

# **MAKING THE STREETS: SIGNIFICANCE OF CREATIVE SOCIAL PLAY IN PUBLIC STREETS -- A CONNECTION BETWEEN STREET ART AND STREET FESTIVALS**

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## **Resumo**

Arte e festival de rua, assim como o carnaval, são expressões culturais criativa e interativa praticadas no espaço público nas nações caribenhas e latino-americanas. Todavia não existem estudos que focalize a relação entre estes dois tipos de atividade social criativa. Esta interpretação aborda o comum como meio expressivo e examina sua relação com a rua. Este artigo mostra a significação social da rua como uma prática social e criativa necessária para a mudança e desenvolvimento da cultura, tal qual se apresenta em sociedades saudáveis. Fazendo um paralelo entre arte de rua e festival de rua será possível compreender melhor as formas sociais criadas pelo povo e sua importância para a vibração cultural na música mundial.

**Palavras-chave:** Arte e festival de rua, carnaval, Caribe.

## **Resumen**

Arte de calle y festival de calle, así como el carnaval, son expresiones culturales creativas e interactivas practicadas en el espacio público en las naciones caribeñas y latino-americanas. Todavía no existen estudios que focalicen la relación entre estos dos tipos de actividad social creativa. Esta interpretación aborda lo común y cotidiano como medios expresivos y examina su relación con la performance de la calle. Este artículo muestra la significación social de la calle como práctica necesaria para el cambio y desarrollo de la cultura. Haciendo un paralelo entre arte de calle y festival podemos comprender mejor ambas formas sociales creativas y su importancia para la vibración cultural y social en la música mundial.

**Palabras claves:** Arte y festival de rua, carnaval, Caribe

## **Abstract**

Street art and street festivals such as Carnival, are both creative and interactive cultural expressions played out in public space throughout the Caribbean and Latin American nations. Yet little to no research has been done on the overlap between these two kinds of creative social play. This exploratory overview touches on the commonalities between street art and street festivals as expressive mediums and examines their relationship to their common stage: the street. This article shows the social significance of the street as an important stage for creative social play, necessary for the change and development of culture, which is present in healthy societies. By making parallels between street art and street festivals, we can better understand both forms of creative social play and their importance to a culturally vibrant and socially vocal world.

**Keywords:** Streets art and festival, carnival, Caribbean

## **Introduction**

While the cine club's announcement is written in chalk, the Kay Dodo message is painted in red and blue to recall the colors of the Haitian flag. On the walls are also fading campaign posters from the last presidential election, which took place the previous November, images of the recently inaugurated president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, his bespectacled glare fixed on the hills surrounding the cemetery as he appears to be whispering his campaign slogan, "Lapè nan tèt, lapè nan vant"--Peace in the head, peace in the belly. The other writing is plain old graffiti, scribbled in chalk rather than spray paint. I find one unerringly appropriate. It is a simple word over a hole in the wall large enough to stick one's head through: BYE. (DANTICAT, 2002, p. 26-27)

This excerpt from Haitian-born author Edwidge Danticat's memoir, *After The Dance*, which describes her time at Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti, stands alone in the author's work as the only indication of a connection between street art (or graffiti) and the annual street festival, Carnival. Such oversight is not limited to Danticat, but indicates a glaring absence of graffiti and street art in countless studies and reports on Carnival throughout the Caribbean and Latin American world (and elsewhere), as well as the lack of connection to Carnival in studies on street art. However, the scope of this article will be limited to a brief review of the subject and some related literary resources. I have neither attempted to answer in-depth related research questions, nor to undertake a complete literature review on the intersection of Carnival and street art, but have only sought to establish the existence of such questions and show the opportunity for further research, and to provide a limited analysis of some related literary works.

