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Art as a new urban norm: Between normalization of the City through art and normalization of art through the City in Montreal and Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

In a context of increased urban competition, art and culture are often used by cities world-wide as tools to improve their image and make urban spaces attractive. In that process, art is – as we will argue – becoming a new urban norm, which is normalizing not only urban space and experience, but also art itself. By contributing to the pacification or securitization of public spaces, art could encourage some behaviors or, on the contrary, discourage others. Reversely, this normative dimension of urban art could impact art itself, especially by redefining the limit between artistic forms that are either inclusive or exclusive, dominant or subversive. Through examples found during PhD fieldwork in Montreal and Johannesburg, we will demonstrate that this normalization of the city through art and of art through the city takes place in various urban contexts, that it questions the distinction between Northern and Southern cities, and the definition of a (global) city itself.

1. Introduction

Any visit to the center of a global city today gives an impression of *déjà vu*. Water features, light designs, open air events, street art paintings, and so on, are common components of any city which claims a global status. Usually conceived as distinctive elements in a context characterized by urban competition, these elements appear to contribute to a certain homogenization of the 21st century urban experience. This proves to be particularly true for culture in general (Paddison & Miles, 2007) and art in particular (Miles, 1997), both of which are omnipresent in the landscape and experience of contemporary metropolitan cities. Looking at this paradoxical situation, one can wonder about the actual function of art in cities. Could it really be a comparative advantage that helps a city to define or transform its own identity and image (McCarthy, 2006)? If so, how does it transform the urban experience? This article seeks to answer these questions through the case studies of Johannesburg and Montreal (Fig. 1).

Based on our respective doctoral research in urban studies on Montreal and Johannesburg (Guinard, 2014), we will question the uses and functions of art in metropolitan areas and especially in their center. Our purpose is not to examine the mobility of art policies *per se*, but more precisely to focus on the effects of such policies on cities and art. We intend to demonstrate that art itself is becoming a new urban norm, which normalizes not only urban space but also art itself. The originality of our study lies in the comparison of cities beyond the so-called

divide of the global North/South. Since culture-driven urban projects are often analyzed through the lens of the global North, we will focus on Montreal as a reference case study (McKim, 2012; Okano & Samson, 2010) and extend our reflection to a metropolis from the global South, Johannesburg. By doing so, we intend first to integrate these cities in the scope of the urban studies on art and, secondly, to question the potential adaptation of urban art strategies in contexts marked by a different socio-economic and historical background. As such, this paper contributes to the “ordinarization” of cities from the global South (Robinson, 2006) with regards to urban arts, by granting them a place in the debate about the role of art in cities. This comparative approach also helps us to nuance the existing literature which is mostly oriented toward Northern cities (Miles, 1997; Paddison & Miles, 2007; Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005; Zukin, 1995).

To this end, we present in the first section of our paper the theoretical framework which situates our case studies; we will illustrate how art has become a new urban (planning) norm in contemporary major cities by situating our case studies within different bodies of literature about urban planning and public spaces. In the second section, we highlight how art in public spaces normalizes both urban spaces and its uses by analyzing various art projects in Montreal and Johannesburg. Finally, the third section scrutinizes the extent to which the increasing use of art in urban planning tends to regulate and normalize art itself. In particular, we will focus on street art, as a paradigmatic example of a subversive art form that has been progressively normalized, if not

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Fig. 1. The economic hub of Johannesburg and Montreal ... or vice versa?
Source: Guinard, 2011 (left) and Montreal4you.com (right).

standardized, in contemporary cities.

2. Art as an urban (planning) norm

2.1. Art in public spaces as a new global urban policy?

Urban planning has deeply evolved in the last twenty years. In a context of intense urban competition at the global scale and economic uncertainty, neoliberalism has spread over the globalizing cities as a “new regime of governmentality” (Isin, 1998: 173). Promoting budgetary cuts, austerity, privatization of public services, public-private partnerships (PPP) or social control, this new rationality of government has legitimized and enforced “a new regime of highly competitive interlocal relations” (Peck & Tickell, 2002: 386), giving a specific importance to the image of the city. Following this, place marketing has become a priority of urban planners whose main goal is to enhance the imageability of the city to attract investments, tourists, and workers of the creative class/economy. On one hand, this trend involves the erasure of all symbols opposed to the desired image of a successful city (homeless people, informal trade and traders, etc.). Zero-tolerance policies have been consequently established in many public spaces, legitimizing the eviction of all signs of poverty and crime (Mitchell, 1997; Smith, 1996), and furthering the rise of “good business climates” (Harvey, 1989). On the other hand, simultaneously to the removal of negative artifacts of the city, urban planners have concentrated their efforts to create a distinctive and positive urban image. One specific feature is the development of flagship cultural projects, including iconic architecture, museums, art complexes, opera houses, etc.

