starts from a relational and socially constructed definition of place rather than the simple equation of place with location. If a place changes, feelings of displacement can be experienced. The author challenges, through a philosophical lens, the perception of place as purely spatial (Malpas, 2007) and the phenomenon of displacement as focused merely on spatial relocation. Davidson’s landmark work is his critical reading of space as conceived by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991), as the affective core of communities’ expression, constituted by daily practices in opposition to the capitalistic dominant conception of space that is conceived by urbanists, architects and planners based on relationships of production. Davidson also draws on a Heideggerian conception of place (Malpas, 2007) within the framework of space. He analytically applies this vision, incorporating the space / place tensions to the late capitalist contemporary urban society that is dominated by a Cartesian view of space while opposing a Lefebvrian reading of the space of representation. Through these reflections, Davidson (2008) contributes to the gentrification literature by developing a schema for a full view of displacement, in which he differentiates between direct displacement and indirect displacement, theorizing neighborhood resource displacement. The functional changes of a neighborhood in services, local shops and meeting places, due to new target orientation, has a knock-on effect on both economic and cultural accessibility. It involves the increasing “out-of-placeness” of existing residents. The places by which people

once defined their neighborhood become spaces with which they no longer associate or can no longer afford. He also theorizes the community displacement theory, stressing how changes in economics and governance in gentrifying neighborhoods compromise place identity and existing residents' power. The literature has already admitted that community, political and social changes are related to gentrification and displacement (Chernoff, 1980; Zukin, 1989; Betancur, 2002; Slater, 2002; Freeman and Braconi, 2004) but without deepening the connection with a loss of place experienced by many residents. Davidson (2008) takes Fraser (2004) as an example to explain how urban renewal can become a struggle to define the meaning of a city and for whom it exists, and how the intersection of community, state and capital can produce forms of exclusion in transforming neighborhoods; he also takes Martin's study (2007) as an example that demonstrates how local residents can feel the threat of loss of power and control of political and cultural decisions due to newcomers.

In 2015, Shaw and Hagemans, following in the footsteps of Marcuse (1985), Slater (2006) and Davidson (2009), wrote an article in which they enrich the discussion by showing that when shops, meeting places and local social structures and governments are changed by the wave of gentrification, the result is a sense of loss of place identity even without physical displacement, whose positive effects are contested by many studies (Arthurson 2004, 2012; Randolph and Wood, 2004; Uitermark et al. 2007; Lees 2008, Musterd et al. 2011; and Manley et al. 2012). Indeed, they strongly affirm what could be grasped in previous literature: secure housing is not sufficient to alleviate the pressure of displacement on low-income residents of gentrifying areas. Shaw and Hagemans argue that the impact of neighborhood resource and community displacement (Davidson, 2008) can be similar to that of physical displacement in economic, social and human terms, causing firstly a sense of loss of place identity. This outcome can produce a sense of loss of familiar surroundings, as well as feelings of grief, loss of stability and control by the local community, who feel threatened and disoriented. The sense of community is threatened when the nature of these elements is twisted by experiencing a transition in terms of access and domain. As Shaw and Hagemans state, "all places change, of course. The key is the scale of change and the availability of alternatives". Indeed, affordability, cultural accessibility and local rituals change when external forces focus on a place as a new target for different groups with different interests who replace the original historical authenticity of the place.

Shaw and Hagemans identify some authors which, since the 1960s (Fried, 1963; Marris, 1974; Milligan, 1998; Gustafson, 2001; Fullilove, 2004), observed how place attachment works among community residents. Several studies explore the array of emotions expressed by displaced residents in relation to feelings of grief (Marris, 1974), due to a process that affects their daily lives, to the loss of meaningful lived places for everyday social practices (Fried, 1963), to the destruction of 'the working model of the world that had existed in the individual's head' (Fullilove, 2004). These authors argue that identification, belonging and daily gatherings at places of residence are the only way for those who have low economic status to develop social ties.

When gentrifiers turn places into symbolically and economically appropriate spaces for new and different groups of people, places become unfamiliar for the local communities until they can no longer associate with them (Davidson, 2008). This loss of place identity can be as distressing as physical relocation, therefore producing a sense of loss of power and exacerbating social isolation (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015).

A merely partial assessment of gentrification's consequences risks creating a literature that does not consider rising processes of gentrification as they really are, or is not able to identify them. Multiple case studies are expected to reveal similar patterns and alert urban policy makers of the potential pitfalls of imposed urban renewal and gentrification even 'without displacement' (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). This research contributes to the debate that is trying to carry out a more comprehensive assessment of gentrification and its consequences. To concretely see these tensions at work, I have chosen an exemplary case of gentrification without displacement, namely, a multiethnic district in Milan suffering the growing symptoms of this process, newly renamed NoLo. It presents a widespread feeling of loss of place identity related to changes in the commercial, cultural and aesthetic landscape. I will specifically focus on the way this process is enacted through the street art-led commodification of public spaces.