The parallels between street festivals and street art in the Caribbean and Latin America

are notable and undeniable. Both are found throughout virtually every Caribbean and Latin American culture. Both are deemed cultural forms of expression and both fit into Scott's often-cited "Hidden Transcripts" model (1990). Both are artistic in nature. Both happen in the public streets of the community. Both are, at least in their origins, illicit and are seen to be deviant against the dominant culture. Both are versatile forms of expression with subject matter ranging from historical, political, and social matters, to lighter matters of play and amusement, sometimes in the same display. It is also interesting to note that public art and public festivals can both be identified as important parts of human society ever since cave paintings depicted festival dance and communal celebration. It is the public expression of unique ideas that is seen both in graffiti (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 161; BRADDELEY & FRASER, 1989, p. 79) and street festivals.

The comparison between street festivals and street art seems to be a logical one, but the lack of preexisting research tells us that this is an under-studied connection deserving closer observation and focused field-research. In this overview I will connect the uses and implications of street festivals and carnival, with public wall paintings and other street art.

For the purposes of this overview, I will generalize "street art" to include graffiti, murals, and other medium with which semi-permanent words and images are left in public places, largely unsolicited and illegal. Examples of such street art can include simple "I was here" messages, "gang" graffiti, or elaborate murals and mosaics, as well as posters, stickers, sculptures, and more. I will not venture into the variety of styles within street art as much as focus on the use and meaning of street art in connection with the use and meaning of Carnival and other street festivals.

Geographically, this study will center on the Caribbean and Latin American communities in which annual Carnival festivals, traditionally preceding the Catholic season of Lent, are celebrated. However, mention will be made of Carnival and street festivals in other cultures and geographical locations as well, and I will also look briefly at additional street festivals around the world.

In the comparison of street art and street festivals, there is one undeniable connection, which is that of the street itself. This connection might well hold the underlying answer to the "why" behind both forms of creative social expression. We then will seek to answer the questions: "Why is the public street a recurring venue for creative social expression?" and "What is the significance of the street within society?"

### **Making the Road**

The title of the book by community educators Paolo Freire and Myles Horton, *We Make*

*the Road By Walking* (1990), provides the imagery of social significance in the evolution of streets. A path is begun by the act of walking from one location to the next. The decision to walk down an uncut route for the first time might be motivated by need, efficiency of route, or drive to explore, but it is nearly always an intentional decision to move from one place to the next. It is not, however, enough for one person to walk a route once, for a path to be created. Even if thick jungle and overgrown brush are cut away to make way for the single traveler, if no one follows the first traveler, the path is soon overgrown again and any indication of a route is erased.

A path is created by the consistent and repeated pattern of feet traveling back and forth between locations. The creation of the path is, in itself, a picture of social unity as other travelers follow the first traveler. As the feet of multiple travelers tread upon the ground, the road widens and is made smooth and defined for those to come. One individual might make such a path over time, but it would require numerous trips across the same route to do so.

As a path is defined, and more and more individuals walk from point A to point B, community is born. One house is connected to another and these are connected to a source of water. Those paths connect to larger roads which lead out to greater social structure and cultural change. The nature of a road itself is that it is always changing. If it continues to be traveled, it will grow and widen. Eventually there might be a market opened up for the sake of hungry travelers. Someone might see fit to place a signpost, and eventually homes and businesses are built around a road, creating a street which is, by definition, paved, and therefore indicative of joint communal effort, or government commission. It is this street that is the connection in human social interaction. The only way to avoid the street is to remain in solitude. If one is to engage in society, it is necessary to go into the street. Exclusion from the street is exclusion from society (BURTON, 1997, pp. 199-200) and akin to social death (PATTERSON, 1982). Streets are, I believe, the very movement of society. It is the means through which individuals connect to make relationships.

In today's world, "streets" might include electronic means of communication such as telephones and internet, but these are additional ways for places to connect, and therefore serve a similar, yet distinct, function to a physical street. From path, to larger road, and then on to the permanency and official function of a paved street, there is a social significance in the phenomenon of the creation and use of streets. These streets are not places in and of themselves, but are a means of connecting places (KALTMEIER, 2011, p. 10). In the development of the street, additional places will inevitably spring up all along it, but the street is something else. The street is the means to get from one place to the next. It is how information is shared, and it is how culture is made and exchanged. It is the way in which we travel through life.