In this context, art – especially installed in public spaces – has gained a greater role in urban marketing since it appears as an additional tool to transform the image and the identity of a city. It is important to mention, however, that the importance of art in the beautification of public spaces is not a recent phenomenon. As Ruby (2001) stressed, social and political elites since ancient Rome, have been using art, generally in the form of monumental sculptures, to mark and impose their power on space. The presence of art in urban spaces is not new to the second part of the 20th century, but the reasons for its presence are. Indeed, after the Second World War, the importance of art in public spaces “became much more connected to the concept of revitalization of urban space” (Ursic, 2014: 2). In a context characterized by a crisis of the modern city, a decline of the industrial sector and an increase of the recreational activities, culture in general and art in particular have been seen as tools to re-enchant the urban imaginary and to develop an alternative economy. New functions were slowly attributed to art, be it by public or private stakeholders, that were esthetic, but also economic, social and – even if more implicitly – political (Deutsche, 1998; Ruby, 2001).

Even today, art set up in public spaces is far from being neutral: its

“installation [...] within the urban fabric is inevitably a political exercise” (Sharp et al., 2005: 1020). Beyond the esthetic transformation of the city, this art form also defines who the privileged public of the pieces – and, consequently, of the urban space – is, by legitimating or condemning certain practices (Deutsche, 1996). This highlights the importance of critically assessing the ability of art in public spaces to build social cohesion, a claim often made by cultural policies (Hall & Robertson, 2001). It demands consideration about the meaning of art in public spaces as it is commonly used in many cities in the global North but also increasingly in the global South as well. Although art has spread to the outskirts of the cities as well as to “banal public spaces” (Paddison & Sharp, 2007) – usually with a particular attention to social and local functions –, this paper focuses on iconic art as it is promoted in the city-centers of Montreal and Johannesburg so as to make the comparison possible and give it sense.

2.2. The “*quartier des spectacles*” in Montreal, symbol of the creative and cultural planning

Montreal is a famous example of this inclusion of art in urban planning, especially through the recent emergence of the so-called *Quartier des Spectacles* (QDS). Initially dedicated to popular stage performances and entertainment, located at the crossroads of two main avenues in the center of the city, this space was one of the biggest red light districts during Prohibition in the 1920s. But, during the era of modernism and urban highways, many cultural places were demolished until the decay of the neighborhood in the 1970s. In order to reverse this decline, public authorities decided to revamp this area in 2001. It was then decided to emphasize and reinforce the concentration of cultural activities in the neighborhood in order to improve the global reputation of Montreal. Bringing together the municipality of Montreal and various public and private stakeholders, a partnership was created in 2003. Its mandate was initially to coordinate the creation of the desired image for this area, hereafter called the QDS. According to the promoters, this image would not be a symbolical *tabula rasa* but would be consistent with the *genius loci* (Harel and al., 2015) and the history of that area.¹ As in many others cities that have undergone a cultural turn in their planning strategies, downtown Montreal has seen, during the last decade, the development of numerous museums, cultural institutions, concert halls and so on. This conversion spurred significant socio-economic transformations. Indeed, from 2007 to 2016 there has been a 67% rise in the number of residents in the area, as well as a growth of property values of 43% from 2007 to 2014. As such, this transformation

¹ The entertainment being promoted in the area by the partnership of the QDS is finally far from the original cultural activities and the implementation of new cultural institutions has also evicted the oldest ones, perceived as too countercultural (striptease / punk). For an in-depth analysis of these transformations, see Harel, Lussier, & Thibert, 2015.

could be seen as a characteristic example of what Cameron and Coaffe (2005) call the “third-wave gentrification”, that is to say a form of urban regeneration mainly oriented toward the consumption of culture and art.

