

# Street Art, Sweet Art? Reclaiming the “Public” in Public Place

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Consumer research has paid scant attention to public goods, especially at a time when the contestation between categorizing public and private goods and controlling public goods is pronounced. In this multisited ethnography, we explore the ways in which active consumers negotiate meanings about the consumption of a particular public good, public space. Using the context of street art, we document four main ideologies of public space consumption that result from the interaction, both conflict and common intent, of urban dwellers and street artists. We show how public space can be contested as private and commercialized, or offered back as a collective good, where sense of belonging and dialogue restore it to a meaningful place. We demonstrate how the common nature of space both stimulates dialectical and dialogical exchanges across stakeholders and fuels forms of layered agency.

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An empty wall is an empty population. (Field site wall graffiti)

The variety of roles consumers play in the marketplace has long captivated the imagination of researchers. Not only do consumers function as objects in the market, as targets of practitioners’ strategies, but also they act as subjects by means of agentic “processes through which selves come to acknowledge and deal with others” (Peñaloza and

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Venkatesh 2006, 307) via negotiated consumption behaviors (Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Those forms of consumer agency include acts of resistance (Kates 2002; Kozinets 2002; Murray and Ozanne 1991), social movements (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), labor (Cova and Dall’O 2009), and political consumerism (Boström et al. 2005; Micheletti, Follesdal, and Dietlind 2003). Agency also encompasses consumption communities (Belk and Costa 1998; Cova and Cova 2002; Kozinets 2001; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), ludic behavior (Kozinets et al. 2004), and liberatory prosumption (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Toffler 1980).

Despite the comprehensiveness and variety of this literature, it has remained, for the most part, within the boundaries of privately owned goods. In our present study on street art, we show that consumer agency operates also in the realm of public goods. We contribute to the emerging discussion at the intersection of the consumption of public goods and forms of consumer agency addressing several questions raised there. What constitutes “public” goods, and what boundaries separate them from other goods? How do the roles of producer and consumer blur in consumption practices? Who controls and who contests public goods? Who is responsible for creating a meaningful public good?

In addressing these questions, we add our voice to a growing multidisciplinary chorus. We empathize with Clarke and Bradford’s (1998) lament of the decline of scholarly interest in the analysis of modes of consumption in terms of public

and private. Moreover, we acknowledge Belk's recent (2010, 730) call for recognition of "sharing" within consumer research, in which he proclaims that "sharing versus proprietary ownership has entered a new and important era of contest." Although most of his discussion revolves around private sharing (what he labels "sharing in"), he calls for research on "sharing out," which would include collective goods.

Collective—or public—goods are produced "by and on behalf of the public" to address matters facing the commonweal (Wong 2002, 163). While public goods have been mostly defined in economic terms (Christensen and Levinson 2003; Samuelson 1954), we here retain a supra-economic definition according to which the public sphere is the "realm in which people define themselves as publics, through ongoing communication, definition and negotiation over their shared concerns" (Sargeson 2002, 21). Thus, goods become public whenever a collectivity of citizens attributes itself a shared ownership over them.

Our specific focus in this article is consumer agency in public place. We develop a framework as a way of examining public place and the agentic dynamics among its entitled consumers, which we feel will assist the exploration of other public goods as well. Notably, we examine the meaning, reclamation, and consumption of a ubiquitous public good, public space. While individuals may choose to opt out of the consumption of other public goods, preferring, for example, private schools over public schools, and bottled water over tap water, it is impossible not to consume public space at all. Such inevitability invites agency and intermutual behaviors that span from feelings of bonding (Belk 2010; Turner and Rojek 2001) to avoidance of this physical or emotional closeness, causing the nature of public place to be continually negotiated (Venkatesh 2002; White 2007).

Contemporary street art is at the forefront of such a spirited confrontation. It illuminates how dwellers' agentic consumption or presumption of space might affect another's experience of that space. Given that architecture and urban design "are among the very few truly inescapable—and therefore public—art forms" (Carmona and Tiesdell 2007, 179), the street art practices transforming them highlight the difficulty in representing what public space is or should be, that is, of an ideology of public space (Polanyi 1958). Street artists seek to overcome the rigid separation of roles conceptualized by Hirschman (1983). The opposition between artists and ideologists may seem to represent two different (though closely related) categories of social and market agents, but our investigation reveals how street artists may act as artists *and* ideologists. They can "express their subjective conceptions of beauty, emotion or some other aesthetic ideal" and simultaneously "formulate beliefs about the nature of reality and values regarding desirable states of reality" (Hirschman 1983, 46).

Our intended contribution is threefold. First, we extend understanding of consumer agency beyond the domain of privately owned and consumed goods. Leaf (2002, 179–81) asserts that cities include "grey areas" between public and

private space, that there are always public impacts of private land use in urban areas, and that the "collective production" of urban space—which includes the public goods of physical place and stakeholder relations—is not the "exclusive reserve" of the state. We also argue that the public nature of goods, such as public space, implies the emergence of contemporaneous, interactive, and convergent or divergent forms of agency—that is, imbricated agency—due to the multiple entitlements on the consumption of such goods. In detail, we unpack the dialogical agentic confrontation of street artists and dwellers, both within and across their group membership, through their different ideologies of public place consumption. We develop a framework of these different ideologies as a way of examining public place that is apropos to the exploration of other public goods as well. Second, we refine the way in which public goods—place, in particular—are envisioned, consumed, negotiated, and shared. We foreground the activity of creative activists and dwellers enacting their sense of ownership of the commons of urban interstices. Civic engagement theorists have tended to locate the practice of authentic participation primarily in formal policy processes, rather than in extragovernmental activity occurring in "associational public space" (Campbell 2005, 698). In contrast, the urban landscape of street art provides the opportunity for authentic participation to flourish beyond institutionalized political arenas. Finally, we consider urban space as cultural fields and texts (Warner 2002) that affect the community. Our field analysis indicates that the way in which public space is currently consumed is often dissatisfying and that—through the agency of artists and dwellers—this unsatisfying experience can be rehabilitated.

## DISCIPLINARY CONTEXT

We locate our investigation of consumer agency in the public domain at the intersection of two main fields of inquiry: public space and the ideological impact of aesthetics. In this section, we first situate our study in the literature on the conversion of space to place, which we contextualize in an urban realm. We apply the "servicescape" framework to public place and also incorporate the limited literature on the consumption of public goods. Second, we position street art within the debate on aesthetic practices and consumption. We do not present an exploration of (street) art per se, but focus on the aesthetic dimension defined as the "critical reflection on art, culture and nature" (Kelly 1998, ix). Finally, we bridge these domains to account for the impact that aesthetics—street art in particular—may exert on the agentic reclamation of places.

### Public Space and Public Place

The notion of *space* traditionally refers to something anonymous, whereas *place* distinctively accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site; that is, it is "consumed space" (Sherry 1998; Tuan 1977). Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world (Relph 1976,

141). Inchoate space (such as “outer space,” “wilderness,” and “wasteland”) is rendered tractable by dwelling practices (Seamon 1993) that can convert it into place. Thus, cities are “both physical and imagined” spaces (Brown-Glaude 2008, 114), where “differences are constructed in, and themselves construct, city life and space” (Bridge and Watson 2000, 507, quoted in Brown-Glaude 2008, 114). The attribution of meaning operates through a twofold (Fisher 1992) process of space appropriation (Aubert-Gamet 1997; Fisher 1992; Lefebvre 1974), involving behaviors and emotions leading to the establishment of a sense of belonging infused with symbolic meaning (Low 1992).

In our analysis, we address urban scenarios as “spaces” whenever they recall nonplaces (Augé 1995; Gottdiener 2000) and, extensively, any time they manifest as dismal liminoid zones. Alternatively, and in line with the enhanced definition offered by Goodsell (2003), we use the term “urban places” to describe appropriated sites where social interactions, sense of belonging, collective memories, and shared identities occur.

Public space/place can be read in the light of the academic discussion on public and collectively owned goods. A current exemplar of conventional public consumption, a cross-cultural volume edited by Cook (2008), explores behavior performed publicly. In addition, consumer researchers (Belk 2007, 2008, 2010; Epp and Price 2008; Ozanne and Ozanne 2008) have recently stimulated reflection upon sharing practices that include “joint ownership, voluntary lending and borrowing, pooling and allocation of resources, and authorized use of public property” (Belk 2008, 2). Epp and Price (2008) identify various forms of sharing, such as not sharing, limited sharing, parallel sociality, and sharing as being.