In the street, both festival and street art are presented by and for the public. As an

example of the creativity that comes through community, these forms of expression are not intended as stopping points or “places” of expression, but as ongoing, ever-developing interactive mediums. Graffiti is added to a wall that serves as a backdrop for society, and is intended to interact with the surrounding movement. It is not preserved for posterity or ego, but is left to the whim of nature, social controls including anti-graffiti initiatives, and work of other artists who add to or cover up existing work. It is an ever-changing and developing form in which one graffiti cannot be observed in isolation, but must be seen together with other graffiti, and with the social context within which it is shared.

Carnival and other street festivals share in this spontaneity of design. The nature of Carnival and other street festivals requires the inclusion of society, and in fact, invites outside participation. Few rules are established as to how one may celebrate the festivities, though examples and standards are set. No two Carnival celebrations will be the same. Every new individual who enters into the crowd changes the shape and meaning of Carnival, just as every contributor of street art changes the experience of the streets for each traveler to come.

### **Streets as Public Space**

There is a point in the development of the street when it goes from merely a means of moving from one location to the next, and it is made official and semi-permanent through paving and a variety of boundaries. This point is when the street becomes the center of a social community. Thanks to the permanency of streets, towns and cities are born (ÇELİK et al, 1994, p. 1). This is notably relevant in studies of the Americas, which hold some of the densest urban populations in the world (KALTMEIER, 2011, p. 3). When a street is paved, it is done so by cooperating citizens or centralized government (or a combination). This action creates a sort of order in a community that is important for the society to function well, leading to the widely held bias that towns and cities are more civilized (KALTMEIER, 2011, p. 6). In order for community to evolve, there must be a series of places that are connected by streets, which sociologist Thomas F. Gieryn calls, “the *execution* of community,” and in this connectivity and community, problems are solved, ideas are developed, and creativity is born (GIERYN, 2000, p. 477). This is the creativity that births festivals and public art. This is the exchange of ideas that comes when hundreds of strangers dance together in the streets. It is the free exchange that comes from unsolicited and uncensored (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 43) street art as an individual’s opinions are expressed to whoever will glance at the wall.

## Place and Space

Common theories of place hold that an individual or class of individuals is restricted by societal pressures and oftentimes force, into one social, economic, and/or physical place. This idea comes into play in gender studies which show the “place” of women being the home and the kitchen, and the “place” of the man being at a job or in education or leadership. Other social places can be determined by ethnicity or culture, as well as geographical locations. Even religious, sexual, and other “personal” practices are confined to homes and specific physical structures such as churches. This sense of place is not strictly a human phenomenon according to scientists (TUAN, 1977, p. 4).

Belonging to a place is contingent upon a commitment to responsibility (HOOKS, 2009, 68), and neglect of such responsibility brings risk of expulsion. The place of belonging is where foundation and identity are first developed and where life is grounded (SANDERS, 1999), “in processes of ‘imagination’” (SCHER, 2003, p. 9). Even in the very act of naming a place, Gieryn claims, the place is given permanency and is made into something of significance (2000, p. 465). And that place, together with historical time, is where social life happens (2000, p. 467). In fact, place holds such a deep cultural meaning that the absence of place (homelessness, being a “wanderer,” “tramp,” “vagabond,”) is feared and hated by many societies (João DE RIO, in ERBER, 2016, p. 7). Yet Richard D. E. Burton, in his book *Afro-Creole*, shows how the street is often a “place” for Caribbean men who feel “marginal and undervalued” in their homes and who take to the street to find significance (1997, p. 161).

Feminist Meredith Abarca looks at it differently, stating, “women are in a constant state of simply ‘Being’ while men are in a constant state of creating, of changing, of ‘Becoming’” (2006, p. 20). Gender studies aside, I find this statement exceedingly interesting in relation to our current study as Abarca defines an active state of “Becoming” as synonymous with creativity and change. In other words, to “Be” is to remain in a designated place, while to “Become” is an ongoing journey coupled with creativity and self-discovery. If this is so, then *creative* expression in the street, the individual’s means of moving, is not only good, but is essential if they are to grow.

