

© MARINA G. TCHISTIAKOVA

*Tyumen State University  
mgtch@yandex.ru*

UDC 130.2(7.01)

**CHANGE SPACE — CHANGE LIFE:  
SOCIAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONTEXTS OF STREET ART**

*SUMMARY. Various forms of street art are investigated in this paper in the context of urbanization issues. Large cities change the mentality of a man, generating alienation, distance, and segregation in society. Street art is regarded as a phenomenon, transforming social and existential space as well as a city landscape. The paper traces a correlation between an activity of members of situationist International and modern artistic activism. As one of the strategies breaking alienation the situationists suggested to construct atypical, routine-free situations, which were to be followed by arrangement of principally new links among people in order to liquidate atomization of society. In all its manifestations (actionism, graffiti, flash-mob, etc.) street art places spectators into an unusual context of perception where they can experience feelings hardly possible in ordinary life. Street art is reviewed as an attempt to break free from urban environmental suppression by means of creating unexpected sometimes ironic modes of space art based on game or experiment.*

*KEY WORDS. Anthropology, situationism, street art.*

Artistic practices of street art have been intensively developed since the mid 20th century. This was the transition time: the industrial society model gave way to the post-industrial; cultural paradigm of modernism was replaced by postmodernism. Being originally a marginal, subcultural phenomenon, by the end of the 1980s street art, owing to the activities of its talented representatives, such as J.M. Basquiat, K. Haring, K. Scharf, was “legalized” as an independent form of contemporary art. Street art includes various kinds of artistic activities carried out in the space of the city by mostly non-professional artists. They are graffiti — font or storyline painting of surfaces — walls, fences, cars, etc.; graffiti cover diverse subjects — from socio-political protests to entertainment. They are performance and happening — forms of actionism (artistic actions art), often presented in the urban environment — in gardens and parks, streets and squares. It is flash mob — a spontaneous happening performed by a crowd driven by a certain idea. Street art is diverse both stylistically and thematically, but in any case its integral part is the city, closely woven into its tissue. This kind of artistic practice appears as a response to the challenges that come to the human from the urban environment.

The influence of large cities on a human has been actualized in the process of forming industrial society. A significant part of theoretical heritage of the first half

of the 20th century is dedicated to the idea that large cities not only accumulate all the diversity of the contemporary experience, but also significantly change a person's attitude to the world. E. Durkheim, M. Weber, G. Simmel believed that the city is the birthplace not only of the industrial society paradigm, but also a new anthropological type — a modern man.

Megacities have put a person before a number of new challenges. Social mimesis here is not focused on following their ancestors' customs, as it used to be in the country, and on the principle of novelty, on the idea of progress, with its belief in the superiority of a modern man, his culture, values, technological advantages over the way of life of previous generations. In the country, relations between people have been formed on interpersonal, "spiritual" basis, as almost all residents have been more or less familiar with each other. In cities such relations are not possible due to overcrowding: warm-heartedness has been replaced here by indifference toward another person, detachment and estrangement. One of the paradoxes of the megacity is that people here are close to their fellows only spatially, but not socially and far less existentially. Detachment turning into indifference that characterizes relationships between inhabitants of the megacity is applied to any reactions of a person to the surrounding reality. In the megacity there are so many kinds of stimuli that gradually their perception by a person fades, the ability to adequately respond to them exhausts, empathy becomes a rare phenomenon, but indifference, on the contrary, becomes comprehensive. The big city, as G. Simmel wrote, is characterized by the state of "callous indifference" [1; 27], and its residents face atrophy of feelings. In this situation, a man is a stranger to another man: the theme of existential loneliness, "loneliness in a crowd," has been largely initiated by the realities of the big city. D.B. Clarke wrote that in the big city there is a breakdown of the correlation "between social and physical space" [2; 44], whereas earlier people who were close spatially used to be close from a social point of view. It is impossible here to be acquainted with everybody: relationships, earlier based on feelings, have gradually been transformed into rational, utilitarian, full of practicality. G. de Vries reveals "industrial, prudent rationality, egocentrism, individualism" in their foundation [3; 293]. The situation of lack of norms and values common for everybody actualizes the problem of identity. The rapid growth of individualism accompanied by increasing human desire for freedom from all the circumstances has determined such qualities of urban dwellers as mobility, willingness to easily change not only the location but also attitudes, opinions, points of view. G. Simmel notes that the city seems to have become a source of immense human personal freedom, but this feeling is deceptive, because he faces one of the key problems of our time — the need to "protect his independence and identity from violence of the society, historical tradition, external culture and way of life" [1; 23].

From an aesthetic point of view, an industrial city has been perceived ambiguously: T. Adorno, H. Zedlmayr, A. Döblin described the new city blocks in the context of the category of the "ugly" [4; 340]. Perhaps urban processes were welcomed as a program only by futurists. In a sense, they can be considered forerunners of modern street art, as they called for the release of the art from museums into streets

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(D.Burlyuk nailed his paintings to the walls of buildings), for the aesthetic development of cities (suprematist Vitebsk of K. Malevich), art events held by them were quite relevant to modern happenings — it is enough to recall futurists walking around Moscow with their faces painted. In all these cases, in full accordance with the aesthetics of modernism, the industrial city was considered as an arena for artists to realize their utopian ideas about building a new world and a new man by means of art. Outside futurism, the city is often interpreted as suppressing space, as “physically and ideologically oppressive environment which has acquired inhuman features” [5; 84], environment, dependent on the interests of economy, not a person. For the power, the city is a tool for manipulating the society and controlling it.