3.3 NoLo, a peripheral area on the path toward gentrification

NoLo, the acronym of "North of Loreto", is an area situated in the northeast plot of Milan, which includes the main street of via Padova, the districts of *Pasteur* and *Rovereto*, and just touches the streets around the perimeter of the Central Station. This area has historically had a peripheral vocation. Deposits, garages, cargo terminals on trucks, petrol and fuel stations, car dealerships and factories and a significant presence of sub-proletarians and immigrants from southern Italy stuck in an overcrowded ghetto, all gave the area a particular connotation compared to the other working-class districts of Milan's periphery. When, in the 1970's and 1980's, the first waves of non-European immigration came, the via Padova area offered then low quality and low-price housing solutions, and for Milanese citizens, no potential redemption of the area could be imagined. In fact, Italian middle and lower-middle class residents, the purchasing power holders, preferred to move to the country towns served by the subway, hoping for a better quality of life. Only the poorest remained. Therefore, since a few decades ago, the neighbourhood has always been identified by the media, politicians and citizens as a low-class area of conflict between various ethnic groups, a place of public disorder and difficult integration (Arrigoni, 2010). Since the 1990's, the neighborhood has dramatically suffered a kind of political exploitation through a massive negative storytelling by policy-makers and their endorsements. Recently, the via Padova neighbourhood, as a peripheral area, got involved in a wider project of urban renewal and re-functionalization of the whole city of Milan (Faravelli & Clerici, 2012); Milan is the most important Italian global node, fully integrated in to the globalization processes and characterized by a very high level of social inequalities and per capita income, reflected into an antagonism between new rich social groups and new servile strata, in which the foreign population plays an important role (Fregolent & Vettoretto, 2017), and between the periphery and the centre (Bondue, 2000). In Milan, the process of urban renewal was driven by the local government, who forced the long-term yet less well-off entrepreneurs and lower-class residents out of the city center (Manzo, 2012) in an elitist reconfiguration of the social fabric that aimed to concentrate the economic and intellectual capital in the city center while the neighborhood in question was designated to indigent groups.

The actual situation can be better explained in numbers: as the state of play is in 2016¹¹, the total number of residents in NoLo is 79,796, of which 33% (27,105 residents) are foreigners, an important percentage compared to the 13.9% of immigrants in the whole city. If Milan over the years has depopulated, here, the density has increased: there were 69,000 residents in 2003. Foreigners and immigrants in particular have doubled and overcome Italians in the lower age groups, as both newborn babies (1,166 versus 1,059) and young people between 25-34 years old (6,326 versus 5,570), while there are only 400 old people over 65. The foreign nationalities which form the largest groups are Latin Americans (males and females in equal measure), North Africans (the males of which are three times the number of women) and East Asians (more women than men). According to the Chamber of Trade¹², in the via Padova neighborhood, about 400 companies are operated by foreigners, in 2015, out of a total of 600. The main groups of entrepreneurs are the Egyptians, who have 30% of the shops and restaurants, the Sinhalese with the 20-25% and the Chinese, with 15-20%. Indeed, the particular multiethnic nature of the neighborhood gave the politicians cause to enact a stigmatization of peripheral areas.

As a wide array of gentrification literature shows (Bauaergard, 1986; Caufield, 1994; Smith, 1996; Ley, 1996, 2003; Lloyd, 2002; Cameron & Coaffee, 2005), the outskirts of contemporary cities provide a broad range of affordable housing and permit an inexpensive lifestyle, attracting all kinds of low-income people, like students, young professionals and artists. In this perspective, over the last decade, not only foreigners but also Italian low-budget users have wanted to move and live in this neighborhood.

Taking this scenario into account, to what extent can we say that local residents have been directly displaced? In order to gauge the full scale of the situation and to properly compare the gentrification and displacement phenomena in Milan to other major Western cities, it is necessary to frame the Italian housing trend: due to a structural national tradition, the ‘normalized’ choice is home ownership (Gurney, 1999; Ronald, 2008). For a long time, houses for rent have been residual assets in Italy. As in many other countries with the Mediterranean welfare regime, Italy sets out homeownership for a wide range of residents, while providing a very limited stock of social and public housing (Poggio, 2012). According to ISTAT data (2017), the proportion of those who have homeownership is up to 77.4%, which is almost 20 million family units, while only 8.8% of houses are for rent. In the city of Milan, the number of landlords (in 2012 it was 57.4%) is lower than the national average but remains high. Indeed, the city reveals a situation on the cuff between the European and Italian trends, with the proportion of those living in rented accommodation being 29%, compared to 63.1% in Inner London, 74.6% in Berlin or 75.7% in Brussels. According to research from “For-Rent” (2017), it is important to note that the social groups with the highest proportions living in rented accommodation in Milan, between 51% and 59%, are immigrants and foreigners, single parents, people with low professional qualifications, and young people and students. The latter group, since 2016, has increased by about 50,000 in central Milan.

This context shows how homeownership is still considered a primary option for access to housing in Italy, in the public as in the policy discourse. Furthermore, enlargement and renovation prevail on new constructions

¹¹ Data available on: www.comune.milano.it

¹² Data available on: www.milomb.camcom.it

for rent. Yet at the same time new constructions for rent are undergoing enlargement and renovation (Cucca & Gaeta, 2016).

This scenario can easily explain the main reasons why direct physical displacement is a relatively rare consequence of Italian gentrification processes. Obviously, homeowners cannot be directly estranged from their own houses, while large real estate investments cannot be made due to a lack of empty spaces.

In the late 2000's, the social, economic and political scenery of the via Padova neighborhood showed a coexistence of Italian and foreign families, shops and services. The area's difficult situation in terms of livability and social cohesion, due to a high level of petty crime and deprivation, has been widely narrated by the media and documentaries (Bernasconi, Ciniselli, 2013; Rezza, Mastrella, 2016). Italian residents used to point their fingers at foreign communities, fueled by rightist ideology of intolerance spread by some influential politicians since the mid-1990's (Spektorowski, 2003). This neighborhood seemed to represent a textbook case: the perfect breeding ground in which the gentrification machine could work by bringing with it the flags of social order and urban renewal. In the following paragraphs I am going to analyze the symptoms of the growing gentrification phenomenon in the area, the actors involved in the process and the consequences experienced by the community.