Interestingly enough, a significant part of this cultural planning concerns public spaces that have been renovated and planned as places for performing-art venues and artistic events. It is indeed part of the mandate of the QDS partnership to “bring its public spaces to life through diversified programming that enriches the *Quartier des Spectacles* experience and makes it a topnotch cultural destination”.² In this regard, musical and artistic performances in public spaces have become extremely important in the planning strategy: many festivals, such as the International jazz festival or the *Francofolies*, include shows in the public spaces of the QDS. However, this importance of art is not limited to the cultural activities taking place in public spaces but also concerns the public spaces themselves, which have become artistic creations, in their own right. Street furniture such as lamps has been conceived with designers and artistic creations have been installed in public spaces, either temporarily or permanently. Special attention has also been paid to the lighting, through the creation of a luminous pathway and an architectural conception of illumination, echoing the well-thought design signature of the area.

As shown above, culture and art have been integrated in the urban fabric and are now part of the global identity of the metropolis. As a successful result of this strategy, Montreal is now known throughout the world as “the city of festivals”. In 2015, it attracted more than 9 million visitors.³

2.3. Newtown, a cultural precinct to build Johannesburg as a “world-class African city”?

In Johannesburg, the urban stakeholders' ambitions to transform the city – including through culture and art – into a global one are maybe even more crucial than in Montreal. Due to the apartheid regime (1948–1994), the city cut itself off from the international scene for a number of years. The motto chosen in 2000 by the City of Johannesburg,⁴ “a world-class African city”, is symptomatic of this new ambition, namely to raise Johannesburg's visibility to the global scale while reaffirming its African identity, which has been more or less denied since its foundation in 1886 (Bremner, 2000). In regards to arts and culture, this ambition involves – separately or jointly – a plurality of stakeholders, including public entities, private companies and artists, and takes several forms, such as events (the Johannesburg Art Fair, the Joy of Jazz festival, the Soccer World Cup in 2010, etc.), infrastructures (the Apartheid Museum, the Soweto theatre, etc.) or public artworks. Within this framework, arts and culture are conceived as distinctive elements that are supposed to foster urban growth. This conception is furthermore characteristic of a broader neoliberal approach that has been adopted but also adapted to the local context by Johannesburg and other South African cities since the end of the Apartheid (see for example: Didier, Morange, & Peyroux, 2013). As stressed notably by Parnell and Robinson (2006), Johannesburg has indeed been trying – more or less successfully – to find innovative strategies to reconcile economic growth and social development that address the high level of inequalities that characterize an emergent post-apartheid city. This also applies to arts and culture that are supposed – at least in (public) discourses⁵ – to support urban competition at the global scale while

promoting social cohesion at the local one.

The first major culture-led regeneration project that took place in Johannesburg was implemented in Newtown from the late 1990s onwards. The idea was to transform this derelict former commercial and industrial area, located in the Western part of the inner city, into a cultural precinct. The changes of Newtown – both as they are and as they are described – are similar in many ways to the ones found in the QDS and in so many others (culturally) regenerated neighborhoods around the world (McCarthy, 2006; Paddison & Miles, 2007), except for the fact that the violent history of South Africa has tended to accentuate these processes of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion that usually characterized these areas. Newtown was indeed created in 1904 after the destruction of the mixed neighborhood of Brickfields (Beavon, 2004). It was then turned into an industrial and commercial area in the first half of the 20th century, before becoming an alternative and subversive cultural place for people of all races in the 1970s–80s when the previous activities faded away (Shand, 2011). But at the end of the 1980s, Newtown – like the rest of the inner city (Beavon, 2004) – was again exposed to urban decline. Due to its cultural past, the presence of available spaces, and its central location (Pieterse & Gurney, 2012), it was identified by the City of Johannesburg as an ideal area to give tangible form to the image and identity of Johannesburg as a “world-class African city”.

The project was carried out by the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) with the financial support of the Gauteng province and Blue IQ, an entity responsible for promoting PPP in the region. This operation led to the urban requalification of former industrial buildings, the creation of new cultural infrastructures, the construction of social housing, the development of restaurants, bars and cafes, the re-design of public spaces, but also to the eviction of the squatter camp. As such, this urban operation based on art and culture could be considered, as in Montreal, as a case of “third-wave gentrification” (Cameron and Coaffe, 2005). Some attempts were however made to make this global policy resonate with the context, in order to build the image of Johannesburg as an African city, and not only as a global one. In order to insure the “Africanization” and “artialization” (Roger, 1997) of Newtown (Fig. 2), practices like the installation in public spaces of African wooden heads statuettes, bronze sculptures and murals celebrating Johannesburg artists, and especially Black ones, as well as the renaming of streets in the neighborhood to honor major South African artists were adopted.

