

Review of Glaser, K., 2017. Street Art and New Media. Actors – Practices – Aesthetics

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Ilaria Hoppe

Catholic-Private University Linz
Institute of Contemporary Arts and Media
Betlehemstr. 20 / 4020 Linz, Austria
i.hoppe@ku-linz.at

The book written by Katja Glaser is the outcome of several years of research for her dissertation in media studies. From this perspective, she analyzes the intertwined relationships between street art, the internet, and social media. Glaser relies on Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory, among the work of other authors, which thinks of media as dynamic agents within social--and in this case digital--interactions. The outcome of this approach is a new understanding of art in general, which cannot be perceived any longer as a single piece by one author, but more as a collaborative, relational, and networked activity, which of course suits the general idea of street art very well.

Before introducing her case studies, Glaser gives a very useful overview of the current state of research on street art. She does not follow every ramification but concentrates on monographs, although Young (2014) and Schacter (2014) are missing. Another section summarizes recent developments in research on locative media art. Here she puts forward the term "distributed aesthetics", coined first by Lovink/Münster (2005), which tries to overcome the notion of an entirely visual perception by acknowledging digital and networked relationships in the process of art production and dissemination.

In order to succeed in the description of street art as a media-related, socially constructed artistic practice, Glaser uses quantitative and empirical research methods, like photographic documentation, interviews and analysis of online platforms like Facebook. She emphasizes that social media offer rich possibilities for dissemination and

participation, opening new means of communication between artists and their audience. Nevertheless, underlying criteria for special sites including algorithms, are not neutral, but are able to push or constrain images or careers as Derwanz (2013) has already pointed out. The practices of linking and liking between host sites, bloggers, artists, and audience reflect inherent and often unspoken values of the street art subculture, but this communication is arranged by the "like economy" and platform politics as well.

The case studies are divided first by in-depth descriptions of the most significant street art techniques: the stencils of Hamburg-based kurznachzehn and the paste-ups of El Bocho. Glaser gives a thorough report about the many ways in which images are processed, from the finding of a motive to the documentary photographs. Then the author follows their dissemination in mobile applications, where they become locative media and function as augmented reality for the user and via guided street art tours. Both options change the perception of the urban environment and not least of street art itself. Paolo Cirio's project Street Ghosts tackles these dynamics further by bringing back (involuntary) portraits of Google Street View on the streets as pasted cutouts and reloading them on Google+. By doing so, he discloses hidden mechanisms of a global internet player. Glaser dedicates the last case study to the relocation of images by Sweza. The artist shows the options of hacking the public sphere by using QR-Codes that bring back buffed works on a mobile device. He uses a virtual archive that is as ephemeral as his own images of QR-Codes, which in turn try to preserve ephemeral street art.

The author highlights the media-related implications of Sweza's pieces, questioning the (online) archive as an instrument for the preservation of cultural heritage in general.

In her conclusion, Glaser emphasizes that today's street art cannot be perceived as disconnected from digital media. Furthermore, her analysis shows clearly the instrumentalization of street art by touristic and commercial purposes, also through the growing number of festivals, which the author addresses in her conclusion as well. Closing remarks target the academic research on street art, for which Glaser demands more interdisciplinary and international collaboration to establish a field of study in its own right. Even though Katja Glaser is herself driven by disciplinary interests, she has contributed in a most valuable way to this demand.

References

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