3.4 Early symptoms of gentrification

With a view to contributing to the small body of work on the phenomenon of loss of place identity, this research draws, first of all, on gathering evidence of growing symptoms of gentrification in the NoLo neighborhood. The context-specific approach to the case study was maintained by a full immersion in the new artistic reality of the neighborhood, including contact with artists, gallery owners, laboratories and the residents, in order to capture the objective reality of the process.

Direct observation of the district allowed me to detect a number of emerging elements that were numerically marginal but symbolically and economically dominant (Bourdieu, 1979), defining the socio-spatial semiotics (Gottdiener et al., 2014) of the area. My research draws from the period between November 2015 and November 2017, prompted by the vast media resonance of the area's "place rebranding", directed by *La Tigre*, a local creative consultancy agency. At the end of 2014, they enacted the first step towards reviving the pre-existing but outdated place image (Hedberg, 2001), adopting the toponymic acronym of NoLo, on the heels of international capital city districts such as SoHo, TriBeCa or NoLiTa. This action suggests the necessity of involving a brand imagery that seeks to reflect a very precise place aspiration (Hedberg, 2001): to link the locality as a whole with common attributes, benefits, relationships, programs and values attached to various products and services offered within the area (Keller, 1999), and to provide opportunities for disassociating the neighborhood from past failures or social, or other, problems (Lewis, 2000; Bennet & Savani, 2003). Moreover, marketing and place branding attempt to mobilize and orchestrate cultural and aesthetic capital so as to promote a city or area with the primary aim of achieving economic benefits like increased visitor numbers and investment (McCarty, 2006). Indeed, the territorial rebranding of via Padova was the fundamental spark

that triggered a reaction which involved the actions of many actors, amplified by the attention of the media. The obsessive need to change the name of the neighborhood, like the growing number of new residents, the public order request made by policymakers and the emergence of a specific kind of consumption, are just some cultural markers of a deeper and more relevant process (Semi, 2015). A part of the revitalization of neighborhoods and urban space is the ongoing struggle to define the meaning of a city and for whom it exists (Fraser, 2004); the introduction of new semantics, new consumption practices and new cultural behaviors is the basis for identity changing and the path that might make a place unfamiliar if no negotiation is made with its current identity.

The first response to the district rebranding was an immediate emergence, in 2016, of some private Facebook groups, namely *Yolo in NoLo* and *NoLo Social District*. Examining contents and data, we note the following critical issues: in a group composed by around 4500 members, the percentage of Italians is 89%; as a virtual group relating to the most multiethnic district of Milan, this proportion reveals an uneven engagement. Furthermore, the proposed activities - like dance, acting, indoor cultivation and photography lessons, workshops or contests, yoga and fitness training, breakfasts and happy hours, meetings at clubs, art galleries and art-house cinemas - reflect a post-modern behaviour and pattern of consumption restricted to those social groups defined, by a wide literature (Ley, 1994, 1997; Hamnett, 2003; Karsten, 2003, 2014; Watt, 2008 etc.), as gentrifiers. It confirms the growing presence of a well-defined social group of newcomers: a set of middle-class families, students, young professionals and members of the creative class (Florida, 2002), classified according to a typology that perceives neighborhoods as fields that are accessed through capital, and operate as a stage for the accumulation of various forms of capital associated with habits of the middle class (Boterman et al., 2010). Indeed, the cultural distance between the proposed activities and the context of the multiethnic periphery within which those are meant to be enacted, seems to reveal a willingness to redress an apparent social discrepancy with new habits rather than mixing with the existing ones.

Another critical consequence of the district rebranding was the impact on the rental market sector. As we have already seen, the conditions of the Italian real estate market show a high percentage of homeowners that partly stems the phenomenon of direct displacement. But the re-functionalization of the district was unveiled through the increasing trend of rents targeted at tourists and students - a trend highlighted by the latest census¹³, which sees NoLo as populated by about 21,416 families, of which 9,672 (45.1%) are households with only one member. Within a year, it has changed its figures and points towards the commercialization of empty living spaces, the emergence of surplus spaces and the reorganization and fragmentation of family spaces. By monitoring and comparing the most popular ads sites for housing around the Via Padova district between 2016 and 2017, the following findings emerged: offers for bedrooms or places for students or young workers mentioning the term “NoLo” increased from 8% to 99%; and the average price per square meter rose from €15.40 to €16.56, behaving, not like a periphery, but according to the market dynamics of the entire city of Milan. Secondly, according to *Airbnb.com*, the famous short-term rentals’ website for international tourism, in 2016 the ads related to via Padova district were around 100 and relied on appealing to references to the Expo

¹³ Data available on: dati.comune.milano.it/dataset?tags=NIL

or Milan as a fashion and design capital in order to make their accommodation attractive; in 2017 the ads grew to about 150, of which more than 30 contained the newly appealing term "NoLo," described as a neighborhood "buzzing with new shops and restaurants" and "transforming at a rapid rate". The attraction that devalued inner-urban residential zones have for speculators, as soon as they are invested by socio-cultural processes, smells like gentrification (Davidson, 2008).

The following two key-informant interviews are fundamental for understanding the described phenomenon; the respondents provide a broad perspective on the relationship between newcomers and locals residents within the frame of a changing social landscape.