Gieryn defines space as, “what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out,” or, “put positively, place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations” (2000, p. 465). Abarca states that “sense of independence, price, and eventually self-belief are easily understood within the politics of location” (2006, p. 41). More than this, space is opportunity. Whereas “Place is security, space is freedom” (TUAN, 1977, p. 3). Space is where place can be established. It is where one enters when one leaves their childhood home in order to become an independent adult. Space is independence and self-identity. Space is freedom and choice.

Creative street expression, whether street art or street festival, exists between place and space. It might be seen, then, as a celebration of the discovery of space in which individual and unique place can be made. Since streets, I contend, are not a specific location, but an avenue from one location to the next, creative expression in the streets is distinct from that within designated places.

### **Streets as Mobility**

Streets are a means of moving from one place to the next, or, “the distinction between here and there” (GIERYN, 2000, p. 464). While a woman’s culture might confine her to the home and a limited place, as long as there is a street leading to a university or to the job market, and she has the tenacity to overcome the social pressure of “place,” she is able to leave her designated place for a new place. This provides at least the possibility of outward (if not upward) social mobility. One might then ask, what is the obstacle? Why does this woman keep herself in her home if her desire is for something else?

The answer is likely due to the powerful pull of society. T.V. Reed refers to, “Hegemony—the process of getting people to unwittingly consent to their own oppression—takes place largely by accretion, by having many, many sites reinforcing the same ideas” (2005, p. 42). As social creatures, we are driven to function within a society. We are torn between the desire to be accepted or “fit into” a social structure, and individual need for notoriety and fame or a sense of achievement. As a result, we will attempt to weigh the social benefits with the social consequences of our actions in order to determine if it will benefit us in one or both of those social pulls. Respectability and reputation can be a significant social pull, particularly in the Caribbean (SCHER, 2003, p. 31). In the event that we can be known in the community as the best cook or the best mother or the best housewife in the community, that might appease both needs. However, there can only be one “best,” and at some point it is up to the individual to realize that their talents might lie elsewhere and they must risk social scrutiny and disapproval (or worse) by stepping out into the street and out of their socially designated place. If this risk is made to seem too great to the individual, then they can more likely be persuaded to remain in their place even at the expense of their own happiness. Greater still, is the real or perceived risk of losing place altogether and being without place, or homeless (literally or figuratively) . . . a non-person (GIERYN, 2000, p. 482).

Street festivals and street art address the societal pull while providing opportunity to step out of place if only temporarily. Within the crowd of revelers in the Carnival atmosphere, and behind the safety and anonymity of the traditional mask, Carnival participants are able to experience the freedom of stepping outside of their designated place while greatly reducing

the risk of social disapproval which could otherwise serve to cut them off from their personal place. Since the festivities have, at least on the surface, the sole purpose of celebration and harmless fun, and since the participants are joined by friends, family, and neighbors in their celebration, the social risks are greatly diminished. Similarly, the anonymity of street art, created largely under cover of darkness, provides the artist an opportunity to step outside of the socially determined place of art (museum, home, gallery, etc.), and allows an expressive freedom that may be impossible to achieve with commissioned and commercial art.

In her book, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, renowned Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat states, “I am even more certain that to create dangerously is also to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts” (DANTICAT, 2010, p.148). When a person willingly steps out into the streets and freely expresses themselves creatively, it allows space to be made and taken for the development of individual and social place. This development of place through expressive public creativity is what pushes against the social structure and encourages deeper thought and dialogue to occur, ensuring the social health of the society, as we will see later in our discussion on dissent.

