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Introduction to Special Issue: Urban Public Art: Geographies of Co-Production

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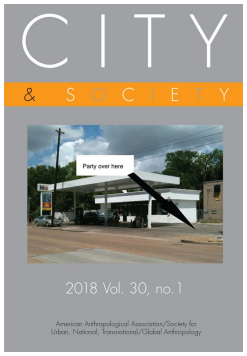

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P*ublic art* is commonly considered to consist of material- or performance-based artwork on sites with free physical and/or visual access (Zebracki 2011). Because or in spite of public art being a polemic term, phenomenon, and practice, there has been a recent upsurge of interest in public art among scholars across this journal's anthropological readership (e.g., Ingram 2009; Sorensen 2009; Lee 2013) and the geohumanities more widely (e.g., Dear et al. 2011; Lossau and Stevens 2015; Cartiere and Zebracki 2016; Zebracki and palmer 2017). Across these various literatures, public art has been recognized for its potential to connect with everyday users of urban public spaces, reshape the built environment, and provide people with meaningful, transformative experiences of everyday city life. Hence, the term *co-production* has gained currency within broader social and cultural discourses and within arts practice to address those efforts that actively communicate with and involve specific members of the public, or "publics," in the arts' ambits of design, execution, and everyday engagement (see Davies 2010; Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff 2012; Warren 2014; Zebracki 2016).

Present-day urban societies increasingly face challenges in light (or under the yoke, depending on one's perspective) of impactful forces, including neoliberalization,

gentrification, city marketing/branding, immigration, and securitization (e.g., Smith 2002; Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison 2005; Zimmerman 2008; Miles 2014; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht 2016). Changing political priorities in these contexts have led to the deregulation of art markets and draconian budgetary cuts that have hit the arts and cultural industries especially hard (Zebracki 2011). Of particular note, scholars have critiqued how financially challenged community art practices have deliberately exploited the free or "cheap" labor of artists and participation by members of the public (e.g., Kester 2004; Bishop 2012; Zebracki 2017a). Additionally, the intersecting conditions of austerity, super-diversity, and urban gentrification have posed serious challenges to achieving policy goals of social justice and inclusion (Pratt 2012; Lees and Melhuish 2015; Zebracki 2017a), which can be at odds with overly optimistic claims of social inclusiveness often aspired to in public art practice (Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison 2005; Zebracki, Van Der Vaart, and Van Aalst 2010).

With all this in mind, the Guest Editors of this issue circulated a call for papers to further the conversation about spaces of public art co-production. The five thought-provoking contributions reveal the shifting and ambiguous roles of producers and public users and, hence, multidisciplinary concerns with regard to authorship, ownership, belonging, and citizenship, alongside the complex realities of inclusiveness or exclusiveness (e.g., Belfiore 2002; Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison 2005; Knight 2008; Vickery 2011; Cartiere and Zebracki 2016). Philosophies and terminologies of public art and its uses traverse myriad disciplines, geographical contexts, and temporal frameworks (including the artwork's lifespan, and user experiences of its presence[s] and absence[s]) (see Hutchinson 2002; Hein 2006), thereby revealing the ontologically multifaceted social, spatial, and material grounds of co-production.

In this issue, we—the editors and contributing authors—adopt a comprehensive working definition of *co-production*, which implicates joint action and a more than just cooperation between actors to create a common good. Co-production is a *fluid* process between formal agents—whom Martha Radice references as the "curatoriat" (Danto 1997 cited by Crehan 2011a, 18) to describe public art's usual suspects, so to speak, who include professional artists, policymakers, commissioning parties, and the like—cum any interested public parties to realize an artwork *with* publics rather than merely *for* them. Therefore, it is not necessarily and immediately clear who initiates, organizes, follows, invents, imitates, finalizes, and so on.

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Ideally, co-production would imply an egalitarian (in lieu of a hierarchical) production mode—one that is an active, or pro-active attitude of all parties involved. Collective endeavor and awareness-making are, therefore, indispensable (values) to understanding the embodied nature of the co-production of a public artwork. Seeing a public artwork for the first time can simply be rendered as a primordial, bodily encounter, and therefore a co-production in immediate visual and emotional terms. In this issue, we advance the definition of co-production by attending to *input* and *social relations*, as well as rethinking public art as a greater, concerted good that is engaged and problematized.