In the first one, Peppe Mazzeo, creator of the *#makingNoLo project*, speaks about how the changing functions and perceptions of the area, nourished by a lack of communication between different groups, created an antagonistic situation among the inhabitants of the neighborhood: "(...)This area has different meanings that change according to the subject who experiences them. Observing local market customers, you can see all ages and origins. Nowadays, old garages turn into galleries, as the *Salvatore Lantieri* one. Whenever a trader decides to invest capital here, he has high expectations about the growing attractiveness of this neighborhood, requiring security and social order. But, in this way, squares and streets are turning into places to see, instead of places in which to authentically live. The majority of pubs and galleries' customers do not live here, and this area is in danger of turning into an Entertainment District. The local "before NoLo" residents have very different habits, they chose to live here because it's a well-connected suburb, where people could still go outside and have a good time walking up and down the streets. The Piazza Morbegno area is characterized by many studios and small flats, recently restructured by an old unique owner who is dismembering his properties for leasing. This situation underlines a stark contrast between old habits and the students and immigrants' new demand. The same reality experienced with different meanings generates closed-off social sections - like Latinos having fun with some beer on one side and the NoLo Social District hipsters having fun, eating cakes, on the other side of the same square. This has deep social and political consequences. (...) To fill the gap that separates the historic memory of residents and the newcomers and their willingness to transform the *Crespi Market* into the Rotterdam *Blaak Markt*, we need to warmly support dialogue, otherwise doing new activities will only mean occupying common spaces and creating closed-off groups."

The settlement of a new social group becomes more apparent when one traces the changes in the commercial landscape as signs of gentrification: trade reveals clues on district rezoning and functions as a mirror of social renewal that involves the entire neighborhood and the coexistence of old and new inhabitants within its own geographic baselines (Ley, 1996, Bovone, 1999, Bridge and Dowling, 2001, Lehman -Frisch, 2002; Gastaldi, 2003; Zukin et al., 2009). Trade is related to gentrification through recurring dynamics set off by pioneers, who are able to intercept emerging international trends and open new stores, restaurants, galleries to attract new targets to reshape the city map (van Criekingen, 1997; van Criekingen e Fleury, 2006). Since 2015, many

new stores and shops, clubs and restaurants¹⁴ in NoLo have been instrumental in furthering a different set of values and habits through a specific aesthetic grammar. Among the examples of this growing phenomenon, we can enumerate the warehouses of the Central Railway Station which, along the northern border of the district, have been allocated to a project proposing luxury or touristic food stores and boutiques, mimicking the *Beaubourg Food District* of Paris. The *Crespi* local market, located within an old rationalist structure of the neighborhood, hosts several projects carried out by the *MakingNoLo Association*, inspired by the concept of New York's *Chelsea Market*. The management of the old traditional *Bocciofila* has been taken over by young Italian women who have introduced veggie menus and vintage parties. Via Stazio, a run-down street at the beginning of via Padova, has started hosting, after the opening of the *Salumeria del Design*, a vintage and design yard sale called *Le Pulci Pettinate* with fairly expensive street food as well as public displays of brand new kinds of yoga. On the occasion of Milano Design Week 2018, *Fuorisalone*, the most important en plein air design event of the year terminated its contract with Ventura Design District and moved officially to the newborn NoLo Design District. Looking at the targets they address and the pricing of their products, NoLo must definitely be placed in a medium-high pricing range, compared to average prices in the city of Milan. Moreover, a familiar aesthetic of gentrified terrains celebrates the repurposing of spaces so as to attempt to capture the urban experience, involving a widespread and inauthentic urban style composed by exposed brick structures, industrial furnishing, concrete and wood materials and depictions of urban art (Romero, 2018). Indeed, though the lack of economic accessibility surely reveals the main obstruction affecting the local residents of gentrified areas, the concern is not just a matter of consumption, but also one of identification and belonging. The threats I want to draw attention to, through this research, are the loss of contact with a context's reality and for the inhabitants, a loss of identity. The aesthetic semantic newcomers spread a common pattern (Henke, 2013; Schiermer, 2014; Michael, 2015; Maly & Varis, 2016) related to an American "hipster culture" widely diffused in the last decade all over the Western world and well recognized as a dominant culture - dressed up like a subculture (Henke, 2013). The semantics of the aesthetics and themes proposed by the new stores convey the intent of international homologation, actually in the same way multinational companies do. This semantics tends to occupy, through an identical set of values and imagery, the gentrified neighborhoods of all Western cities. This process erases the original traces of each specific city's cultural authenticity, replacing the memory and the link with the history of a place with pre-packaged activities for tourists or newcomers that can be found similarly in New York, Berlin, Bilbao, London or Milan.

In the following interview, Matteo Russo, the manager and bartender of Piazza Morbegno's *Ghe Pensi Mi*, depicts a very explicative scenario about how this trend is involved in growing gentrification.

"(...) I decorated this pub inspired by Berlin shops, with light natural green color and wooden pallets. I hung pictures on the walls with expressions in the original dialect of the students who joined the club.

¹⁴ like *Bici&Radici*, *Barber Shop*, *Ciclofficina Pontegiallo*, *Ninna Anna Vintage shop*, *Share*, *Il Covo della Ladra* / *Spazio NoLo 43*, *La Salumeria del Design*, *Ghe Pensi Mi*, *Bar Gluck*, *Clover*, *Ragoo Milano*, *Cascina Martesana*, *La Taverna dei Terroni*, *Ci vuole un Drink*

When I started to search for a place to make my business, I asked a micro-financing business consultant to help me. He said he would have financed only a project based in this growing district which could vehiculate and gather a specific target of users by selling a specific kind of products. So, I draw in young Italian families, students and artists (this area is full of artists!) for happy hour and professionals after dinner. Many customers move from *Porta Venezia*, the Gay District, to come here. My place does not draw foreign guys, only some American or Japanese tourist who's staying in an *Airbnb* nearby. Even the shop owner accepted to rent me the property under the agreement that I do my best to bring some apparent order back to the existing social fabric of the community. Unfortunately, she imposed a batch rent. Actually, I don't know if, in the future, it will still be affordable for me. The majority of old or multi-ethnic traders in via Padova are tenants, as I am. If the Warehouse Food and Design District projects catch on, they surely will be replaced. I already ran into English fashion house professionals crawling around here, searching for lofts to start up a business and asking around "Is NoLo here?". Also, artists, gallerists and architects have moved or are really interested in moving nearby. According to them, we all think that in a few years this district will be completely different from now."