Clarke and Bradford add a further level of interpretation of public space and place by inserting the distorting effect exerted by the market on our experience of urban contexts. The authors note that as the sociality of city life has shifted from collectivized to market-based mode, collective activity is largely confined to commercial “playgrounds” that inevitably excludes some social groups: “The ideological power of the term ‘private’ . . . serves to occlude the presence of those for whom the market fails” (Clarke and Bradford 1998, 884–85).

We focus on the production and consumption of a public good, a temporary autonomous zone (Bey 1985) if not a third place (Oldenburg 1989), carved from commercial and government-controlled place by active artists and appreciators in search of authentic engagement. In the following paragraphs, we sketch the various forms of aesthetic appropriation enacted by street artists on urban spaces and tie them to the elaboration of contemporary “urbanscapes.”

### Street Art as Active Place Marking

The antiquity, continuity, and cross-cultural prevalence of inscription as a means of emplacing ideology are undisputed. “Early humans were drawn to express themselves by drawing on cave walls, producing the first evidence of guerrilla

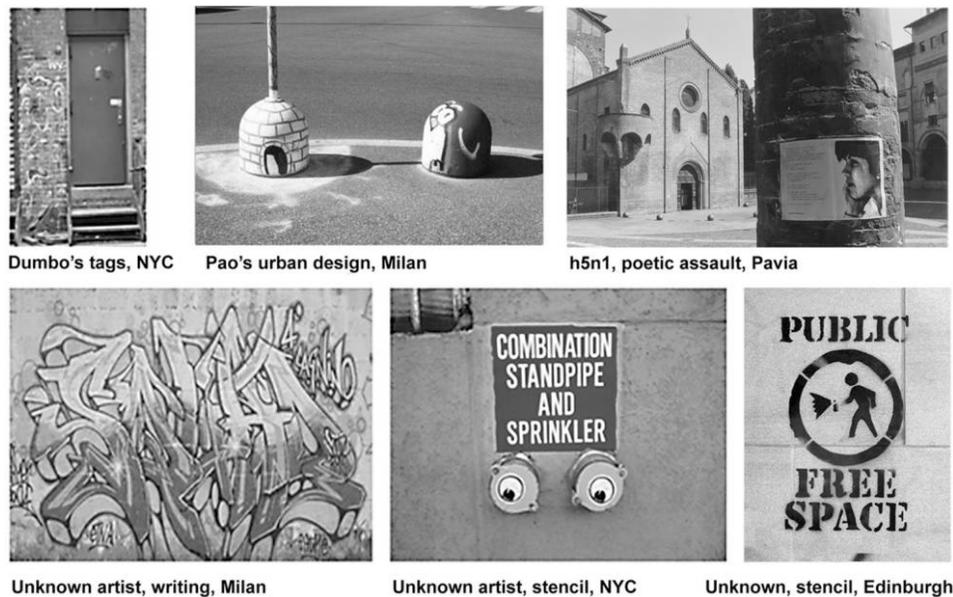
art. People have always felt the need to share and express themselves in a public way, sometimes by telling a story or posing a question, many times by presenting a political ideology” (Smith 2007, 11). Place marking is thus an evocative form of place making, ranging from pure resistance and contestation (David and Wilson 2002; Ferrell 1995; Stenson 1997) to public place beautification (Banksy 2006).

Street decorations and inscriptions have largely dominated Western towns throughout history (Quintavalle 2007). Forms shift from prehistoric cave graffiti to the Roman cities rich in signs, adornments, and writings such as those revealed at the archeological sites of Pompei and Ercolano. In the colors of churches and noble buildings that crowd the asymmetrical European streets of the Middle Ages, holy iconography is merged with civic engagement. The Renaissance—a high point of beautification and embellishment extended to public places—testifies to the spirit of patronage, extending the ideology of art as private and disposable matter. The neoclassical codes (based on symmetry and order), which dominated European urban geography until the late twentieth century, comprise an aesthetic imaginary.

Nowadays, by conceiving urban landscapes as screens, street artists update the heritage of the Renaissance and stimulate dwellers to establish a critical relationship with city place reclaimed from space. By overthrowing the established visual urban structure, artists embody Mary Douglas’s (1966) theory of dirt as “matter out of place” and the traditional overlapping between cleanliness and order (Shove 2003). Confirming Douglas’s idea that dirt is in the eye of the beholder, rival positions about what is clean and what is dirty coexist. Dwellers, art experts, and government officials may actually look at street interventions as acts of beautification or even public art (think of Banksy or Haring) but also as the ultimate defacement of urban order.

The history of street art movements is a fascinating tale of evolution fueled by political and aesthetic ideologies in constant cross-cultural hybridization (Gastman, Rowland, and Sattler 2006; Rose and Strike 2004). Over time, street art movements have incorporated multiple and sometimes conflicting forms of marking, accounting for a variety of views, intents, and actions (fig. 1). Briefly speaking, we acknowledge the following ideal-types of marking (Borghini et al. 2010): (i) *tags* represent an early expression of street art meant to spread an individual’s name, originating in New York in the 1970s and contesting the marginality and ugliness of social life through the repetition of nicknames or words of rebellion on public walls; (ii) highly stylized *writing* is a pure practice of aesthetic exercise related to the need for self-affirmation within a community of peers; (iii) *sticking* is the practice of pasting drawings and symbols in public spaces so as to spread short messages to a broader audience; (iv) *stencil* mimics the marketing practices of advertising and branding by replicating the same form or symbol (e.g., personal logos) in multiple places; (v) *poetic assault* is one of the emerging practices of street art, consisting in the writing of poetry on dull public spaces (e.g., walls, parapets, rolling shutters, mailboxes) to infuse them with

FIGURE 1  
DIFFERENT FORMS OF STREET ART



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

lyrical and graceful content; and (vi) *urban design* mostly relates to an aesthetic practice applied in favor of the beautification of public architecture and urban style.

Street art marking encompasses several dichotomies: individual versus collective action, self-affirmative versus altruistic aims, self/peer versus public audience (Hirschman 1983), critical versus celebratory purpose, protesting versus aesthetic language. While we recognize the extensive variety of street art expressions, we constrain our inquiry in two ways.

First, the street art we address comprises durable forms of aesthetic transformation of public settings (e.g., walls, floors, urban design, metro stations, traffic lights, signposts). Thus, we exclude forms of: (i) street performance ranging from traditional forms of street theater and clownery to emerging forms such as the parkour movement in the *banlieues* of Paris; (ii) the primarily performance-based practices that may range from the evangelical culture jamming services staged by the Reverend Billy (2006) to the flash-mobbing and genre-rampaging bottlenecking that local activists promote to disrupt mundane urban activity; and (iii) indoor practices such as shopdropping, or media practices such as mocketing (C100 2006; Moore 2007).

Second, so as to contribute to the literature on consumer agency, we concentrate solely on those street marking practices imbued with multiple ideologies of reclamation of public place. Thus, we elaborate upon forms of street art sharing a critical reflection about the meaning and use of public space, which include both primarily pictorial (e.g., painted,

poster, stenciled, or stickered images) and primarily literate (e.g., poetry and slogans) representations.

### Street Art as Servicescape

These emergent manifestations of street art foster an interpretation of public place consumption that conforms to the sphere of the servicescape (Sherry 1998). The past decade has witnessed a burgeoning of interest in the built environment. Drawing from multiple perspectives—experimental tradition (Turley and Milliman 2000), social sciences, and philosophy (Casey 1993, 1997; Seamon 1993), and consumer research and marketing literatures (Bitner 1992; Brown and Sherry 2003; Sherry 1998)—scholars have expanded our knowledge of retail atmospherics, themed environments, brand design, cocreation, negotiation of public-private interface, “brandfests,” service encounters, and gender. The emphasis to date in this literature has been on commercial marketplaces and the edifice complex that generally (and literally) surrounds them. The exceptions to this tendency have been treatments of “retroscapes” (Brown and Sherry 2003), which have included accounts of open air markets and festivals, cyberspace and wilderness, and the mnemonics of consumer memorabilia, most of which are still tied to commercial transaction. Even though the role the built environment plays in the construction and communication of ideologies has been demonstrated (Borghini et al. 2009), what is still missing from conventional servicescape inquiry is insight into noncommercial (or countercommercial) ideo-

logical place-making that invites people to suspend, or at least modulate, their object position. This creation is often conceived of as conversion or reclamation of public space, as creative destruction, wherein wrongly privatized space is returned to its rightful owners. The built environment becomes a canvas, and often a palimpsest, in the sense that even though the original is overwritten, traces of it remain, restoring private to public, and engaging hitherto passive passersby, galvanizing them into an active interaction.