Some of the questions pursued, as well as suggested, in this issue are: How do active creators/engagers place both thought and labor into the conception, manufacturing, or execution of a public artwork? How are these artworks placed in public spaces and public minds, and melded together with the actions of those who use the mutually constituted artwork and space? Public art, in this logic, suggests both a public space and public timeline along which encounters and meanings shape, and reshape, its lived realities, both real and imagined. This kind of practice adds additional layers of significance and possibilities for engagement to the original formation of the artwork.

This process can sometimes continue for a considerable period of time after the initial material appearance (if any) of a public artwork, whereby co-production may continue the incorporation of physical, discursive, and emotional appropriations. *Tilted Arc*, in Federal Plaza in New York City, is a well-trodden textbook case of failure in this regard (Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk 1991). Upon installation, everyday users of the square largely perceived the design of this artwork to be blocking the passage across the plaza, and the artwork was taken down in 1989, after a prolonged period of public support for its removal. Interestingly, co-production involved the radical act of its entire material removal. Yet the aftermath of *Tilted Arc*'s demise has been characterized by a growing antagonistic and immaterialist discourse within both the academe and urban practice, revolving around the perceived uses and misuses of art in global urban public spaces. In our view, this "anti-case" of public art has shown how a contested city space has become embedded not only in the local public mindscape but also in the international urban public sphere and academic discourse.

Martin Zebracki and Dirk de Bekker, in their analysis of socially engaged public art practice in the city of 's-Hertogenbosch, with its toponymical shorthand Den Bosch, in the Netherlands, indicate that an artwork might become embraced as a positive city symbol, offering "contact zones" for meaningful encounters and social bonding as time progresses (see Askins and

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Pain 2011). Therefore, the permanence of public art is not a requirement for a constructive ongoing co-production (see also: Radice, this issue, 45).

Zebracki and De Bekker engage with the theoretical "trialectic" between the physical, social, and spatial (after Lefebvre 1991 and Harvey 2009) to examine public art in the spectrum between flagship art and community art. In doing so, the study authors uncover common grounds and differences between hegemonic policy discourses and everyday publics' experiences and concerns regarding the potentials and problems of social engagement with both types of public artwork. Zebracki and De Bekker, moreover, critically engage with the notion of *common sense* (Crehan 2011a, 2011b, in reference to Gramsci 1971), which is part and parcel of the assumed social benefits of urban public art as commonly found in higher-order policy discourse. They argue that participation and dialogue play a pivotal role in making art public in the first place. Zebracki and De Bekker contrast an iconic, flagship artwork, the *Hieronymus Bosch Statue*, with that of a community art project, *The Four Seasons*, in the Dutch city of Den Bosch. Their examination suggests that presumed social values, as well as the potential for public art to operate as an object for profound engagement, can be challenging to develop and identify in the first place.

Zebracki and De Bekker's analysis of the community art project shows how it was possible to elicit community discussion about place attachments on the basis of the straightforward theme of the four seasons. A strong element of co-production was cultivated, as the artist incorporated participants' drawings into the final design of panels that were placed on the sidewalls of houses in the neighborhood. Flagship artworks, such as the *Hieronymus Bosch Statue*, are often situated in lively, "branded" city-center localities. Such works typically involve a widely marketed, mediated, and hence dispersed public space, as well as a multiplicity of passersby and therefore dispersed publics. As such, the publicness of urban sites of flagship art might be potentially more difficult to pin down in comparison to the residential makeup of a neighborhood space. Zebracki and De Bekker's study uncovers the ambiguous realities of how co-production—and hence the construction of a broader consciousness of public art—may evolve alongside the "mere aesthetics" (i.e., beautification) of the material dimensions of the public artwork, as well as the urban environment and the "deeper matters" of social inclusivity, or the perceived lack thereof.