Pushing back against dominant culture is a common theme in public creative expression (SCHER, 2003, p. 61). Burton addresses the recent change of dynamics in Trinidadian society where women are becoming more active in Carnival, pushing back against the social ideas of “place” in order to find a new space in which to express and assert themselves (1997, p. 166). Reed calls this *culture in movements* which he defines as, “those specific aesthetic-cultural artifacts (songs, poems, murals, and so forth) deployed within the shifting orbit of a movement culture” (2005, p. 296).

Trinidad carnival thus began as an imitation of Blacks by Whites, rather than vice versa . . . preemancipation Trinidad was characterized by its unusually large free colored population whose members conducted their own kind of carnival celebrations, subject to restriction, *on the streets* of the principal towns of the colony. Only the slaves, confined to their quarters both in the towns and on the plantations, were excluded from the merrymaking, condemned either to watch the Free Coloured on the street outside or, like the proverbial *nèg dèyè pòtla* (slave behind the door), to spy on their masters and mistresses as the latter mimicked their dress, demeanor, and dances (BURTON 1997, pp. 199-200).

This exclusion of the slaves reinforced their lack of place and social right-of-way. Consequently, when the slaves were allowed to celebrate Jonkonnu during the Christmas season, “They paid ritual visits to their masters and moved about with comparative freedom from plantation to plantation or, in town, from house to house, eating, drinking, making music, singing, and dancing” (BURTON 1997, p. 200). Once the streets were opened to the slaves,



albeit temporarily, the slaves were able to act as free people and their first acts were creative, festive, and communal acts.

### **Streets vs. “Public Places”**

As people take to the streets and meet to share information, buy and sell goods, express views, interact with community, and travel from place to place, space is made, but not yet converted to place. Until collaboration takes place, requiring people to assemble, the street is still an avenue. However, as soon as someone sets up shop, steps up onto a soapbox, congregates with a group of revelers in spontaneous (or planned) celebration, or stops to paint on a wall, place is established. At some point in this transition from avenue to space, and then from space to place, temporary shelter might be erected in the form of a tent or other covering, a phenomenon Burton describes as the intermediary “between street and yard, and inside-outside or outside-inside” (1997, p. 194). But this place, while jutting into the avenue or street, is contrary to the societal flow of travel, and creation of space has the potential to clog the free movement of individuals (ERBER, 2016, p. 3), infringing on the rights of others, which is no longer conducive to freedom. The response then is the creation of public space, connected to, but separate from the street.

Once place is permanently established at or near avenues of free circulation, public space comes to life. This might be a plaza (literally a “place”), park, square, market, or other space intended to be used by individuals to sit, stand, stroll (indicative of walking without a specific destination in mind, and therefore not the intended use of streets), and exchange ideas. Ideally this public space is a symbol of community (KOSTOF, 1994, p. 13), and acts as a place of containment and relative safety for those who would express opposing views and even resistance (LOW, 1996, p. 863; CASTILLO, 1994. p. 60).

Traditionally in Latin American countries and elsewhere, public squares were the place of debate, and used for everything else up to and including court hearings, executions, and even public displays of affection between courting couples. In Spanish colonial towns, the plaza was commissioned to be the place into which the town’s principal streets led, serving as the cultural and visible political center (KALTMEIER, 2011, p.5-6). In his introduction to a collection of essays on urban cultural politics, Kaltmeier credits the system of Spanish plazas with the colonization of space (2011, 7). Whether expressing support for or resistance to a particular politician, or showing affection, the public space provided the appropriate environment for speaking out.

When those controlling the public space become intimidated or otherwise agitated by displays, and either respond by establishing social controls around the place, or by making the

public place inaccessible (LOW, 1996, p. 877), even specifically targeting “opposition street graphics” (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 4), such restrictions can lead to resistance in the form of street demonstrations, organized “strolls” (ERBER, 2016, p. 1), spontaneous street festivals, and expression through street art.