Street art addresses this gap. Shelley Sacks (2005) defines art as instruments that involve "trans-actions" between people, issues, and places. Thus, this participation draws spectators in as participants and brings about discourse. The action component is devoted to achieving some social result. Street artists seem to be in the vanguard of this trend, and their work helps "chip away at perceptions that the 'environment' is something 'out there' and that cities are not as deeply connected to other ecosystems as they are to global trade networks" (Smith 2005, 15–16). In addition, street artists proclaim urban buildings covered by ads and other commercial stimuli violate the spirit of the law by imposing the market ideology upon city dwellers (Banksy 2006).

### MULTISITED ETHNOGRAPHY

Our study is a multisited (Marcus 1995), multiyear, multinational, bi-gender team investigation of public place consumption via street art. Four consumer researchers of varied cultural backgrounds undertook ethnographic fieldwork in various countries including the United States (e.g., San Francisco, Omaha, Phoenix, Minneapolis), Italy (Milan, Turin, Pavia, Rome, Belgioioso, Sondrio, Taranto, Venosa, Vimercate), Netherlands (Amsterdam), the United Kingdom (London, Bristol), Belgium (Brussels), and Ireland (Dublin). Netnographic exploration further increased the number of cities sampled throughout the world. The Internet presence of street artists ranges globally from Los Angeles to Iran, from Israel to Japan.

Although data collection occurred across various cultural contexts (the United States and Italy, in particular), we do not offer a cross-cultural framing of emergent themes and conceptualizations. We acknowledge that multisited ethnography has more to do with the tracing of relations across sites than the description of individual localities (Kjeldgaard, Csaba, and Ger 2006), which is captured more precisely in the notion of translocality (Ekström 2006; Hannerz 2003). In particular, street art movements evince high rates of globalization in terms of aesthetic codes and languages, ideologies, target audiences, history, and marking practices, which are frequently reinforced by street artists' personal Web sites.

Our unit of analysis is public space as consumed. We look at the ways public space is defined, at the ideologies of entitlement of its use, at the transformative practices of street art, and at the reactions of artists, dwellers, and gatekeepers of public space. We document the conflicts, the confrontation, and the coconstruction of collective identities around this commons. However, we do observe local differences

in the way dwellers appropriate and consume public place. For example, we observe that European consumers are more prone than Americans to get involved in vivid theoretical and philosophical debates around the nature of public space. In addition, European towns have usually been developed around historical downtown centers and have a tradition of public congregation in squares. Thus, the issue of street art location (downtown versus the suburbs) becomes a major topic of confrontation in Europe. However, U.S. consumers are more prone to indulge in the enjoyment of fun occasioned by street art creations. Americans are more attentive to street art's educational aims, and view the downtown areas versus the suburbs as in more need of beautification. Beyond such local differences, however, we note a dominant and shared concern for a wishful rethinking of the meanings, entitlement, and enjoyment of public space as consumed. Given that multisited ethnography attempts to "grasp global or globalizing market conditions and relations" (Kjeldgaard et al. 2006, 521), we focus mostly on the dominant and common traits of artists' and dwellers' perspectives.

Moreover, we are not interested in interpreting particular subcultures (street artists versus dwellers), but we locate our cultural unit of analysis at the crossroads of those subcultures. For purposes of theory development, we confined the study to artists and dwellers, including in this latter category those critical of the phenomenon as well. Clearly, there are institutional antagonists to the phenomenon (law enforcement, abatement programs, civic associations, etc.), but they are beyond our scope.

Authors collected the data individually and as dyads or triads, met as an entire team periodically in person (and frequently online) to analyze data and strategize ongoing data collection, and jointly negotiated interpretations (Sherry 2007). Relying on snowballing and word-of-mouth techniques, researchers engaged in direct observation of street artists' practices and outputs as well as of the reactions and comments of passersby. Data collection ranged from observant participation (e.g., documenting street art creations in public settings; tracking of press reviews; monitoring the institutional debate involving public authorities, street artists, politicians, and dwellers) to participant observation. We recorded data by means of: (i) videotaping of street art interventions, (ii) manual and electronic capture of field interviews, and (iii) field notes documenting our participation in events and exhibitions of street artists (galleries, museums, etc.). Given the illegal nature of street art, we did not personally commit creative acts beyond our witnessing of the enterprise.

Semistructured interviews ranged between 2 and 8 hours with artists, and 15 minutes to an hour with passerby participants. Observations of and interviews with key informants were repeated over time as part of our immersive strategy (Berry 1989). In addition, researchers devoted abundant attention to the cultivation of trust among and elicitation of informed consent from informants, in order to be allowed to study the phenomenon in situ. This need explains our long interaction with key informants, whose

FIGURE 2

## CONSUMPTION IDEOLOGIES OF PUBLIC SPACE

		DWELLERS	
		Individualistic appraisal of public space	Collectivistic appraisal of public space
STREET ARTISTS	Individualistic appraisal of public space	<p><b>Private appropriation of public space</b></p> <p><u>Dialectical confrontation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contesting hypocrisy</li> <li>- Self-affirmation</li> <li>- Market exploitation</li> <li>- Dwellers' preserving private property</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dwellers' resistance to the alienation of public space</b></p> <p><u>Dialectical confrontation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contesting street art locations, forms, and intents</li> <li>- Defending the authentic voice of the place</li> </ul>
	Collectivistic appraisal of public space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enchanting urban space via gift</li> <li>- Enchanting urban space via vitalizing</li> </ul> <p><u>Dialectical confrontation</u></p> <p><b>Artists' claim for street democracy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dialogical recreation of public place</li> <li>- Sense of place and feeling the community</li> </ul> <p><u>Dialogical confrontation</u></p> <p><b>Striving for common place</b></p>

identities in this article are replaced by pseudonyms, except in cases where artists agreed (or insisted) that their street name be employed.

Data gathering was enhanced by large-scale collection of artifacts, including street art publications, press articles, television programs, flyers, street art guerrilla kits, and commercials deploying street art codes. As mentioned, netnography expanded the scope of the study to other countries and towns. The following street art sites were monitored over a period of 3 years: <http://www.artofthestate.co.uk>, <http://www.banksy.co.uk>, <http://www.eveline.milano.it>, <http://www.gruppoh5n1.splinder.com>, <http://www.i-v-a-n.net>, <http://www.opiemme.com>, <http://www.paopao.it>, <http://www.streetsy.com>, <http://www.thetvboy.com>, and <http://www.woostercollective.com>.

A rich data corpus of field notes, interview transcripts, Internet downloads, photo and video documentation, and archival sources has resulted from the study. Data were recorded electronically and manually. In particular, we conducted personal in-depth interviews with 12 key informant artists in Italy, and eight in the United States. We also interviewed 60 consumers in the act of consuming art or retrospectively commenting upon their experience. The comprehensive data set integrates 640 pages of transcriptions, 58 pages of blogs on the Internet, 450 photos, and 15 hours of videos.

## EMERGENT IDEOLOGIES OF PUBLIC SPACE CONSUMPTION

In this section, we attend to the voices of street artists, their appreciators and opponents, and the informants who

helped us understand the various ideologies underpinning the agentic consumption of public space. Conceptualizing of urban space as a collective good requires a multivocal account of the ways in which public space consumers define and appropriate this commons. The ideologies we unpack stem from the confrontation and sometimes the alignment between artists' and dwellers' visions and practices about the use of cityscapes and the role played by street art (fig. 2).

Our interpretive model identifies two mutually exclusive ways of appraising public space we call individualistic versus collectivistic. By *individualistic appraisal*, we mean subscription to the private appropriation of public space. In this venue, artists and/or dwellers act as separate agents who claim personal entitlement to public space or who dispose of these public spaces according to market rules. Consequently, they consider public space as a personal property that is contested among the parties. *Collectivistic appraisal* acknowledges the sharing of public space in the common interest. Dwellers and artists holding this position aim to defend the collective ownership of public space while striving for its restitution to meaningful consumption.

Sometimes conflicting, sometimes attuned, these voices recount dialectical versus dialogical ways of confrontation. Dialectics expresses the tension and opposition between two interacting parties and their related visions of public space. Dialogue is more explicitly related to the sharing of visions, values, and meanings ascribed to the role of public space. We notice that whenever at least one of the parties holds an individualistic appraisal of public space, the confrontation becomes necessarily conflictual (i.e., dialectical). In contrast,

we observe that the assumption of collectivistic positions by both dwellers and artists stimulates fruitful dialogues.