The main topics of Russo's reflections on the NoLo urban development indicate a trend towards social cleansing, enacted by tools of order, consumer selection and re-functionalization. The aesthetic facade of the area is developing for tourists and temporary users. This bait, this magic recipe for gentrification, seems to recall those widespread hipster practices: to alienate the authentic space of the peripheries by taking its surplus - its bohemian draw, its history - and making it up for a bunch of private clients. The identity of a place can be considered the alienated surplus, handled on the basis of capitalist market imperatives rather than an ethical surplus dissemination process (Tan, 2015) towards the community. Neighborhoods are still not simply receptors of processes dropped from the outside, but active and resilient spaces (Barata Salgueiro, 2011). Nevertheless, a dramatic change can be much faster than the ability of the community to digest and assimilate it, especially when the change concerns affordability and identity and doesn't give the time to find alternative ways to adapt or make decisions. In these urban renewal processes, this dramatic change can be seen as the strong will of commodification (Ley, 2003): a fast re-functionalization towards privatization and elitism of spaces rather than towards an open reuse that is extended to all social groups and respectful of the place identity. The depersonalization of the urban fabric is the first factor in the loss of local identity and, in the process, not only traders and newcomers are involved, but also the newcomer creative class.

3.5 The beautification of the neighbor: a top-down led conflict between high and low culture towards the commodification of public space.

In early 2015, NoLo's place rebranding was accompanied and warmly sustained by a tidal wave of artists, creatives, architects and newborn galleries¹⁵. At first sight, a clear pattern emerged before my eyes as a common storyline, in regards to the interaction, both conflictual and cooperative, between urban dwellers and

¹⁵ like *Magazzino76*, *Drogheria Creativa*, *Dimora Artica*, *Spazio Atene*, *Hausegrafik*, *Studio GM*, *Marios*, *LeftLoft*, *Galleria Salvatore Lanteri*, *T12 Lab*, *Fruit of the Forest*, *Gigantic*, *Cookyes*, *8Modelli*, *Pro*Labmakeup-Academy*, *Biancovino.com*, *City Art Gallery*, *Fanta Spazio*, *Paolo Nava*

street artists, who would set up private and commercialized public spaces or offer them back as a collective good, in the hopes that a sense of belonging and dialogue would restore them to a meaningful place (Visconti et al., 2010): the process by which artists and artistic businesses move to a neglected neighborhood and set the stage for gentrification by renovating and decorating its landscape, and attracting higher income groups with spaces for cultural consumption (Zukin, 1982; Ley, 1996; Lloyd, 2002; Cameron & Coaffe, 2005). Typically, the ending of the story goes at the expense of long-time residents and businesses, not to mention the artists themselves (Ley, 2003; Pratt, 2009; Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 1982, 2010). Urban artists are a transient population (Mele, 1994) that represent an inner conflict between their image, which is tied to an authentic, bohemian urban underworld (Lloyd, 2002), and their strategic role for the middle class in stretching its imagination, its desires, even its practices. The dialectical relationship between cultural capital and limited economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993) may lead to a synthesis in space which is treated as an aestheticized product (Ley, 2003). Moreover, the literature that recognizes an active rejection against artistic colonization on the part of peripheral communities and less well-off quarters is constantly growing (Sacco, 2017). This scenario has certainly played out in several metropolises all around the world: following many different international experiences, specific process patterns can be identified (see Ley, 1986; Zukin, 1995; Sharp et al., 2005; Cameron & Coaffe, 2005; Stabler, 2004) within an increasingly globalized urban model (Brenner, 2014). As McCarty (2006) affirms, the extent to which public art in such scenarios enhances or reflects local identities is problematic, since it can also reflect hegemonic images of the city as a consequence of place branding priorities, which can lead to homogeneity and erosion of distinctiveness if applied as part of a process of commodification rather than a sensitive adaptation to context.

According to Miki Scioscia, a fashion photographer based in NoLo, artists have moved to the area in the past few years “attracting each other with the attempt to gather an artistic community in a peripheral area of the most economically promising Italian city. Some artists, musicians, photographers and creative people used to live here and many others came here probably, first of all, because this area is both affordable and well connected to the city center. But now we are more aware of the potential that we have. We’re a very active kind of people, we are changing this mistreated neighbor through all the artistic events and situations we are creating here.”

The first interesting point that emerges is how creativity, whether expressed in art or fashion, is seen to act as a strategy of economic assets development (Ley, 2003), operating strictly within the worldview represented by the capitalist imagery. A widespread desire to gather a creative class, according to the reading of the city theorized by Florida (2002), conceived as a non-social but domesticable space, is the gateway to that well-known practice of art-led space commodification. Other emerging elements, like a growing aestheticization of public spaces through street art murals, recall the well-known implications which link art-led urban redevelopment with the threat of gentrification (Mathews, 2010; Lees et al., 2013). The functional reconstruction and urban redevelopment of the entire neighborhood is channeled not only through trade but also through a beautification of its public spaces. Since early 2015, an impressive process of urban *maquillage* was carried forward by groups of urban artists in agreement with a policymaker-led project called *Muri Liberi*,

sponsored by the City of Milan. Old abandoned walls of streets and garages in via Giacosa, via Termopili and via Marco Aurelio, as well as underpasses and ballasts of the elevated railway around via Pontano, drew the attention of local and, over time, international street artists who applied to participate in the project.