What is striking in Newtown however is that the exclusion of the perceived undesirable persons (such as the former inhabitants of the squatter camp) has not led to the attraction of the desirable ones (the middle-class, the creative-class, etc.). Indeed, on a daily basis, Newtown and especially its central place that was designed to be an event-place (Fig. 2) are mainly empty (Guinard, 2014; Vivant, 2007). If the number of visitors increased in the 2000s,⁶ the attractiveness of Newtown is far from being comparable with the one of the QDS in Montreal. Apart from special events like the New Year carnival or the Joy of Jazz Festival, most of the time the precinct is a space that people cross over rather than occupy. This lack of public is probably due to the still persistent image of the inner city as a no-go area (Bremner, 2010) and, maybe more importantly, to the financial constraints faced by the Newtown Improvement District, a mainly public funded structure, which makes it difficult to maintain a high level of activity, and consequently to attract visitors, throughout the year. Nevertheless, the success of privately-managed neighborhoods using art, culture and more generally the creative economy as driving forces of urban re-development, like in Maboneng in the Eastern part of the inner city

² <http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/>

³ Tourisme / Montreal. 2015. Annual Report.

⁴ In the late 1990s, the spaces divided along racial lines by the Apartheid regime that composed the urban area of Johannesburg were reunited into a single metropolitan entity, called the City of Johannesburg.

⁵ See for example the “Public art policy” adopted by the City of Johannesburg in 2006 (http://www.joburg-archive.co.za/2006/pdfs/public_art_policy.pdf) or the “Public art strategy” defined by the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) in 2011 ([\(footnote continued\)](http://www.</p>
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jda.org.za/docs/publi_art_strategy.pdf).

⁶ According to Newtown Improvement District, the entity in charge of the management of the precinct, the total number of visitors, with events taken into account, more or less doubled from 224,713 in 2003 to 457,804 in 2009 (Shand 2010).