### **Society of the street**

The under-studied topic of street society most commonly focuses on the place rather than on the avenues and journeys between places. Yet, we see evidence that society functions differently in the streets than it does in “places,” and that reaction to street festivals and street art differ greatly from attitudes towards similar activities within “places”. Whether or not I am ready to define streets as “non-places,” I would certainly venture that the idea of “place” as it relates to “appropriate behavior” is much less defined in the streets than elsewhere. This changes, however, the more an external government (that is, not a true democracy) regulate the streets with the patrolling of individuals who are not residents of the places connected by those streets, such as a police force.

Not only is society developed and strengthened in the street itself, but individuals can become attached to a neighborhood or area as they journey through the streets on their way to different places (GIERYN, 2000, p. 481). As people become more attached to an area and think of it as home, they will not only be more inclined to join their neighbors in celebration or demonstration, but they will more likely notice a change in landscape such as introduction of a piece of graffiti, which is a “direct inexpensive way to reach the public” with any number of social messages (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 136).

Festivals draw masses to the street, where people step out of their own place into the “enjoyment of the enchanting power of the crowd” (ERBER, 2016, p. 13). The fact that the street is by definition, a means to travel from one place to the next, makes the gathering of crowds, mobs, and spontaneous street revelers an illicit activity. In the act of standing still, dancing, or doing pretty much anything other than traveling from place to place, the purpose of the street is challenged and its social rules broken. As Abarca puts it, “The social interactions of daily life that unfold within a given *space* define its significance” (2006, p. 19). Yet history shows us that it is human nature to break these rules, if only for a short time. Street festivals, parades, processions, markets, street-preachers and other performers, street artists, and any number of other illicit uses of streets have been commonplace throughout human history (KIANG, 1994, p. 51; ÇELIK et al, 1994, p. 4).

## Power of the Streets

Until a path or road becomes a street, it is not unusual for a weary traveler to stop for a rest, a drink of water, or to exchange goods or conversations with other travelers on the same route. Until a government power steps in and turns a road into a street, such rules of usage exist. At this point, the creation of plazas, wayside rests, sidewalks, and other public spaces is necessary for non-traveling activities to occur. As traffic gets faster with the development of technology, standing in the middle of the street to exchange gossip becomes more dangerous, and at the least, will result in the offenders being offered some choice words and sign-language.

Power is achieved, retained, and strengthened and oppression is most easily achieved through the control of streets and other avenues, simply by limiting the individuals who may use them, or the purpose for which they may be used (GIERYN, 2000, p. 480). More accurately, it is control of free movement as represented by avenues of travel, that empowers the dominant class and has the potential to oppress, enslave, and imprison (LOW, 1996, p. 862). From the ability to lock one's own door, thereby keeping others in or out, to gates, bridges, borders, and tolls that regulate what is otherwise free travel in public space, control is achieved by forcing people into "their place."

Streets have not only served as a means of routing and controlling movement, but as the grounds for proclaiming power and authority. Rulers have used the streets to address their public, their enemies, and their allies. They have paraded their enemies through the streets in disgrace, and have paraded themselves through the streets in arrogance. There is a seemingly universal understanding that to "take to the streets" implies a public show of power and influence. Taking the streets then, is the premier democratic action for the people. *Making the streets* happens when this democratic movement is made creatively.

## Community

Community is developed as a result of the avenues between places which connect the people and resources within those places. As places and people are connected, they relate in one way or another to each other. This relationship develops the community around which society, or the organized structures that emerge to help community function, evolves. Community can be closed or open. It can be structured or casual, but no matter the model, there are social rules that are required for it to function. Community is what bell hooks calls "a place of welcome, a place to belong" (HOOKS, 2009, p. 183). Yet once a place and its residents are joined to other places through the development of avenues and streets, the residents of those places must work within the rules of the society or risk being cut off from the community. For instance, if

neighbors do not cooperate, there will be a literal or figurative roadblock erected in the street between their respective “places”, and their relationship will be severed.