The first big surge of artistic actions among the streets of NoLo was led by a leading light of the *NoLo Social District* community: Christian Gangitano, an art manager whose work focuses on communication strategies through art¹⁶. “The maze of streets that intertwines behind Via Padova is turning into an open-air gallery among the most important in Milan. The area, revalued as the newborn NoLo, has unfortunately always been famous for its gang wars and the underworld. Since politics exploits degradation, I wanted this area to start being perceived in another light through public and street art.(...) It's a simple concept: If a wall become attractive, it is no longer perceived by people as a urinal to be filled with tags. Previously, those walls seemed to say "welcome to junk city". These pieces have a purposeful message and a high cultural value. Following these art-led social reactivation projects, media began to change their mind about via Padova and NoLo. As a territorial marketing operation, it is useful to support this new vision of the neighborhood. It is obvious that it will bring gentrification processes, but this cannot be stopped, because it is the soul of the great metropolis and of Milan itself.”

An eager interest in the cultural misappropriation of the neighborhood's fate leaks out of Gangitano's words. A strategic capitalization in creative hubs, quarters, clusters and precincts (Pratt, 2005; Evans, 2009; Dickens, 2010) is part of a wider way of rethinking urban space according to a neo-liberal approach, where the exaltation of representation over function (Ley, 2003) is a strategy to convey cultural and economic hegemony. This act of transformation explains precisely the movement to space conceived of as a product: from junk to art and then on to commodity (Ley, 2003). When the cultural dimension becomes a key element of consumer rituals (McCracken, 1986) artworks, including street art works, potentially turn into highly craved status goods. The commodification of street art itself in advertising, objects, fashion or through successful crossover into the contemporary art marketplace, has raised the profile of individual artists (Snyder, 2010; Dickens, 2010) such as Tomoko Nagao, whose works are easy to run into all over the walls of NoLo. Nagao used the context of street art to use public space as a commercial billboard, to take advantage of a public good by acting like a “free rider”. The majority of the subjects and contents of her artworks do not deal with issues about the neighborhood or the specific place she has been occupying, but can be found for sale in the galleries of the city center. Indeed, even if street artists can experience negative effects resulting from gentrification, urban redevelopment can also have benefits for those who exploit the growth of city space as their own creative playground: it results in an expansion of their urban canvas, which advances the artists' opportunities for paid work and exposure (Romero, 2018). And the same applies to a project called OUT. Headed by *Urban Solid*, it was born in order to create an opencast museum in the place of the old Hall of Fame of old school writers¹⁷. The project's presentation was completely lacking in multi-ethnic or older residents. By interviewing the

¹⁶ He spent his last few year coordinating street art projects all around via Padova, in collaboration with important artists who come from the world of street art and pop art such as Tomoko Nagao, *Bros*, *Pao*, *Tvboy*, Cristian Sonda, but also with artists such as Giuseppe Veneziano and Vanni Cuoghi

¹⁷ like *Stan*, *Mac*, *Rendo*, *JD* and *Raptuz* who used to paint murals in via Pontano, all along the railway ballast, since 1987 (Besana, 2016).

majority of the people there, we realized that only tourists, art academy students, other artists, hipsters were present. These curious walk-in outsiders were walking up and down the street, acting like customers walking through a shopping mall. Yet it was undoubtedly considered a success by the organizers, according to their statement outlining the reasons underlying the choice of a specific site like NoLo, the ultimate periphery in the spotlight. Their work has a merely aesthetic revaluation intent, dedicated to an external public different from the community to which the wall belongs: “we chose via Padova because it is considered one of the most dangerous streets in Milan. We wanted to bring a breath of art to attract people to a place where they would normally never have come.”

The NoLo + street art marriage provides the perfect stage for hosting advertising spaces created by the street artists themselves, such as the one made by *King Raptuz* for “Il Milanese Imbruttito” blog, sponsored by a famous brand of spray cans and SAMSUNG.

The total lack of any form of empowerment of collective action, or of entitlement of residents, seen as one group of potential customers among many, defines clearly the power relationship between this artistic operation and its context. Indeed, shortly after the beginning, the same walls the City of Milan granted to selected urban artists started to wear the signs of activist and graffiti artists -like tags, bubble letters or artistic actions- defacing the artworks and sending out a clear message of re-appropriation of the spaces. Indeed, the *Muri Liberi* project has been harshly criticized by art collectives like *Viola Viola*, who emphasized how politics tries to divide the public art world between the good and the bad by promoting urban redevelopment paths through the same artistic tools that it fights and represses, like promising 100 free walls that were already freely used for decades by citizens (Santucci, 2018). In this process lies the heart of the speculative policymaker-led beautification, whereby cities promote or remove urban art as an instrument for denoting an area to reflect the potential income, far removed from the artistic value perceived by graffiti and urban artists themselves. The power relationship emerging from the conflict between graffiti artists and street artists reveals a long history of struggle between high and low aesthetics (Romero, 2018). This top-down categorization of cultural expressions is the dualistic and antagonistic reflection of corresponding forms of economic power. The way in which graffiti artists behave shows the necessity for members of a subculture to communicate (Ferrel, 1998) their feelings of threat and reactance towards an impending hegemonic culture. They are reacting against a loss of place identity by promoting their way of reimagining a spatial organization (Dickens, 2008) that has not been negotiated with the community which the place belongs to. On the other side is an ongoing attempt to reorganize the space in favor of the newcomer social gentrifiers who attracted by new stores, events and restaurants. Indeed, part of this attempt, led by the policy-makers of Milan, is the use of new businesses and selected street art as identical instruments of hegemonic power in order to facilitate the introduction of this new social class, in the name of order and speculation. These artistic practices reflect those kinds of social practices that might put new and old residents in competition, particularly over planning and development issues (Davidson, 2008). The feeling of detachment experienced by graffiti artists who are excluded from the official channels of the dominant schemes, threatens also the identity of the community: residents are deprived of the power to decide what sense to give to their own social spaces. This loss of negotiation of the sense of