The intersection of artists' and dwellers' positions reveals four ideologies, including (i) private appropriation of public space, (ii) dwellers' resistance to the alienation of public space, (iii) artists' claim for street democracy, and (iv) joint striving for common place.

While it is possible to describe artists as producers, and appreciators as consumers, this is a fairly flat rendering of their roles. Recalling that our unit of analysis is public space, artists produce and consume public place in the act of aesthetic creation. Dwellers appreciating street art produce and consume both in the act of aesthetic apprehension and in the completion of various forms of street art.

### Private Appropriation of Public Space

We define the private appropriation of public space as the intersection of an individualistic view of public space by both dwellers and street artists. Since the emergence of street art, this ideology has constituted the most recurrent form of interpreting public space consumption and the locus of recurrent conflicts. It is interesting to note that this approach pertains to both artists and dwellers.

Artists perform individually in public space in at least three different ways.

*Contesting Hypocrisy.* Some artists contest the hypocrisy of clean walls that portend respectability while hiding corruption, selfishness, and social inequality.

And our good Dumbo, he's convinced instead . . . I've met him and spoke to him about this, and he has his own, let's say, principles regarding what is right . . . that is, he vandalizes because he wants to vandalize . . . so I like Dumbo more because he gave me his explanation and so at least . . . I don't share it, but it's a conscious act . . . at least, I think . . . in the sense he says: "I don't appreciate this society, it's fucked up, and so I'll dirty this wall, and when they say they want to clean the wall they should instead think about cleaning up what's *behind* it . . . what's *inside* it" . . . so, if you like, it's a gesture, but still destructive . . . and so it doesn't interest me much. I prefer to construct. (Pao, street artist, Milan, commenting on Dumbo's street work)

Contestation assumes shaded meanings. Pao's comment on the international writing interventions of Dumbo (in New York, Paris, Milan, etc.) is politically and ideologically embedded, as it denounces the insincerity and falseness of current society. In addition, Poo's life experience accounts for his enjoyment of opposition and the violation of rules and spaces to the point of accepting the conflictual physical reaction of dwellers and gatekeepers of public order.

Basically I've always liked scratching, irritating, making people run away . . . the gusto of doing something you can't do . . . the gusto of the prohibited . . . I've never gone to do a "legal" wall with other writers . . . I've never liked that . . . I've always much more preferred to do a scratched

writing, scratch the windows of a bus, even in front of the driver, and then come to blows. (Poo, street artist, Rome)

*Self-Affirmation.* Second, artists may egotistically accomplish self-affirmation.

It's a form of exhibitionism. You write your own name, and it has to be bigger and nicer than any other. . . . It's not a matter of space. You have marking pens and you write your name, wherever you are in the subway, in malls, etc. . . . We left walls for trains: this was our acme! (Max, street artist, Milan)

Well . . . so, basically a writer begins with walls . . . that is, first from paper and then on to walls, then to trains, and finally he aims at a higher-level target, the subway, the most common means of transport for the working class, the means that never stops and goes around the entire city, so by writing on one of those you're certain that your name (one name only) will make the rounds of the city until the cars are cleaned. . . . I don't want them to know it's me, because you can't do that. But let's say I've also always loved the idea of living a second life . . . it's like having a second personality in some sense. (Poo, street artist, Rome)

These voices attest to artists' self-orientation while leaving a personal marking on the cityscape. Poo embodies forms of self-affirmation achieved by means of parallel identities. His tagging practice is widely shared by other artists, most of whom adopt nicknames to cope with illegality. We observe different rates of intensity in the use of nicknames as camouflage. At one extreme, artists chase after notoriety, hiding behind their nickname: the English artist Banksy has long escaped from media while obtaining an international reputation and remarkable market quotations. At the opposite extreme, others—like the American sticking guru Obey (aka Shepard Fairey)—have adopted their nickname as a brand logo and operated in the open air, participating in public debates, giving interviews, and transforming their street practice into commercial business.

*Market Exploitation.* The third way artists individually appropriate public space involves the opportunistic bending of street art to market logics. Museums all over the world are institutionalizing street art by hosting its main exponents and debating its embedded ideologies. Among them, the Tate Modern Gallery in London has recently commissioned six internationally acclaimed artists to adorn its building's iconic river façade: the artist collective Faile from New York, United States; Nunca and Os Gêmeos, both from São Paulo, Brazil; Blu from Bologna, Italy; Sixeart from Barcelona, Spain; and JR from Paris, France. Such acclamation of street art facilitates its commercialization through art auctions and galleries and through artists' personal Web sites. For example, Banksy's work may garner prices that range between US\$7,700 and US\$92,000. Finally, artists are deploying street art aesthetics both to sell out their own garments and to design products for major international com-

panies (e.g., Adidas, Nike, Puma, Etro, Murakami, Nestlé, Porsche, Zurich, Bic). Some state that this enterprise is conducted in an effort to cover their street art costs. In this regard, Obey, who is considered a sellout by many in the graffiti subculture, has evolved his brand to worldwide prominence and has used it to develop a cultlike following, which has helped him create a successful clothing line and a ubiquitous (and controversial) U.S. presidential candidate poster. Although not to the same extent, elements of this pattern are evident with artists such as The Disposable Hero, Pao, TvBoy, Dem and Sea, Dado&Stefi, and others.

Musealization of street art, commercialization of artists' craft, and deployment of street art aesthetics on behalf of companies are sustained by the increasing notoriety achieved through artists' self-focused use of public space: the aforementioned self-celebration by means of personal logos, tags, and writings, which make public space a personal window.

*Dwellers' Preserving Private Property.* From the perspective of dwellers, this individualistic ideology of public space consumption implies conceiving of walls as private or government-controlled properties. As such, they cannot be lawfully violated by artists. Appreciators falling within this category reject street art performed illegally (i.e., against private property) and call for confining street art to museums or placing it under the control of the market by means of art auctions, galleries, and other forms of commercial exchange. The most vocal opponents judge artists to be vandals offending public decorum and violating individual rights.

When I first saw all those terrible and ugly signs on the shop windows close to my house and around the station, I thought that only young kids who are *vandals* would do that. Have you seen the house on the corner? They are going to spend a lot of money to clean the wall once again. A friend of mine lives there. Every year they have to do it. And it seems that the more they clean, the more these guys like painting. You don't even know when all this will come to end. Yesterday I told my son, "Look at this and listen to me! Never do that! If I see you doing something similar, you won't have a motorbike or your computer!" (Patrizia, dweller, Pavia)

Well I do know it [street art] is illegal, as an attorney. It violates the [city] code. It violates Common Law principle of trespass and so forth. Should it be? It looks like we have an abandoned tenement and personally, I don't have a problem with it, but I suspect city authorities are probably right when they say blight. . . . When they mark it up, it's still considered blight, but then I don't see how anyone could really be the judge of what's artistic and what's not, so it's a difficult situation, and I suppose the only solution is one the cities have chosen. They can't choose what's art and what's not, so they stop it all. (Ned, dweller, Phoenix)

Urban aesthetics, sense of belonging, and equality constitute symbolic, collective resources imbricated in street art practices that dissolve the clear-cut boundaries of private property (Smith 2007). Concerning this issue, our infor-

mants—both passersby and artists—hold alternative positions, which we discuss in the next paragraphs.

I'm happy to see that they think that way, and I like some graffiti—especially the ones that do not damage private property. When you travel by train you will see nice things painted on walls that without graffiti will be just gray. (Marco, dweller, Pavia)

## Dwellers' Resistance to the Alienation of Public Space

Dwellers dissatisfied with the ugliness of our cities may endorse an ideology of resistance to the alienation of public space. Overall, they claim entitlement to and sharing of city walls and thus question the boundaries of appropriation in public contexts. They observe that city walls, although privately owned, are nonetheless visible to everyone and thus made consumable to a larger set of stakeholders that may express legitimate rights in terms of use and renovation. In this logic, the public location of buildings mitigates the rights of the legal owners, and questions the separation of legality from the legitimation of public consumption. Legality merely ends in forms of juridical entitlement; legitimation incorporates ethical, aesthetic, and ideological entitlement.

Such resistance stems from two main ideological positions defending a common cultural, historical, and social heritage tied to space publicly consumed. The first reacts to what is perceived as individualistic street art and condemns the drift of street art that impedes the collective consumption of public space. The second captures the emergent quest for the construction of what we define as "authentic public place," implying collective involvement of artists and dwellers close to the local community. In this light, we recognize that authenticity is socially constructed (Grayson and Martinec 2004) by means of the collective action of public place consumers.

