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“Journal of Economics and Social Sciences”



Street-art and graffiti in scientific discourse: concepts' definitions and basic research topics

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Abstract

Topics connected with the development of artistic practices and art functioning in urban realm are discussed both in scientific and public areas. The results of these investigations can be found in published scientific and popular papers, scientific information notes and blog posts; they are also discussed in social networks and online forums. One of the most pressing issues is related to establishing and operating a variety of visual objects created in graffiti and street arts and crafts. The analysis of publications shows that in everyday language and Russian mass-media language consider that all non-classical images created on the surfaces of walls are called "graffiti". At the same time, in scientific discourse it is necessary to distinguish the concepts of "graffiti" and the concept of «street art», which includes the images that differ from "classic graffiti" due to some characteristics. This paper shows how scientists differentiate the concept of "graffiti" and the concept of «street art" and what key themes of these cultural phenomena are the most relevant in contemporary scientific discourse.

Keywords: Street-art, graffiti, basic research topics;

1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are various definitions for a global cultural phenomenon called “Street Art”. Most of the definitions note that street art is a visual art created in public spaces, often unauthorized and out of the context of traditional art institutions and government-funded initiatives. The term “Street Art” appeared at the boom years of graffiti in the 1980s because of the need to define a new artistic (creative) activity taking place on the streets of North American and European cities. The existed term "graffiti" did not properly describe the existing phenomenon. Most researchers of street art agree that this phenomenon has evolved from graffiti, but it is not identical to it. “Classical graffiti”, regardless of the technical complexity, was a simple signature (a tag) that was drawn on city surfaces - walls of houses, multiple-unit cars.

2. Discussion

Typically author's pseudonyms are used in tags; they are also called a street nickname. Graffiti began to appear in the second half of 1960s, but the massive epidemic of tags application appeared in New York and spread to other cities in the early 1970s. "Epidemic" was provoked by the

publication of the article «Taki 183: Spawns Pen Pals» in The New York Times on July 21, 1971. The article tells about the 17-year-old office-boy, Dimetriuse, who left his tag everywhere in the city. Having read the article, hundreds of teenagers began to write their names (pseudonyms) in all US cities.

The well-known researcher of graffiti and street art, Anna Waclawek, in her book "Graffiti and Street Art"[1] identifies graffiti as a part of the urban experience of the new relevant agents – youth and youth subcultures, using available urban space for the manifestation of their existence. Waclawek considers graffiti as a highly successful attempt at finding somebody's own voice, declarative identity in the situation of anonymity and impersonality of modern metropolises, as a way of forming effective solidarity. It is worth noting that earlier graffiti did not suppose a dialogue with the public, open communication, and was only a manifestation of a personality, imposing encrypted messages that were understandable only for the initiate.

Street art, as opposed to graffiti, was formed as a democratic medium, aimed at the communication with the widest audience. Different content messages supplanted tags; these messages are social, humorous ones reflecting everyday life, created in various techniques, using different materials (from traditional colors to knitting and all kinds of installations). Waclawek notes that street art is much more symbolic and figurative as it has an interesting and memorable font that forms the basis of modern graffiti statements. She also emphasizes the openness of street art: its messages are clear and they are addressed not to the narrow community of experts, but to everyone; they appeal to spontaneous communication with the viewer in an urban environment.

In this communication there are various specific moments. For instance, the creation of a special city game, rising to the legacy of the situationists.

«Its task is to involve city residents in the self-reflection of the urban space, its rules and exceptions, its textures and surfaces.

To open the potentiality of space permeability, to move the present boundaries and to demonstrate their absurdity, to induce to notice the usual things that are not noticed; to pull out a city dweller with a sudden and not immediately understandable image that is frightening or ridiculous from the state of pseudo-understanding.» [2]

It should be noted that street art is changing and today, the author is now not a boy from a deprived area, he is a professional artist.

All these changes in the street art practice, noted in the 1980s, have become evident since the early 1990s. The openness of street art led to the formation of communities that love this art. With the development of the Internet that allows storing and transmitting photos of street art images, the interest in street art is growing.

Along with spectator's interest, the popularity of street art as a subject for scientific research has been growing for the last fifteen years. Street art has broken the tether of subcultural phenomena; it has become a global a sociocultural phenomenon, which is marked as an integral part of the urban visual culture, the most important symptom of modern urban development. Therefore, the study of street art is carried out in the various fields (philosophy, sociology, psychology, aesthetics, theory of communication, art, culture). Every year the number of publications about street art is increasing. researchers try to describe its relations with other street activities / practices, the succession and demarcation with graffiti, blurring of distinction between street art and public-art, political opportunities of stencils (stencil), the fight of street art with advertising ("brandalism"), legitimation and commercialization of street art, communication features and problems of street art music-making, etc

Natalia Samutina and Oksana Zaporozhets noted that modern literature of street art can be divided into two large blocks.

The first group includes publications based on the documentation of street art in a portrait-landscape format, focusing on photography. First of all, they support and reinforce the relevance of major names and indicate the territorial logics such as "Global street art", "Street art of Yekaterinburg", "Street art of London", "Street art of Berlin", "The most influential street artists". These works are often accompanied by street artist's manifests or their interviews as an attempt to give a summary definition of both global and local variations of street art. The experts who write introductory articles for albums can be academic researchers. Also, they may be compilers of albums, creating their own version of "cataloguing" and interpretations of street art (for example, Rafael Scheckter (Schacter and Fekner 2013).

Secondly, "this monographic work about street art, whose authors attempt to show the development of this phenomenon in the totality of its tasks and main parameters from its place in a city to its changes that are produced and will be produced in legislative practices, changing our ideas about possible actions of residents in the urban environment (e.g., Klitzke and Schmidt 2009; Waclawek 2011; Bengtsen 2014; Young 2014b)".[3] Also, special attention of researchers is attracted by the creators of street art, their personalities, artistic language, motivation and the issues of self-identification, the feeling of being in the space of the city, issues about the communication with the street art community and the public.

Thus, there are various aspects of the problematisation of street art existence as a global socio-cultural phenomenon in modern research literature.

In their paper Natalia Samutina and Oksana Zaporozhets examine only foreign experience of street art research. This approach is very interesting, as in Russia the study of street art stands on the periphery of different scientific interests. Study results about street art have been examining for 5-6 years. At the same time, there is no single database for Russian studies in this area, all scientists investigate street art independently and this makes it impossible to form a unique scientific space with the possibility for joint scientific study of street art.

It should be noted that in 2012 the project of a comprehensive study of street art and graffiti started and Natalia Samutina was a project director. In the framework of this project a review of the publications of foreign researchers was carried out, but the analysis of Russian scientific papers devoted to street art was not done.

3. Conclusion

Therefore, the analysis of Russian papers in the field of street art is not carried out and may be implemented within the framework of our future study of street art.

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