The United States Supreme Court has, at least in word, recognized the importance of “public expressive activity” (SUNSTEIN, 2003, p. 102) between citizens within public streets and parks with relatively minimal restrictions. However, falling under the existing restrictions are both street festivals without permit, and street art, which can also qualify as “vandalism” or the destruction or defacing of public or private property. Unapproved street festivals can interfere with traffic, which infringes upon the rights of citizens to move freely from one place to the next without being forced to fight crowds. How does the right to free travel work alongside public forums for dissent and necessary disagreement in free societies (SUNSTEIN, 2003, p. 109)? The answer is unfortunately often determined based on who claims their rights have been infringed upon (BECKER, 1973, p. 12).

### **Deviance & Dissent**

Deviance and dissent push the boundaries of place so they become streets or avenues upon which one may travel to find new and unique places. Deviance can also function as opposition to the movement of the street by literally or figuratively redirecting the route, or by making the street, at least temporarily, a place. Richard D. E. Burton gives us examples of how slave societies of the Americas tended “to be much more *cultures of opposition* than *cultures of resistance*, in that they draw heavily on materials furnished by the dominant culture . . . that they contrive . . . both to modify (without transforming them entirely) and to turn against the dominant culture in order to contest that culture” (1997, p. 7). This “turning against” the dominant culture is seen when individuals “go against the flow,” or step into traffic, move in a new way, or just stand still against oncoming traffic.

In contrast, Antonio Benítez-Rojo believes that it is in the cultures of “Peoples of the Sea” to remain in a socially neutral zone with regards to social dissent where, “In this paradoxical space, in which one has the illusion of experiencing a totality, there appear to be no repressions or contradictions; there is no desire other than that of maintaining oneself within the limits of this zone for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty” (1996, p. 17). This neutral zone is the place for public creativity of graffiti and Carnival which serve to mask the message of the participants through the joy of dance, or creativity of color and form.

Forms of deviance such as street festivals and street art momentarily stop the momentum of the street. Burton specifically cites carnivals among a range of oppositional actions intended to oppose “the dominant order on the dominant order’s own ground” (1997,

p. 8), and defines it as “an attempt by the low to raise, enhance, and aestheticize themselves to the level of the high” (1997, p. 157). The very notion of deviance alludes to a wandering off the path, and engaging in activity outside of its designated place, which is also the most basic form of resistance (GIERYN, 2000, p. 480). While societal function is ensured by the establishment of paths, deviance and dissent ensure that new ways of traveling are continually established. Pushing against established boundaries ensures that power does not become centralized and unchallenged. Street-centered deviance protects the community from totalitarianism by challenging centralized control of the streets that could otherwise inhibit free movement of individuals and groups moving from place to place.

Both street art and street festivals serve the social needs of deviance by engaging the streets and turning them even temporarily into “place.” Through the widespread use of murals, “Latin American artists have reclaimed their own landscape and its inhabitants” (BADDELEY & FRASER, 1989, p. 139). In the case of street art, the intention is arguably to catch the eye of the traveler briefly in order to break up the focus of the journey and to redirect it towards a place in the imagination. Street festivals go even further, by creating a temporary place within the thoroughfare of the street. They create a place of revelry and a moment of social rest in the immediate celebration of music, dance, and art such as Carnival. In creating such a moment of celebration, the motion of the street is disrupted, traffic is stopped or redirected, and people get a break from life as usual. The destination is no longer the priority, but rather the journey and the moment at hand become the focus. In this way, both street art and street festivals serve to deviate from everyday commutes and pursuits, and provide a place of rest for the traveler.

In his book, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Cass Sunstein posits that dissent is not only present in healthy societies, but that it is what helps to generate social health. He insists that it is not the street-makers or “conformists” who are thinking of the larger society, but the dissenters who are sacrificing themselves for the benefit of the whole (2003, p. 6). Sunstein explains that a society without dissent provides an ideal setting for the rise of tyrannical government, beginning with fear and distrust of others in the community (p. 45). However, the threat of social disapproval or shunning is likely to deter individuals from engaging in deviant activities (p. 47). So the ability to cloak social and political protest in art and music is beneficial for those organizing and engaging in the deviance. It is much easier to gain support from the community when the activity can be disguised as simple celebration or appreciation of aesthetics, than if the movement reveals a political agenda.