Martha Radice draws conceptual and empirical attention to how co-production revolves around public art that is deliberately designated as a temporary intervention. The author presents an ethnographical analysis of how public art is interactively created by everyday

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users in a "spatio-technological" sphere. In *Time Transit* (in the Canadian city of Regina, Saskatchewan), bus riders produced text messages in a mixed-media installation while riding in an operational city bus. Radice compares this case with the spontaneous (and often unanticipated) encounters of *Situated Cinema*, a mobile demountable micro-cinema in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. This cross-case analysis addresses the relevance of digital and mobile technologies in mediating public engagement with contemporary art in urban public space, which can be construed as an "internet of bodies and (art) matter" (see Zebracki 2017b; Zebracki, forthcoming). Radice argues that these technologies enable the interconnection of city spaces as well as the creation of new spaces for contemplation by empowering incidental participants as co-producers.

This contribution, along with the other analyses featured in this issue, explains unequivocally how an ethnographic research approach is beneficial to unravelling public art's ordinary fields of actions, and everyday interactions, with art matter, people, and public space. As the study's bottom line, Radice imparts that co-production puts the public in public art practice and, as such, enhances the public artwork's *publicness* by mediating communication and thereby connecting everyday uses and meanings of public spaces, layer by layer, with the broader urban public sphere.

Furthermore, co-production, as argued in this issue's intermezzo "thought piece" by joni m palmer, is a story of affect (thus, anything but a condition of indifference). People's levels of co-productive engagement ensue from ascertaining that the work of art *resonates* with them, along with any positive and/or negative emotional and intellectual appreciations and values as exchanged, and potentially relayed to others, over time. palmer especially recognizes public art's potential to trigger social changes to urban communities and environments, a belief that finds common ground across the empirical analyses presented in this issue.

Willie Jamaal Wright and Cameron "Khalfani" Herman critically attend to the transformative social potentials of public art via their examination of manifestations instigated by the Black artist collectives MF Problem and the Black Guys, both of which are located in the predominantly Black community of the Third Ward in Houston, Texas. The authors indicate how co-productions constituted various public art forms including murals, art houses, block parties, Sunday socials, conceptual work, and films. Wright and Herman critically juxtapose financial exchange values, which drive urban gentrification (see Smith 2002), with residents' cultural use values, where public art operates as an antidote to the former. Residents' participation in the sometimes unsolicited and illegal public art performances co-produce

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spatial realities and imaginaries—or, drawing on Lipsitz (2007), momentary Black geographies—that steer a critical course through the contrasting ambiguities that are inherent in the discursive constructions and real-life realities of the ghettoization and gentrification of the neighborhood.

Wright and Herman's contribution dovetails Black geographies (see Hooks 1990) to public art scholarship to address intersectionalities across the social identity markers of race and class in particular (see Sieber, Cordeiro, and Ferro 2012 in this journal). Although Black geographies have still been given marginalized attention (see Hudson and McKittrick 2014), scholarly interest has been emerging along with the Black Lives Matter movement that started in 2013. This movement has been fighting systemic racism and the often violent disenfranchisement of Black people (e.g., Derickson 2016), which invests the study by Wright and Herman with further topical social relevance.

As well, the study by Pauline Guinard contributes to this niche at the nexus of public art, race, and class. Guinard geographically expands these controversies beyond the dominant Global North context of public art research. The author presents a study of *Made in Musina*, an ongoing participatory community art project that was originally part of the *2010 Reasons to Live in a Small Town* program. The latter was introduced during the 2010 FIFA World Cup to support public art projects outside city centers in areas with limited cultural infrastructure. In addition to steering our attention to the Global South, Guinard's contribution attends to public border art (and its broader geopolitical context) as situated within a subaltern and migratory "mobile" space of the post-apartheid city—more precisely, in the Musina township along the northern South African border with Zimbabwe.

Guinard tells the story of two Johannesburg-based artists who moved to this township without any predetermined plans about how to work with local artists and members of the public in addressing community needs. To date, co-production has involved arts festivals, theatre performances, and workshops. Social networks, both off-line and online, have been established to enhance social welfare through the arts—for example, by promoting creative job opportunities. Unorchestrated attempts have also been made to provide publics, working alongside the artists, with the agency to define the parameters of *Made in Musina*, and accordingly gain authorship of the project and ownership of the shared spaces of everyday life. The project especially aims to empower marginalized and underrepresented populations (including migrants, artists, and unemployed people), and to challenge power relationships that define today's still highly socially segregated South African urban society.