The transition of the society from the industrial to the post-industrial model as well as changing cultural paradigms has even more exacerbated the problem of detachment, alienation, estrangement, despite the fact that throughout the 20th century representatives of various areas of human knowledge, art, politics, with varying degrees of radicalism made attempts to change the situation. One of the most striking examples of this kind is the French “Situationist International,” artistic and political movement, whose criticism of the consumer society largely inspired the youth unrest in 1968.

For G. Debord urbanism is “capitalism’s capture of human and natural environment into its own property” [6; 59], resulting in disunited and atomized society. Situationists — primarily G. Debord and R. Vaneigem — developed a series of practices aimed at transforming the “radical artistic gesture into the radical political” [7]. These practices aimed at the development of urban spaces and work with them included psychogeography, which is understood as the study of landscape influence on emotions and behavior of people; “drift” which is aimless wandering around the city, similar to Baudelaire’s *flanerie*, however, not indifferent, but critically coloured toward the “society of the spectacle”; designing of “situations”, moments of life created by means of “collective organization of the atmosphere of unity and events game” [8] intended to create new connections between people in addition to those established by this society. The task of the situationists, according to G. Debord is “direct involvement in a passionate abundance of life through a deliberately organized variety of ephemeral moments. The success of these moments cannot be expressed in anything else except their fleeting effect. Situationists consider cultural activity in a set of experimental methods of constructing daily life, methods that have to be constantly developed over leisure time and blur the boundary separating it from work (starting from the boundary separating art work)”[9;25]. This kind of artistic activism as street art in this context can be interpreted as a practice aimed at changing the existing circumstances by means of “direct action” advocated by situationists, implemented “here and now”, creating new communication opportunities for people involved into this situation.

Interpretations of the texts of the “Situationist International” representatives carried out through the prism of postmodern cultural paradigm put the revolutionary excitement aside. “By the 2000s the reception of the situationism in its peaceful,

purely theoretical form occurred: the situation is often used as a roomy, almost elastic concept, by means of which you can describe almost all extrainstitutional or collective artistic practices” [7]. The prism of soft postmodern culture, through which the interpretation of these previously uniquely revolutionary and critical toward the society texts is carried out, deprives them of their inherent radicalism (though experience shows that any social and political exacerbation of the situation brings us to a completely authentic interpretation of them). Revolutionary aesthetics is replaced by the “aesthetics of interaction,” whose vivid example in the sphere of street art is knitting art. This kind of creative work that emerged less than ten years ago is also often called “yarn bombing,” sometimes — “graffiti knitting”. In all cases, we talk about decorating various elements of the urban environment with the help of bright yarn, hooks and needles for knitting, resulting in a temporally short transformation of ordinary landscape into a bright, memorable sight.

Knitting art is a curious study object in several contexts: it expressed the problems of the industrial as well as the post-industrial society. The important fact that the priority here is given to the manual and not machine knitting can be interpreted as an attempt to stand against the unifying influence of civilization. But urbanism, unifying both society and space, at the same time inspires searching for a new environment and a new lifestyle. Thus, knitting art sets unification against authenticity of an object created manually; atomization of the society — against creation of communities within it, uniting people with common interests, the very “designing of situations”, which was described by Situationists, calling for the creation of atypical situations other than ordinary designed to lead to the establishment of fundamentally new connections between people. Street art in all its manifestations (actionism, graffiti, flash mob, etc.) puts the viewer in the unusual context of perception, allowing him to experience feelings unlikely in everyday life. Knitting art, from this point of view, is nothing more than an attempt to overcome the urban “oppressive environment” by making unexpected decisions of decorating space, decisions, equally ironic, game-like and experimental. This is the very “game diversion”, which was described by R. Vaneigem [10; 170]. Hidden in elegant knitted covers, rusty pipes and lampposts; knitted figures sitting on the fence, bright rasta man hat on a statue head create an image of another environment — not hostile, but (at least here and now, at this moment of time and at this space point) friendly and comfortable. Game “humanization” of the urban environment conquers by its sincerity and warmth, gives a feeling of freedom of expression and joy, creates new opportunities for communication and, ultimately, brings the society together.

Unlike traditional graffiti art objects of knitting art provoke not only visual, but also tactile perception from the viewer. Unusual situation in which he takes this simple action, attaches special importance to the latter (as if this feeling was experienced by him for the first time, or, conversely, for the last time in his life), in other words, in the world overpopulated by simulacra, it is experienced as reality. In this respect knitting art acts as a reaction to simulacrisation and growing virtualization of modern culture. The specific feature of knitting art is its absolute non-aggressiveness. Unlike

politicized and packed with social issues graffiti, the knitting art statement sounds peaceful: “I want the world to be a better place.” We can assume that the reason for that is gender proportion of participants: among them there are more women. But in the Western culture of triumphant feminism women often exhibit different manifestations of masculinity, whereas knitting art is rather associated with the return of traditional views on women as homemakers, creators of warm, lived-in, cozy space. In the context of the postmodern situation in culture — with its uncertainty, the abandonment of the logic of binary oppositions underlying this culture — knitting art is yet another sign that the culture is in search of a more stable state.

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