Sunstein claims that just as society can enforce conformity, “People will violate society’s norms or laws, even when punishment is possible or even likely, if they are supported by a ‘deviant subculture’ whose members reward them for their violations” (p. 47). This is seen both with street art and street festivals in various ways. Street artists function in a community of underground and illicit artists who celebrate daring efforts made to decorate streets and

public spaces. Evidence of this can be seen in the renown earned by artists such as UK's Banksy and Haiti's Jerry whose illegal and socially charged art is celebrated around the world, even creating an attraction for tourists. Illicit street festivals generate a more obvious network of support in the crowd surrounding the revelers, but because of the lack of anonymity, it is arguably more socially challenging to convince one or two individuals to start a street celebration than it is to convince someone to paint on a wall in the dark of night. Graffiti has the added benefit of, "helping to gain recognition, support, and 'space' for collective social and political movement to take place" (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 133). Similarly, Kaltmeier credits the New Orleans Mardi Gras, with providing a setting where the spectacle of the festival brings light to issues of class and racial inequality (KALTMEIER, 2011, p. 24).

Whether it is expressed through street art, street festival, or otherwise, the act of taking creative energy into the street is in essence a method of reclaiming what already belongs to the citizenry and has been dominated by the powerful minority (ST. JOHN, 2004, 421). Sunstein asserts that "Diversity, openness, and dissent reveal actual and incipient problems. They improve society's pool of information and make it more likely that serious issues will be addressed" (2003, p. 149).

This "protestival" is a "site of creative resistance rooted in aesthetic protest and insurrectionary pleasure [which] finds nourishment in avant-garde art movements that have challenged the distinction between art and protest, seeking 'situations' through which to penetrate, reveal and out-marvel 'the spectacle' of the present" (ST. JOHN, 2004, 422). Benítez-Rojo claims that it is in the nature of Caribbean peoples to, "Run away toward freedom, or rather, toward a space that the imagination paints as freedom," because, "Caribbean societies are among the most repressive in the world," and he claims that his Caribbean brothers and sisters are driven to "flee from [themselves] . . . paradoxically, which leads [them] finally back to [themselves]" (2006, p. 249).

## **Conclusion**

In this brief review of the connection between street festivals and street art, and their relationship with and significance to the streets in which they occur, many questions are left unanswered. This is often the case with preliminary explorations into a largely untouched subject matter. These questions serve to provide direction for future research, and it is my wish that this overview has provided a framework for continued study on the topic.

There is a clear connection between street art and street festivals as creative cultural expressions, modes of place-making, and tools of dissonance with which societal traditions and moral guidelines are renewed and strengthened. This overview demonstrates that the two

forms of expression share a common locale, that of the street and public place. This overview also shows that both forms of expression are distinct and function differently.

Areas of opportunity for future research include a more in-depth analysis of related literature both on the topics of carnival and street art, as well as within the numerous disciplines with which this topic overlaps. There is opportunity for significant field research showing occurrences of street art and street festivals in shared public place, as well as human studies research focused on examining similarities and differences in mindsets about the two forms of expression. It would be helpful as well to examine the differences between commercialized, tourist-based, or commissioned instances of street art and street festivals versus spontaneous and illicit occurrences.

Communities often take their collective joy and release their pent-up emotions in the streets, whether through street art and graffiti, or street festivals. The absence of such creative expression can be linked to oppressive governments (CHAFFEE, 1993, p. 10), but active public creative expression is indicative of a healthy and growing culture that is pushing outward in its quest for new space to exchange and to counter ideas, to express communal solidarity and to reinforce culture, and to establish personal and community space and significance.

As with any living organism, death of the old to be replaced with new birth must constantly occur in the community and in streets and public places in particular, so that societies can grow and flourish as they are renewed. This renewal is not always a celebration, and sometimes it can be unfamiliar and frightening, but when we better understand the function of public creative expression through street art and street festivals, we can embrace the change that will help our communities flourish.

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