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Co-production, as conceptualized throughout this issue, is founded on the role of publics as full participants, and artists as both producers and community builders, who therefore become, as Guinard puts it, active members of the local community. These community art projects, as seen in the contributions by Guinard and Wright and Herman, were not focused on producing material outcomes as such. Following new genre public art (Lacy 1995), it was the social process itself, as well as the tacit knowledges generated along the way, that comprised the public artwork as grounded in the dynamism of local community life. Public art in this sense, as conveyed by Guinard, constitutes a social medium rather than an aesthetic tool.

The study by Guinard critically engages with how co-production may offer renewed reflections on divided urban spaces (in this case, towns/townships) and on marrying segregated positionalities, including White/Black and South African/foreigner, within the idiosyncrasies of Musina's border context. This study provides deeper empirical insights into how public art practice may articulate and bridge the intersectional spaces and identities of race, nationality, class, and gender, which are deeply segregated in the border region concerned and in the super-diverse South African society more widely. Guinard's analysis, similar to the other contributions, speaks of the power of public art to not only disentangle the social complexities of cities but also to imagine and instigate more socially inclusive urban living. The case study on Musina does so by seeking and deepening inter-connections between central urban spaces, small border towns on the periphery, rural interstices, and urban professional work spheres.

The contributions to this issue, each on its own terms, critique recurrent essentialisms as particularly integrated into the goals of social inclusion as embedded in contemporary urban policies and public art practices. The authors challenge homogenous understandings of social identity as well as normative dualisms of, amongst others, indoor/outdoor, public/private, center/periphery, here/there, urban/non-urban, now/then, and us/them. The analyses overall indicate that co-production implicates an amalgamation of formal and informal actors whose practiced, lived places should be comprehended through fluidity rather than duality. This is at variance with hierarchical and fairly reductive understandings of top-down vs. bottom-up practices, which are frequently used notions in public art policy blueprints (see Zebracki, Van Der Vaart, and Van Aalst 2010).

On a methodological level, the contributors to this issue further elucidate the complex social and spatial fluidities of public art co-production. Rather than gauging social impacts through

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"hard" statistical and cost-benefit evaluative models and the like, the focus of this issue is on ethnographic and participatory methodologies, where the public is part of both the public art and the public art research. Although the studies do include some quantitative elements, such as numbers and descriptive figures in the empirical data analyses, the methodological remit is defined by, as phrased by Zebracki and De Bekker, the qualitative "meaning-making" of the findings. Accordingly, the types of ethnographic research employed are based on socially grounded involvement, site-specific input and complexity (see Kwon 2004), and, therefore, situated knowledges (see Haraway 1991; Rose 1997). Hence, this collection attends to the social activities of diverse actors, the *social relational* (mal)functions of public art (see Massey and Rose 2003), and how public art endures and is contested along material and immaterial frameworks of lived urban spaces.

Co-production, as we have defined it, pushes dialogue into action and, hence, presents a diagonal understanding of the production of public art through social relations beyond formal actors, institutionalized spaces, and preconceived audiences (which are still too often rendered as uniform dummies). We hope that this special issue offers a useful analytical lens for scholars with a genuine interest in how urban public spaces are socially grounded, constructed, and reconstructed through artistic engagement. This collection of articles critically pursues a site of knowledge exchange about how cultural spaces of cities are lived through public art practices and imbued with associated vernacular meanings.

In so doing, this issue contributes new scholarly work and encourages further scholarship on the co-production of urban public art and how it fluidly navigates through social diversity and different regimes of interest, structure, and agency (e.g., the individual, urban community, local governance). Through the lens of public art, we hope this issue offers critical reflections on the past, our present understandings of everyday life, and our imaginings of inclusive urban futures.

Notes

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papers in earlier incarnations in these contexts. We are grateful to Suzanne Scheld, Sheri Gibbings, and Joshua Barker for handling the review process of this invited collection, to Tom Cho for copyediting the manuscripts, and, last but not least, to the authors who "co-produced" this special issue. On all sides, patience was a virtue.

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