place impedes a necessary cohesion between the artist and the local community, precluding a better participatory and dialogic process. A public artwork that enacts elitist and not collective practice, serving a small group's interests rather than those of the collectivity (Bourdieu, 1989), especially when commodified as advertising space, is an expression of hegemony (Clements, 2008). This process reveals the ultimate aim of economic speculation and appropriation of the surplus provided by street art's beautification, and the way in which urban artists are carefully chosen by politicians as instruments of space domestication for the aesthetic redevelopment of the suburbs. It demonstrates a clear connection with the perpetuation of culturally-based appropriation practices, which are typical of gentrification.

3.6 Residents' perception of the phenomenon: do they feel threatened by a loss of place identity?

Between November 2015 and November 2017, I collected interviews from several residents and from some key informants that explore the newcomers and residents' daily experiences of changes in services, meeting places, social structures and urban landscape. Case study informants include various members of the NoLo district like artists, architects and curators, community leaders and professionals, new and old shop owners, but most of all, new and old residents. In addition to interviews, I used auto-ethnographic observations resulting from a long stay in the heart of the social life of the neighbourhood acting as a participant observer, from photographic documentation to data borrowed from websites, media and published work.

My first attempt has been to analyze the social changes taking place in the district through *the loss of place identity*, with a combination of participants' observations of the incoming businesses and leisure activities, and of naturalistic observation of cultural attitudes and the behaviors of new coming residents of the neighborhood (Musante and DeWalt, 2010; Semi, 2010), who bring cultural and economic symptoms that evidence an early gentrification in progress. I proceeded to interview the residents in order to prove or deny my reading of the phenomenon and to investigate a tangible level of impact of the neighborhood's urban renewal.

I submitted, via Facebook Messenger, email or in person, a semi-structured survey to residents. The questions touched on the personal, social and economic spheres of the respondents, and included a brief explanation of the answers. Despite the linguistic limitations encountered in submitting questions to residents of foreign origins and despite the reticence of many in participating in the survey, I collected a sample of 64 respondents. The survey related to the affordability and the frequency with which residents frequent new shops, restaurants, galleries and public spaces, and the events proposed by NoLo Social District. An open follow-up question concerned the extent to which they feel aware and involved and their perception/evaluation of these changes' impact on their lives in the neighborhood, in terms of economic opportunities, social enhancement and cultural belonging (Ferilli et al., 2017). We have categorized respondents according to the following criteria (and relative percentages on total respondents): old residents (I chose 2015 as the first year of the NoLo phenomenon) 65% / new residents 35%; residents of foreign origins 38% / residents of Italian origins 62%; students 32% / families 34% / adults 22% / over 70 12%. Analyzing and cross-referencing the collected data, the most interesting information on the community's perception regarding the NoLo phenomenon, the re-

functionalization of their neighborhood and their feelings of belonging to the identity of the place, are the following:

90% of the old residents of foreign origin and 58% of the old residents of Italian origin declare that they do not know / do not frequent the new galleries and new artistic events in the neighborhood. Most of them declare that they have never been directly involved in cultural activities, with the exception of the ones promoted by the Trotter School, through their children, or by *Cinema Beltrade*, two institutions that have been repeatedly mentioned and are beloved by old residents. The cultural event most mentioned by residents of foreign origin is the newborn *Parco Urbano delle Culture festival*, a free and collective event in which they declare they have been positively involved; most of them declare not to appreciate / not to understand the new murals, with the exception of a work by *Hadok and Sef*, mentioned several times, dedicated to the saint laywoman, *Sarita Colonia of Peru*, a very popular and loved figure by Latinos.

None of them perceives that the development of new artistic and cultural activities is aimed at them or directly beneficial to their lives in the neighborhood in terms of development of the public space or community's cohesion. Overall, they feel totally excluded from these social moments and consider all those news as issues not belonging to their behaviors and rituals, not related to the sense they give to their places. Instead, 85% of new residents say they know, appreciate or frequent the new galleries and new artistic and cultural events in the neighborhood: there is a great overlap between culture and business and a strong focus on the new social status the neighborhood is taking over; the most mentioned events are linked to the Design Week, the *Fuorisalone*, the Vintage flea-markets and to live music in clubs, but also to vernissage, cinema and literary groups; most of them appreciate the new street art on the neighborhood's walls and they suggest a direct connection with a desire for redevelopment of the peripheries. 75% of residents of foreign origin and 50% of Italians declare that they do not frequent Italian restaurants and pubs recently opened in the neighborhood and that they could not perceive any benefit, but only an increase in prices: most of them declare that they are too expensive and / or not frequented by their friends and relatives (in terms of social activity), and that they prefer older but more familiar and affordable businesses: the most recurrent comment is that old businesses and independent shops selling daily products are slowly closing up to give space to new, more expensive restaurants and pubs, revealing a substantial impact on low-income people's sense of place. Most of the places that disappeared or had been renovated were those that made them feel comfortable. Despite the increase in restaurants, cafés and bars, long-term residents reflected on there being fewer places to go out to, adding to the loss of social contact they already felt from feeling excluded from places affected by artistic and cultural gentrification. Many of them are disappointed by the idea of embracing a Food District in the Station warehouse nearby. "The *FAS gruppo*, *Ferrante Aporti Sammartini*, has worked hard over the years trying to transform those spaces in favor of the community, to turn them into social spaces. The book "There's life around the tracks" was written to raise awareness on this issue. But the City of Milan has taken a step towards redevelopment only when the project has been proposed for commercial purposes, due to the participation of *Grandi Stazioni Retail*." Among the respondents of Italian origin, 80% of the new residents frequent and appreciate the new restaurants, pubs and shops. Moreover, the link between the urban requalification and the