*Contesting Street Art Locations, Forms, and Intents.* Dwellers striving for collective shaping of urban space acknowledge the great variety of forms united under the aegis of street art. They often allow that certain interventions add to the place while others contribute to its decay. Beyond the undeniable subjectivity involved in their consideration of good and bad practices, data account for a few aspects of more shared agreement in the contestation of street art when constraining sense of community. First, the location of street art is of overwhelming importance:

It depends. . . . If intervention is on a monument or on walls of a certain value, for example just close to a 200-year-old door, it bothers me. Otherwise, it may be placed everywhere. Yes, in an empty place, in a park or on any anonymous wall it may stay, but if in that place there's something beautiful to see, well . . . it's useless adding, overburdening with something that may also be not particularly nice. It's different for putting art on the walls in the suburbs, these kind of engineer-made walls. (Edoardo, dweller, Milan)

Dwellers and artists are increasingly demanding the beautification of cityscapes, targeting distressed urban areas with the ultimate goal of smoothing socioeconomic inequalities encumbering local communities. European historical downtown locations are more easily contested as possible exhibition sites of artists' work, since street art placed there may subtract more than it can actually add to the majesty of the place. In our U.S. locations, the opposite was often the case, where the downtowns were more blighted and thus receptive to artists' work.

Second, informants report different levels of appreciation as they move across the various expressive forms of street art. While poetic assault, urban design, stencils, and even graffiti are more often welcomed, thanks to the irony, playfulness, and reenchantment they provoke, other forms are more usually rejected as reflected in the words of Gabriele and Jane:

Tags per se—whether or not they may be street art—are meaningless to me. It's the pure staining of walls or trains in the metro or anything else. Street art to me is only contextualized, distinctive and beautiful stuff. (Gabriele, dweller, Taranto)

Yeah, sometimes I feel bad because my uncle is actually a train engineer and he has to pay people to clean them. And it's very, very expensive actually. . . . When they defame something, they write all over a street sign so you can't even read the street sign. (Jane, dweller, Phoenix)

Finally, resistance can be related to artists' intentions.

Well, if it's creative I like it, but if it's something about hate, or some real strong message then I don't even look at it. (Bill, dweller, Phoenix)

Everyone shouts his own message. But there are various kinds of messages. I am irritated by the meaningless things I see, which are written just to scribble the walls. (Simona, dweller, Rome)

These words summarize the discontent with artists' practices of contestation and self-affirmation spoiling the beauty of towns. Sometimes such dissatisfaction is extended to any commercial deployment of street art, as effectively rendered by Raffaele:

I conceive street art as an open-air museum, something that has to be artistic, not an advertisement. . . . Should Banksy do advertising posters in the streets I'd look for its subliminal commercial message. I would react differently, I would raise barriers, I mean . . . so to understand what is hidden beneath. The idea of being passive in front of it would make me feel somehow violated. (Raffaele, dweller, Milan)

*Defending the “Authentic Voice” of the Place.* Within the enclave of dwellers resisting individualism, some in-

formants struggle to preserve the authenticity of their urban space. Such informants suggest that each space has its history and cultural identity that can be more respectfully incorporated into street art practices when native, local artists are enlisted.

Where we live, there is a lot of artwork along the highway walls. . . . I enjoy that. So if that's what you're talking about, then I think it would look very good. I think one of the things we have to be sure of though is that it's local artists that are doing the work and not having contractors or artists from other cities come in to decorate our city. I think we have enough talent here. And I think I'd like to see that. (Debra, dweller, Phoenix)

To me, [street art] is a way to experience the deep soul of urban places, a kind of tribal conscience . . . like going and meeting the people who have really lived the towns. They develop something in their rooms they later bring outside into the streets. In this sense, it may be an experience even more authentic than going to visit the MoMA, where paintings are collected from everywhere. And thus the fact that the MoMA is there and not in Johannesburg is by chance, it doesn't change a lot. (Luisa, dweller, Milan)

The inclusive impinges upon the exclusive in this account but seems territorial not necessarily in a defensive or parochial way so much as in a way that promotes “real” neighborhood consciousness and local empowerment. It is as if informants believe public place must arise organically and unfold according to a local agenda with which natives are more acquainted. This sentiment is also reflected in the remarks of a local business owner:

The street art is having the freedom to paint outside the boundaries. Thinking outside the system, such as the system of a canvas or a gallery. The stuff around here isn't street art because it's done by middle class kids, who are angry because their dad won't buy them a car. So they write misspelled words on the walls. . . . If it's done well, then it's a huge contribution. If it's done well, it's a commentary of what's going on in the neighborhood, by creative young minds. This neighborhood, it has nothing to do with any of that. It's done by drug dealers at 3 in the morning. (Ron, business owner, Phoenix)

We are struck by how some informants elaborate upon authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004) when striving to capture the ancestral voice of the place and thus raise a barrier against what they perceive to be decontextualized dialogues of street art. In their eyes, local artists can better serve the cause of referential and influential authenticity as well (Gilmore and Pine 2007). A passerby captures this ethos when commenting upon how artists' marks on garbage cans or metro trains make them feel the “biting of the underground life characterizing our towns,” since appreciation implies

feeling the boys who live in their towns without being possessed by these towns, but conversely trying to possess them. . . . That's why I say the street artist cannot be a person outside the community, since he belongs to his territory as much as he contests his sense of exclusion. By imposing his presence on the territory, street artist is a person feeling *that* place in *that* moment as his own land of belonging. (Luisa, dweller, Milan)

### Artists' Claim for Street Democracy

Artists in this category promoting street democracy, the collective stance, encourage a twofold contestation. On the one hand, they resist individualistic deployment of public space by both other artists and passersby. Consequently, they oppose the capitalistic sale of streets resulting in the commercialization of street art, the egocentric display of the self carried out by artists performing on their own behalf, the overwhelming domination of advertising, and the emphasis on private property marked by the individualistic dwellers and gatekeepers.

The wall of a house is a space that belongs to the eyes of the person looking at it . . . in this sense it's a public space. When we stick up that particular poem on that particular house we're not thinking of who's living there, who probably will never read that poem, because he lives behind it. We're interested in those who will see it with their eyes. . . . I'm not trying to have a relationship with the people, but with the city. The city is not only made up of people, of buildings, but of relationships between people and buildings, between people and walls, between the eyes of the people and our poetry. (Ludovico, street artist of the group h5n1, North Italy)

As Baudrillard said, the architectural phenotypes of the streets, house facades, are public property, so why are they private property? Perhaps we can begin to reason on this matter by saying that I occupy someone's private property, but someone takes possession of the private property on my street. The street is public and I don't see why the facades are private. (Mauro, street artist, Eveline, Milan)

I mean every artist that does stuff publicly does it for a different reason. None of us do it for the same reason. A lot of people go against the galleries, like, why should art only be in the gallery? For some stuffy . . . for \$900. Why can't I put a piece up there that's free? (Disposable Hero, street artist, Phoenix)

On the other hand, artists contest the abandonment and disuse of cityscapes due to the anonymity, grayness, and ugliness of urban space. They note how dwellers lack attachment and a sense of belonging, traversing their towns without meaningful consumption.

I think the relation between a person—I mean his identity—and his place is compulsory. We now have problems

[in our towns]; they are more spaces you pass through, basically, Augé's idea about nonplaces, these temporary, transitory zones. We drive through them, don't we? They flash at our sides; we don't even perceive them anymore. In the past, we were walking our towns! (Ivan, street artist, Milan, Turin, Pavia, and Paris)

The reconstruction of dwellers' ties to cities is not an easy task, as articulated by Abba.

What really pushes us is the need to communicate. Not only in Milan, which is particularly bad and cold, but in our society in general . . . that is, I enter this place, right? . . . You don't know how often I've dreamed of getting on a bus and saying: "Good morning!" like "Hi! Hi!", but if you do that, or even if I see someone doing it, I'd be happy, but I'd think: this person has some problems, a little crazy, etc., etc. . . . Eveline, in my opinion, allows you to get over this problem: that is, not being able to express myself with people as I'd like. (Abba, street artist, Milan)

He points out that the building of direct social interactions is often greeted with suspicion. Conversely, he argues that street art interventions can mediate this distrust and help cement connections among city inhabitants, as cogently phrased by Smith (2007).