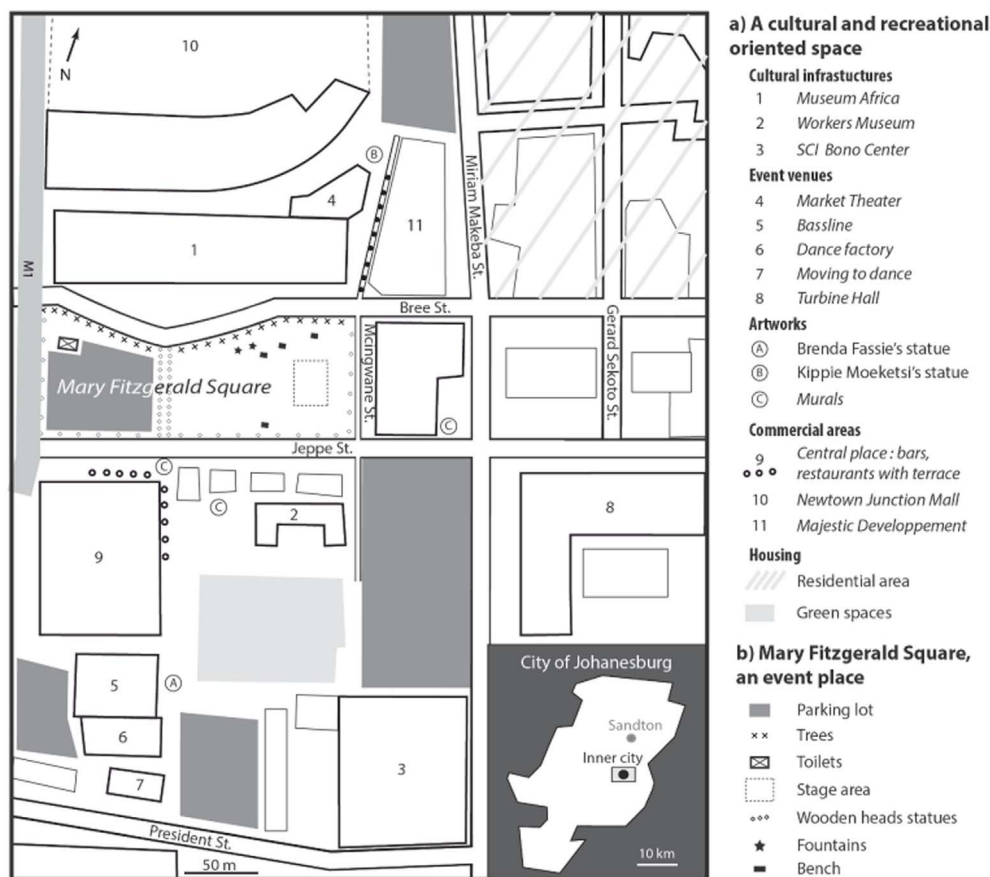


Fig. 2. Newtown, Johannesburg cultural precinct.



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(Gregory, 2016), tends to prove that all culturally-based urban regenerations are not meant to fail in Johannesburg, as long as investments to animate them on a daily basis are available.

Arts and culture have progressively been integrated in Johannesburg and Montreal urban planning to such an extent that art and culture appear as an urban planning norm. Art in particular has become a common and indispensable tool to give a place a new image and a symbolic identity in order to make this place and the whole city a global and competitive destination. The success of these art-led operations seems to depend on the urban planners or developers' capacity not only to create art in public spaces, but also to animate public spaces through art. For an in-depth understanding of this artistic planning of public spaces, it is thus necessary to critically scrutinize the effects of such art in the urban everyday life.

3. A normalization of public spaces through art?

People are always engaged in their environment since they are constantly perceiving and interpreting symbolical values associated with it (Berleant, 1997). These values are part of the esthetic experience and tend to generate (un)comfortable feelings but they also compose potentialities for action (Ingold, 1992). Thus, if the artistic creations mentioned above transform the esthetic of urban space, they also generate a new individual and collective experience of the city.

3.1. Normalization and pacification of public spaces through art in the QDS

As it is claimed in the promotional rhetoric used by public authorities about the QDS, walking and strolling in its public spaces is a specific experience engaging both senses and minds of visitors. One of the main slogans of the QDS describes this experience as "the most emotion in 1 square kilometre".⁷ This sensory experience refers to

“visitors captivated and intrigued by its eight vibrant public spaces”,⁸ which are indeed conceived in order to create interactions between people and urban space as well as between people themselves. In order to enable this experience, several pieces of art have been designed and presented within these past few years in public spaces. These “ephemeral urban icons”,⁹ involving lighting design, immersive environments and interactive installations, are designed to promote participation of urban dwellers and visitors, especially through playful practices. In this way, the division between art and urban design is becoming increasingly blurred.

This playful experience of urban space is significant with “21 musical swings”, a creation by *Daily tous les jours*, a design studio focused on collective experience. 21 musical swings have indeed been put up in the QDS. This installation is conceived as a “playful space for rediscovering a childlike sense of wonder”.¹⁰ Each single moving swing creates a musical note and melodies emerge when participants adjust their swinging. By activating this creation, visitors, inhabitants, and children interact together and create a melody, transforming the urban experience into a playful experience. According to the QDS partnership, those swings “spread an infectious sense of *joie de vivre*”.¹¹

If many artworks in the area promote playful interactions, the lighting creation called PIXINESS is particularly meaningful. Created in 2011 by the visual artist Axel Morgenthaler, this piece of art is located in the façade of the Society for Arts and Technology building and is part of the QDS Luminous pathway. It is made up of motorized lights whose rotation “create reflections of the external environment or produce layers of low-resolution, light-based images that lie at the limits of our figurative perceptions”.¹² This digital playground is supposed to “offer several levels of sensory experience and interaction”.¹³ Passersby can observe this creation but can also activate the lights and transform their movements via their own smartphones. According to the artist “this fusion will offer spectators both a digital playing field and an anthropomorphic artwork capable of engaging them by its sheer dimensions as much as by its playful aspect”.¹⁴

In the different artworks located in public spaces, individuals themselves become performers and part of the cultural and artistic city. By enrolling visitors' bodies and ideas, these creations constitute an invitation to participate and interact with urban space. Promoting the sensory experience of public spaces, these playful practices invite visitors to engage in and with the city. Those kind of ludic spaces constitute “triangulating events” (Stevens, 2007), initiating a common context and a common experience from which contacts and interactions between strangers are more likely to occur. Furthermore, the spatial proximity between people initiated through these artworks opens up opportunities for a “playful transgression of conventional boundaries” (*Ibid.*: 66).