desire for social control and public order is stressed (a connection which is never mentioned by respondents of foreign origins), and arguments related to working class, safety, cleansing and xenophobia are confusingly overlapped. As for the involvement in the new activities promoted by the NoLo Social District group, it is interesting to relate what a participant of foreign origins declared: "(...) if we want to talk seriously about NoLo as a laboratory (...) there is still a missing piece, that is the involvement of people of foreign origins, the elderly and children (and maybe more). The NoLo Social District is not privately owned, anyone can propose something, right? So let's face whoever he can and wants. I believe that the universal rule is: to be useful, to contribute to improving the quality of life, to relationships, to include and to interact, to lower tensions, etc." What emerges from these reports is the clear limit of the respondents in understanding the ongoing phenomenon. The difficulties encountered are related to the cognitive and cultural access to change. Most of the educated, Italian middle class, which is part of the dominant culture, consciously participates in the cultural and social renewal mechanisms based on culture, even though they reread the reality according to a storytelling in which their actions have no negative implications.

Radio NoLo, directed by some members of the *NoLo Social District*, recorded a story in 2017 called "NoLo doesn't exist", reinventing a mythology of the neighborhood. The story they told was about a displaced man from Isola looking for a new place in which to move. In NoLo, he finds drug dealers, transsexuals, immigrants and old people: none of them has ever heard of NoLo, but he has discovered a multicultural, rich and lively neighborhood. He attends art galleries, artists, pubs. The direct antagonist of the piece is the personification of gentrification, represented by the reporting of evil journalists who criticize the protagonist and the real estate speculators. From this mythopoesis emerges the fact that the newcomers are completely unaware of the role they have in the same processes they have directly or indirectly activated. As the "useful idiots" of gentrification, they unconsciously perpetuate a dynamic that they believe they are fighting. The interviews show that they know the meaning of gentrification only to a limited extent concerning the housing sector, confusing the term within the wider concept of *urban requalification*. They are not aware of all the social and cultural implications that their behaviors cause, often because of the storytelling they have built to justify their role. Many respondents in this group consider gentrification as a positive force, as a wave that has to be ridden. On the other hand, old people and residents of foreign origins do not understand what is going on under their noses, feeling increasingly a sense of loss of familiar surroundings and of control, caused by a lack of involvement in the decision-making process. They do not have any critical instrument to identify the symbolic signs of change and they are defenseless and weak in reacting against the estrangement of their social classes. They face many difficulties in finding or creating alternatives and that's when they perceive the loss of place identity, when economic opportunities, social enhancement and cultural belonging are undermined. Between the two macro-groups there seems to be a lack of dialogue and negotiation, and many critical issues stem from mutual exclusion: the newcomers speak to themselves and act for themselves.

3.7 Conclusion: the right to identity is the right to the city

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper, which finds its foundation in the gentrification without displacement debate, aims to analyze the consequences of increasing gentrification on old residents in the NoLo neighborhood. I have attempted to assess how hegemonic models of culture-led urban development, with its commodification of public spaces and social amenities in terms of trade, meeting places and aesthetic landscape, can lead to a harmful change in social meanings at odds of local community's identity and consistency. What emerges from this peculiar scenario is that, once individuals cease to identify themselves as members of a local community with familiar places, common interests, shared and collective authenticity, the very idea of a collective entitlement to the public space (Zukin, 2010) is lost. The place identity is lost. Collective strength is weakened in terms of economic, human and social capital.

Interactions between people are not individually provokable or feasible; instead, places and opportunities for meeting are needed and must be designed with due regard for the community's identity. Each type of community, either virtual or physical, should be an enabling ecosystem; it should foster collaborative actions and openness towards relational values including, in addition to all the social strata of the residents, even the transient citizens. Relational goods keep places connected to the communities in which they flourish. If relations and narratives come through a top-down manipulation and not through autonomous citizen-actors, who are free to act and plan how to run their lives (Sen & Nussbaum, 1993), urban innovation strategies will lead to commodification; this process is at complete odds with the regeneration approach, which adds to the economic aspects sustainable models of social value creation. Changing neighborhoods could become potential forums for social mixing as long as resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective wellbeing, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility (Black & Hughes, 2001). Therefore, community platforms, such as NoLo Social District, should pay attention to introducing those principles among users, instead of fostering unresponsive cultural and artistic interventions. The goal is to maintain complex and nuclearized identities, to allow similar individuals to unite and form clusters while maintaining porosity and communicating membranes in the structures of the groups. In this way, the many different cultural identities of a neighborhood can become contaminated and evolve concurrently. Culture is appropriation, not misappropriation. The antidote consists of participatory inclusion in spatial status negotiation projects, which transforms space into a place of shared participation (D'Ovidio & Moratò 2017, Pradel 2017). The relationships between old and new cultural identities must be favored through open urban spaces, through a bottom-up system which is open socially to different voices who can attend to one another, rather than who each do their own thing in isolation (Sennett, 2017). This can happen through a design process fully locally owned and controlled, a process which clearly expresses the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968).

3.8 References

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3.9 Appendix

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