The ideology of street democracy demands active and collective participation in the design and use of cityscapes. It refuses both the excesses of the appropriation of public space by single individuals and the lack of conscious consumption. This is the idea of street democracy, since it relates to the set of rights and duties that citizens have in democratic political settings. These artists acknowledge the right of collectively consuming public space as a collective good, while calling for participation, responsibility, and planning from its entitled owners.

The following excerpt summarizes our artists' ethos in this category by encapsulating many of the reclamation and action themes (Margolin 2005; Sacks 2005) our informants rehearsed for us. Data account for two main trajectories guiding street artists inspired by the ideology of street democracy, which we define as the enchantment of urban space via gift giving and via vitalizing.

What is the message you are trying to send? You can't be offensive. If I put naked chicks everywhere . . . first of all it's not going to last. People are going to rip it down. The general public . . . what I am trying to do is not going to come across for sure because it is offensive. . . . So I am very, very aware of . . . they are totally turned off and that's what I don't want, I want people to question it . . . I did a bus stop recently. It was a Las Vegas bus stop and it [the ad] said, "I was in a threesome. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." Okay what is that exactly saying? Cheat on your wife, spend all your money, and when you leave, you are fine because you were in fucking Las Vegas! Give me a goddamn break! I mean, how do I explain to my 7-year-old daughter what a threesome is? She asked me, so I took it as

my mission to pull that thing out of there and alter it. So I pulled it out and painted over, painted it [where] it says "I was in a threesome" and I painted over all the Las Vegas bullshit. I put "Love Life" and I put three huge panda faces on it and I painted over the whole thing. (Disposable Hero, street artist, Phoenix)

*Enchanting Urban Space via Gifts.* Street artists in this category are eager to reenchant the cityscape with "hierophanic" gifts (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) intended to awaken psychically numbed dwellers and reconnect them with a pleasurable consumable environment.

They feel that they enchant public space by leaving free interventions in the space that surprise the community. Enchantment refers to the distinction that aesthetic intervention brings to cityscapes. This distinction encompasses both sensual and ideological aspects of aura. Sensual seduction mostly relates to the reenchantment of urban landscapes and to the connected aesthetic experience of consuming more memorable and pleasurable places (Ritzer 1999). Aesthetic arousal implies excitement, vivacity, surprise, and a sense of discovery and enlightenment, which help consumers of public space plunge into the experience of (extra)ordinary urban life (Carù and Cova 2007).

Enchantment copes with the two main criticisms embedded in this ideology. First, the street artists' gifts mitigate the loss of entitlement to the consumption of public space caused by dominating market logics and self-oriented behaviors. Actually, street art offers alternative modes of aesthetic consumption to the hegemony of the culture industries (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006) and advertising. As documented in our field notes:

Over the last months, in Pavia you can find pieces of art and poetry almost everywhere (e.g., garbage cans, electric power boxes, mailboxes, hospitals, and abandoned buildings), especially in ugly and gray corners. . . . Anytime I get into a new one I can see many passersby showing attention and interest. They stop and read, and sometimes they smile. Noticeably, the impact of poetry on passersby's appreciation seems to be related to the most unexpected locations that enforce the sense of surprise. (Researcher's field note, Pavia, spring 2006)

The aesthetic thrum of the enchanted street is palpable, as our informants have emphasized.

There's also an aesthetic and artistic reason for what we do. . . . What's missing in the daily routine of going to work, taking the bus, is beauty. . . . what we write has to please people. . . . Besides the question of beauty, which is a bit presumptuous, there's the desire to have surprises in our daily lives, because it's nice to think someone has stopped and been struck by our work, and they write this even in the comments they leave (you made me smile, you improved that minute of my day) . . . they're surprising, because our

everyday lives are in danger of becoming gray. (Paolo, poetic assaulter, Pavia)

*Enchanting Urban Space via Vitalizing.* Second, as Paolo has observed, enchantment entails lightness, surprise, and aesthetic transformation, which help overcome the liminality and dissatisfaction arising from the social void of city lives (Bauman 2005). "Public art says the human spirit is alive here" and thus stimulates vitality and enjoyment (Smith 2007, 14). Further, Willis (1990, 11) observes: "Being human—human be-in-ness—means to be creative in the sense of remaking the world for ourselves as we make and find our place and identity."

Artists deploy enchantment to awaken the collective consciousness of sleepy dwellers and acknowledge the various reactions (from strong support to open contestation) that the same intervention may evoke from different audiences. Regardless of reaction, these artists are mostly concerned with creating a conversational commons wherein city inhabitants can confront one another. According to poetic assaulter Ivan, his street practices have been refined after his dialectical confrontation with the owner of a pub, upon whose walls he had formerly plastered his poems:

"Look, I like your poem, but if you paste a poem over another writing, you simply add dirty over dirty." Dear, I looked at him and I got a very important point: if something is good for you, it may not be the same for him. . . . Then, I started thinking, "How could I paste my poems in a different way?" Finally I came up with the idea of looming them on a removable support, and of sticking them on the street bridges. (Ivan, street artist, Milan, Turin, Pavia, and Paris)

Frequently, city dwellers are stimulated to be critical readers as well as active authors of street art texts and thus to react by completing artists' work so as to fulfill a sense of collective identity and belonging to shared space. This is a form of presumption, which may be intentionally stimulated by artists at the very inception of their creative act. Successful completion results in the physical and virtual agoras we document in the following paragraphs.

The city is the public forum par excellence; it's also defined as a theater where everyone is a protagonist in some way or another and a place whose true significance is especially in the past. . . . when there was the agora, a meeting place where the poor were basically on the same footing as the rich. You realize now that this is all becoming more difficult, except in towns. (Pao, street artist, Milan)

### Striving for Common Place

When dwellers and artists share representations of public space as a context for enriching dialogical confrontation, as a repository of collective meanings, and as a stimulus for a sense of belonging, we observe a final ideology of public

space consumption, which we characterize as striving for common place. Here efforts go beyond gifts and vitalizing to creating connection, belonging, and community. Such ideology occurs at the intersection of artists' and dwellers' utopian views according to which human behavior should be regulated by means of arts and culture more than through hierarchical control and repression. This transformational effort, converting public space into public place, generates liberated "playscapes," along the lines of the "cocreation of a utopian spectacle" (Maclaran and Brown 2005, 314). This new aesthetics stretches the ties of art beyond the object dimension to incorporate participation and action (Margolin 2005; Sacks 2005). These artists and dwellers strive to fulfill their dream and quite eloquently disclose their intent to promote a new ethic of dwelling in the spaces they reclaim.

[Street art] has a huge impact. It brings happiness to everyday boring life. . . . I think it brings obvious creativity, a sense of community. It brings people together. . . . It has a huge impact on culture. It creates culture I think. (Bob, dweller, Phoenix)

Being a creator is the opposite of passive victim or consumer. If we don't like the world as it is, well then we need to step up to the canvas and paint a better picture and inhabit it. (Audette Sophia, street artist, California; Web site: <http://www.audettesophia.com>)

Your collective identity as citizen has to be negotiated with many others. I mean . . . also people living in Milan, despite their disgust for Milan, they need to feel part of something otherwise . . . it's more staying in a place rather than living it. . . . This is, in my opinion, the real soul of street art. . . . There's this kind of artistic instinct stimulated by a dialogue with the urban landscape. I mean . . . urban landscape should stimulate something. . . . We'd receive this message: "Come on, this sidewalk is also *mine!*" This is the road I walk every day. It has happened to you, I'm sure. I don't know, streets have such evocative power, I mean . . . I'm more moved walking the street I used to walk in high school in Messina than in coming back to my old bedroom 'cause my bedroom has been internalized. Conversely, the street is not mine, because it belongs to many, but in this sense it's also mine . . . I think that by creating powerful messages in the street, [artists] make people internalize them in the long run. (Luisa, dweller, Milan)

Aesthetic agency becomes the impetus to the social change of connection, belonging, and community; redesign re-enchants the cityscape, encouraging proactive and responsible dwelling, as if artists could view towns through the eyes of dwellers envisioning rejuvenated public places. Artists, together with dwellers, share in the utopian emancipation (Levitas 1990) of public space that, once unchained from its usual constraints of ugliness, invisibility, and liminality, becomes a meaningful, consumable collective good. This ideology evolves from two final processes that—while

acknowledging their interconnections—we treat separately, in the interest of clarity.