3.2. Normalization and securization of public spaces through art in Johannesburg

The need to create interactions amongst people in public spaces, be it through art or not, is so important in Johannesburg that the previous governments, especially under the Apartheid, have used space to separate people according to their race (Beavon, 2004; Guillaume, 2001). The promotion of spaces where people could mix freely independent of their race, but also their class or gender, is thus a crucial issue. Since public spaces are mainly associated with fear in Johannesburg

(Bremner, 2000; Guinard, 2014), their securization is often presented as a prerequisite to any other intervention. Consequently, the installation of artworks in those spaces, in Newtown and beyond, are mostly correlated with the reinforcement of security in particular via the implementation of PPP. As a result, in spaces where art is found, guards often patrol the street, street furniture is especially designed to discourage people from sleeping on it (Davis, 1992) and informal trade is prohibited. The artialization of public spaces in Johannesburg tends to be synonymous with their securization, and indirectly leads to the exclusion of most precarious people from these spaces.

There are only a few areas – mostly privately owned or managed – in Johannesburg, where art is or has been used as a means to animate, and not only to secure, public spaces. Maboneng, mentioned earlier, is one of those (Boichot & Guinard, 2013). Sandton, the new economic hub in the Northern part of the metropolis, is another one. This case is particularly interesting since it shows at the same time the potentialities and limits of the development of a more ephemeral and playful art in Johannesburg. As part of Sandton Central Management District (SCMD), a program of performing art (“Open street sessions”) took place in the streets of the area from 2005 to 2010. The longevity of this program was supposed to enhance the image of the area to attract more visitors and thus consumers, but also to animate spaces by introducing an element of surprise capable of seducing new visitors while avoid that regular customers became bored. For instance, Anthea Moys and Toni Morkel organized in 2008 a *Water Ballet Divas*. This parodic ballet was performed by six artists, all non-professionals dancers, wearing swimsuits and rubber rings, who swam in the central fountain of the main square in Sandton (Fig. 1, left). This intervention created an opportunity for the passers-by to laugh, sing or even dance together. As such, it fostered interaction. Nevertheless, this kind of performances in Sandton no longer exists since the “Open Street sessions” program's elimination in 2010 following a conflict between the SCMD and the owners of the square, who wanted to be able to control what was happening. There is still art on the square today from time to time, but the present art form is more consensual and is mainly designed to support the commodification of the space rather than develop its playfulness.

Because playing is a call to imagine new operating rules (Stevens, 2007), the playful dimension of art can also be seen as a way to test, if not contest, the norms of the space. And indeed, there are still some artists in Johannesburg who intend to resist the current normalization of public spaces through art by proposing other forms of art that are more subversive and critical of the way the city is currently produced.¹⁵

3.3. Toward a pacification of public spaces through art in Montreal and Johannesburg?

In both case studies, art is conceived in a way so as to transform public spaces into attractive and pleasant ones. But important differences remain between the ways art is used in Montreal and Johannesburg. In the Montreal QDS, most of the recent art located in public spaces aims at creating a new sensory experience. Visitors are highly encouraged to participate to the artistic creations, which are only achieved with the involvement of individuals. In Johannesburg, the use of art follows an approach more oriented toward the beautification and securization of public spaces. Because securization seems to be a prelude to any intervention in public spaces, the playful practices of art are more likely to be found in privately owned or managed spaces, as long as they support – or at least do not disrupt – their commodification. We propose then the hypothesis that this divergence between Montreal and Johannesburg references a difference of context – the importance of the fear (of crime, of the Other, etc.) in Johannesburg restricting the diffusion of a more playful art –, a lag in the adoption of global models, and in the appearance of their outcomes.

¹⁵ See for example Ismail Farouk's project, *Trolley pushers* (Author1, 2014)

⁷ <http://www.quartierdesspectacles.com/en/discover-the-quartier/>

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ QDS, Works produced by the QDS Partnership, Montreal.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² <http://sat.qc.ca/en/news/pixiness>

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The focus on the collective and participative experience of art is considered only once the esthetic and security function of art has proved its effects.