*Dialogical Re-creation of Public Place.* By sharing a commons, street artists reject unidirectional, dominating approaches to the reclamation and consumption of public place. Pao's earlier description of the street as the "agora" of a community reflects one of the strongest themes in our research, the vision of conversational involvement of and confrontation with entitled consumers of contemporary towns. Collective discussion may imply different levels of agreement (fig. 3). Street artist Pao narrates the contradictory reactions of a policeman to his artwork, which is replicated in the narratives of several other informants. "A policeman was memorable: first he fined me, and then he shook my hand." The fluid shift from critical opposition rooted in institutional belonging to personal appreciation illuminates the point.

Dialogical involvement is strewn with difficulties first arising from the loss of familiarity with active and critical interaction within urban space and its community. Second, stimuli and communicational codes deployed by artists may be ineffective. This idea of acquaintance with forms of public confrontation unfolds from the emblematic experience of the group Eveline that performs poetic assault in Milan. These artists describe the frustration deriving from an awkward interaction with dwellers, whose interest is not questioned but is difficult to channel.

We realized . . . that in some spaces in particular sticking up a poem that was already written was a mistake. For example, I had stuck up a poem already written in front of a high school . . . the next day I returned and saw the poem had been changed . . . all the words changed . . . and I thought: "You're right, I was wrong. You're 18, for five hours a day you get an earful, and now I come along to tell you things." It was crazy, and so basically I understood that we had to put up a blank poem to make them write. . . . [We got] a fairly disappointing reaction I'd say. . . . It was disappointing in that: being given an opportunity, which a blank sheet is, in my view . . . a sensible opportunity even, in that: writing on a wall is illegal, sticking up a blank sheet is illegal . . . but writing on a blank sheet that's been stuck up isn't. It's just that, given this chance, people responded . . . I'll sum it up in a slogan which is "Giusy I love you." That's the qualitative intellectual level of the answers we got . . . bullshit, incredible bullshit. . . . So on the one hand we were disappointed by this from people we expected more from . . . but on the other hand it helped us understand that maybe it wasn't the best way . . . maybe the blank sheet is a bit aggressive. (Mauro, street artist, Eveline, Milan)

Our empirical evidence shows how dialogical impediments can be overcome through various arousal techniques spanning from beautification to surprise, and from ideological messages to irony. The interaction engendered in appreciators and opponents becomes the basis for ongoing relationships, fueled by the gift of the unexpected, which

FIGURE 3

## PASSERSBY AND GATEKEEPERS APPRECIATING STREET ART



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

eventually becomes familiar. Dwellers confirm how appreciation for street art beautifying interventions returns attention to public place.

I like the excitement. I like that it is busting out, and lighting up. I like that vitality. To an extent, I like that it is there, even if it's not my thing. (Gwen, dweller, Phoenix)

I like hidden corners, flowers on a window, a message left by a lover “Maria, I will love you forever” . . . such things. In Corso Ferrini, somebody wrote a piece of poetry on the stairs. This is a piece of art. The place itself is ugly. . . . Once I went there to see a house on sale and I told myself “oh dear, I cannot live in this place.” But then you see this poetry. It means that somebody who was there had this good

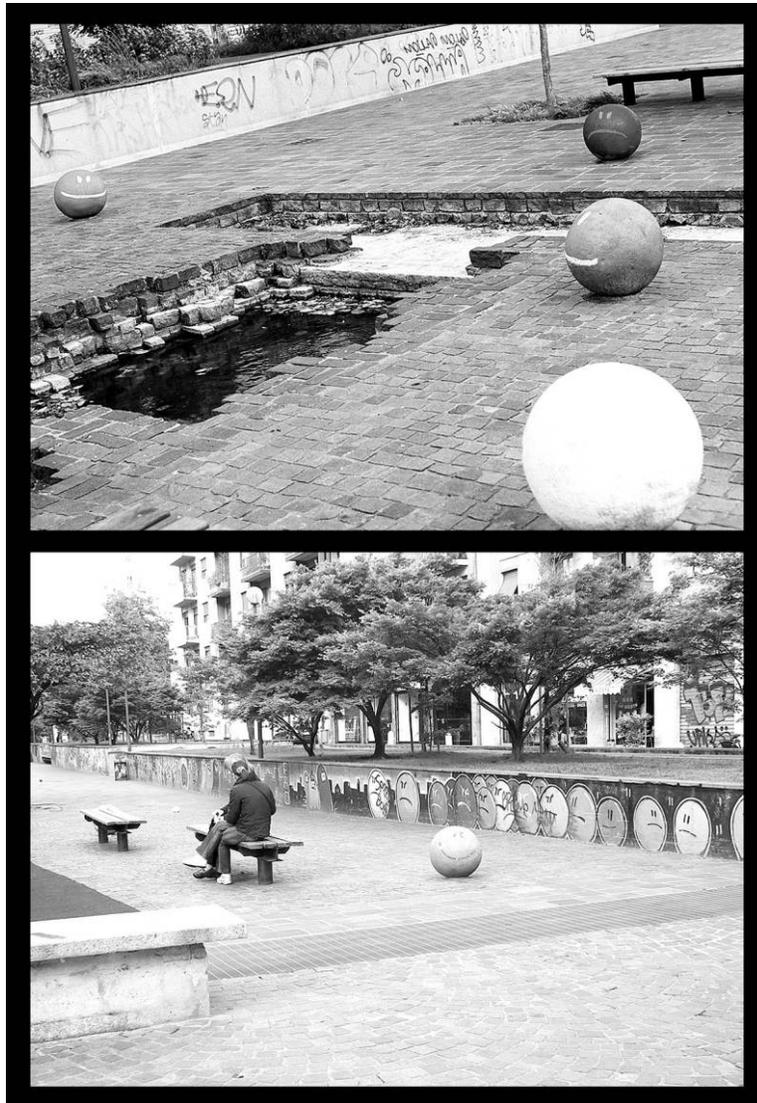
idea to write something. Words make the place nicer. What is the problem? Now it has a meaning. (Paola, dweller, Pavia)

Further, dwellers may be actively involved in the project of vitalizing by defending artists’ work, collecting money for artists, helping design interventions, and lobbying for the legitimization of street art. These traits are well depicted in the following field note.

Case of the cement garden of Via Cesariano, in the suburbs of Milan—the place comprises a large portion of land, half meter beyond the street level. This kind of square is surrounded by a short wall, and has a broken fountain in the middle. The only architectural ornaments are cement balls in the four corners of the square. The whole area, which had embodied abandonment and ugliness, attracted attention from

FIGURE 4

PARTICIPATED REDESIGN OF THE MILAN NEIGHBORHOOD OF VIA CESARIANO:  
DURING THE INTERVENTION AND AFTER ITS COMPLETION



NOTE.—Color version available as an online enhancement.

urban designer Pao. Dwellers narrate how Pao started painting a portion of the wall overnight, in total anonymity. Afterward, he went back to the neighborhood and started collecting dwellers' feedbacks and feelings about his incomplete project. He was overwhelmed by positive reactions and observed the starting of a collective discussion about the completion and legitimation of the work. . . . Some simply appreciated the work and expressed pleasure about the beautified space. Many others started collecting money to buy bombs-spray and asked Pao to finish his work during the daylight. Finally, a group of people stimulated a debate on the legitimacy of street art in their neighborhood and

the opportunity to involve local governments in its legalization. This collective action led to the total renovation and reenchantment of the square [see fig. 4]. Now, dwellers express pride in their square. (Researcher's field note, Milan, autumn 2008)

Other times, street art is appreciated more for its ideological message. As a manifesto contesting the market domination and the exploitation of the consumer (Cova and Dalli 2009), street art is interpreted as an indictment of consumerism and the excesses of materialism in public space. As

Judy (dweller, Minneapolis) comments: “It’s just what I think art is about: freedom. Not commercialized. Individuality.” Informants also suggest how street art can aim more specifically to leverage social and market inequalities afflicting people. In this light, street art constitutes a form of political intervention via aesthetic activism.

[I think] precincts are important since—par excellence—they are places orbiting around downtown areas. If the downtown is the producer of meanings, then those meanings are received by the precincts. I’m not a “man in the control room,” thus I’m interested in the places where meanings are received more than originated. Additionally, peripheral areas are places where human density and connection to poetry are stronger. Even more . . . it is where you experience in many ways a sense of belonging to a social organism far from the anonymity of the downtown. Third, and that’s really important, precincts are often marginalized, excluded and discriminated by urban policies applied in such a chaotic and crazy manner. . . . I’m interested in talking to poor people, ’cause it [poetry] is a form of poor art. (Ivan, street artist, Milan, Turin, Pavia, and Paris)

Whether aesthetic or ideological, street art may seduce dwellers, since “[street art] gives a depth to the environment; it gives it kind of a street feel. It gives it a sort of individuality, so it sticks out from all the corporate structure that is just down the street” (Mary, dweller, Phoenix).

*Sense of Place: Emplacement and “Feeling the Community.”* Town as “place” to be, to have, to consume, and to share, implies two main interconnected perspectives, which we detail below. In fact, dwellers’ enjoyment originates both subjectively and socially.

[Street art] brings people down here, people come to see it. It brings commerce to an area that was almost kind of dead before. It makes people excited to come and see other things and it gives a creative expression to a city that’s not exactly very creative. (Mary, dweller, Phoenix)

Through aesthetic reenchantment, informants observe how revival and recovery are abetted by this process and how inhabitants are empowered by the reclaimed environment. Moreover, they observe how appreciation of their neighborhoods can be extended far beyond the sphere of local inhabitants to include “foreign” visitors. Thus, street art functions as a kind of beacon product, encouraging a form of destination window shopping in its appreciators. In so doing, the conversion of space to place builds the self-esteem of the locale, revitalizing all that it touches. It ultimately animates the appreciator, providing him or her with a badge of membership:

Well I’m always a big fan of street art as long as there’s thought put into it, and there’s skill behind it—you know, effort—and that it’s not just tagging. . . . I think maybe it should be used in areas that aren’t maybe as nice as other areas and it would maybe give people an outlet for a hobby.

People could go there and express their emotions and express their thoughts through visual art. . . . That’s a lot of what this . . . live street culture is becoming: a more popular culture. It makes you seem real, or you get credibility from it. (Sam, dweller, Phoenix)

Emplacement strengthens feelings of closeness to the inhabited place, as well as a sense of legitimization and entitlement to its consumption. It constitutes “embodied experience” (Joy and Sherry 2003) and “embodied passion” (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003, 333), linking dwellers to their town and thus to its cultural, historical, and social heritage.

## INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY

In lamenting the withering forces of commercial and government-controlled supervision in contemporary public spaces, Bauman (2005, 63, 74) has posed two essential questions that capture the essence of our inquiry. The first is, “Are not the blank walls, and all flat surfaces carrying no messages, the updated, liquid modern version of the ‘void’ which all nature, in this case, the nature of information society, abhors?” The second is, “Where is such an institution [that will protect public place] to be sought?” The seeds of the answers seem to reside in the questions themselves. Clearly, our artist and dweller informants—the consumers of public place—imagine themselves to be in the vanguard of a new restoration, an urban renewal project that deploys aesthetics in the service of a reclaimed commons.

Our interpretive model depicts four ideologies of public space consumption arising from the agentic interaction of dwellers’ and artists’ individualistic versus collectivistic inclinations. While the ideology of private appropriation of public space clearly marks conflicts emerging from utilitarian appropriation of public space by both artists and dwellers, the two ideologies of dwellers’ resistance to the alienation of public space and artists’ claim for street democracy capture situations in which the quest for communal collides with self-interest. Only when stakeholders share the same understanding of street democracy, which gives back place to its owners, can the consumption of a commons that is equally meaningful and enacted be fully appreciated. The last ideology is increasing in its impact upon the life of city inhabitants, as it subverts unquestioned routines and patterns that have negatively affected sociality and sense of belonging to a commons since the rise of (post)industrial towns (Augé 1995; Bauman 2005).

It is remarkable that multiple ideologies of public place consumption coexist. Considering the collective nature of the good, one might have expected to observe the domination of sense of collectivism, community, and shared identity of the place. Building upon an economics tradition, Fehr and Gächter (2000) relate the consumption of public goods to the way social norms are established and maintained. We demonstrate that positive and negative conversations between artists and dwellers help overcome the logic of self-

interest and advance forms of cooperation and belonging, particularly in contexts where market competitiveness and lack of trust exist, as happens in contemporary towns (Bauman 2005).

Deploying art in unexpected or forbidden places to stimulate reflection and social action, street artists and active dwellers create an aesthetic commons that invites belonging and participation. They operate as “curators” (Schalk 2007) who enhance the public character of a site and empower its diverse stakeholders. An urban curator is an “independent cultural worker” who is able to sidestep the constraints imposed by the “myth” of the architect, by bureaucratic building law, and by market economics, to create relationships of “greater connectedness” between people and environments (Schalk 2007, 165, 157). (For additional examples of street art, see figs. A1–A9 in the online version of the journal.)

Bauman’s (2005, 77) belief is that public places that “recognize the creative and life-enhancing value of diversity, while encouraging the differences to engage in a meaningful dialogue” are the sites for the future of urban life. Our more utopian informants share this belief.

## CONCLUSION

We have attempted to make a multivalent contribution through our multisited account of street art practices and the related ideologies of consumption of public place. First, we have sought to vitalize research and debate around collective goods, the entitlement of their consumption, and the dynamics of collective sharing versus capitalistic appropriation (Holt 2002), which our ethnography documents within the context of public space.

Second, we have sought to contribute to the appreciation of public space as consumed. Recent discussion of public discourse, whether it laments the sublimation of citizen to consumer, or promotes the denial of citizen and consumer, returns the analytic focus unrelentingly to place. Even in nuanced analyses of political, economic, and cultural zones of citizenship (Miller 2007), place remains the foundation of agency. Of special significance to our position is Ruth-erford’s (2000) claim, in view of his Habermasian interpretation of the eclipse of utopian public space, that the individual’s participation in public discourse largely represents an aesthetic response to contesting hegemonies. One of our informants is especially eloquent in her assessment:

The real metropolis is the one with these buildings all in line, with its anonymous streets. . . . There are objectively depressing landscapes. They don’t tell any story, and if you pass by at 8 in the evening, you see the TV lights, which give you the impression that your life is the same as thousands of other lives, since your home is the same as many others. Your big building in New Jersey is the same as a big building in London. I think it is a kind of rebellion against this sensation of being homogenized. (Amelia, dweller, Milan)

Third, we believe our interpretive model (fig. 2) can be adapted to understand the consumption of other public goods beyond space/place. The model poses the question of consuming public goods within a dialogical confrontation of differently entitled consumers having rival ideologies about the nature and the borders of public goods. Certainly, each public good maintains idiosyncratic features, asking for a critical adaptation of the model. At the same time, we have here defined the public nature of consumer goods from a supra-economic perspective, according to which goods become public whenever a collectivity of citizens attributes itself a shared ownership over them (Sargeson 2002). We believe the understanding of other public goods could benefit from the constructivist, agentic, and conversational view encapsulated in our model. Among others, the spirited debate around the health-care reform in the United States, the exploitation of natural resources around the world, the “ownership” of and access to Internet information, or the privatization of water in Italy might be read beyond the merely economic domain. In fact, these issues can also be disentangled by locating them in relation to citizens’, media’s, and governments’ fluid definitions of what is public and what is private, of what should be granted to everyone, and what has to be regulated via the market.

Finally, we address agency within the unexplored context of public goods. Collective goods involve entitlement of various stakeholders and thus stimulate multiple agentic behaviors, which can reinforce or weaken one another. The terrain of such imbricated agency stems from the dialectical and dialogical confrontation of multiple owners and consumers of public place and public goods in general. Our informants both accommodate and resist consumer and statist culture in their engagement with public goods through street art. The illegality of the practice is a compelling repudiation of the rules of these cultures, and the channeling of street art talent into the marketplace may be both an aspect of the endless cycle of capitalist appropriation (Holt 2002) and a way to help underwrite guerrilla activity (Borghini et al. 2010). This engagement underscores the triumph of “and/both” over “either/or” agency.

And while they may share some ideological commitments—and even the ironic gloss of “brand community”—with their desert brethren (Kozinets 2002), our informants eschew the temporary secession strategy of Burning Man participants for one of occupation, taking their critique to the streets rather than the wilderness. Theirs is a settled sedition rather than a wandering one. They are more dwellers than pilgrims, bent on creating a communitecture (Browne and Viladas 2009) that celebrates the common good:

Think about . . . the [local neighborhood]. . . . Street art has completely changed the area. Now it is beautiful, it has a public value, a social identity. . . . [We] are “social animals” so we have it. But we are not using the streets anymore to live this social aspect of our lives. . . . Graffiti . . . should remind us that we are losing this public side of our life. They are on the walls like advertising. Sometimes we think that

they are graffiti and actually they are commercial advertising! I would like to see people chatting in the streets. Imagine that somebody draws something on walls and others stay there and comment. Only good paintings should be allowed and dwellers could judge and decide what to keep and preserve. (Alberto, dweller, Pavia)

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