In that perspective, the cases of Montreal and Johannesburg could be seen as two phases of the same trend toward the normalization, if not the pacification of public spaces. Beyond the symbolic transformations, the artistic production of public spaces tends to normalize the behaviors of the by-passers through the diffusion of norms about the “good” uses and users. Associated with the positive values of inclusion and conviviality, the art in the QDS public spaces encourages certain specific behaviors such as participation or play that implicitly discourages other behaviors that are not welcome in public spaces. Indeed this ideal of a vibrant community does not seem to involve homeless people, informal traders, and deviant youth that appear more and more as “out of place” (Cresswell, 1996). Furthermore, the promotion of a consensual art based on joy and happiness does not question the social and political realities in which it is produced and finally tends to exclude activist - or at least more engaged - art whose presence becomes unwanted. In Johannesburg, if this process of pacification of public spaces through art is less advanced, art nevertheless participates both in (re)defining the rules of conduct and practices in public spaces and in legitimizing its redefinition. Due to its consensual esthetic value (Deutsche, 1998), art is thus a means to mask and facilitate the diffusion of the socio-spatial exclusion dynamics induced by contemporary urban regeneration operations. In such a context, it is important to wonder about the persistence in the long term of an art form whose intent is to resist these dynamics of normalization of urban space. Is subversive art, in the public spaces of Johannesburg as elsewhere, meant to be absorbed by the dominant art form that is promoted through urban regeneration?

4. A normalization of art itself? The case of street art

This section will more specifically focus on street art since the progressive commodification and institutionalization of this initially subversive art is symptomatic of the extent to which normalization of urban spaces can affect art itself.

4.1. Street art in Montreal, from undesirable disorder to a successful urban policy

In Montreal, the status of street art is particularly ambiguous. Indeed, although graffiti is an artistic expression, it is perceived as a hindrance to the beautification of public spaces and opposed to the image of a global cultural city. Consequently, the police, in cooperation with public and private stakeholders, have launched an anti-graffiti action plan for downtown, including increased surveillance and the eradication of graffiti and street art that are not included in the official vision of art in public spaces. In 2013, \$3.5 million were spent by public authorities to clean “graffiti from 150,000 square meters of walls, street furniture and equipment¹⁶” from the whole city. Aware that, despite these efforts, illegal graffiti continues to proliferate on the walls of the city, the police and the city’s beautification task force adopted a new strategy and decided to invest in the creation of artistic murals. Relying on the belief that a graffiti artist does not write on a painted wall, the development of these murals aims to restrain illegal graffiti. Paradoxically, graffiti artists, whose work used to be prohibited, have been hired by the city to complete these murals in different parts of the city. Today, in Montreal, more than 70 murals have then been created.

Obviously, the design of some murals also participates in the creation of the desired cultural and artistic atmosphere. In the QDS, a jazz scene has been painted and covers an entire wall (Fig. 3), as a permanent reference to the International Jazz festival and the cultural life of the area. Realizing the beautifying potential of street art, the



Fig. 3. An official mural in the QDS

Source: ArtduCommun.com

partnership of the QDS invited graffiti artists to paint on the walls of an abandoned building in order to transform the negative image of the vacant building and also to offer an ephemeral street exhibition to visitors and inhabitants. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that two international street-art festivals take place every year in the QDS in cooperation with the municipality: founded in 1996, “Under pressure” is an outdoor festival which is now one of the biggest and longest graffiti and hip-hop event in north America; “Mural Festival” invites international artists to transform one of the main street into an open-air museum for two days. In 2015, they attracted 1,15 million visitors. Encouraged by this success, Montreal will host a one-month street art festival in July 2017. Through this kind of initiative, street artists are deeply encouraged to transform their own practice, from illegal graffiti to official street art.

The management of street art absorbs the abilities of street artists into official cultural planning and also restrains the emergence of graffiti in public spaces. Street art then becomes a means by which the goal of making Montreal an international cultural city is achieved. This regulation obviously tends toward the normalization of street art, which becomes officially and consensually oriented and then normalization of public spaces.

4.2. From subversive murals to consensual and globalized street art in Johannesburg

In South Africa in general and Johannesburg in particular, murals have a historical and symbolic value because of their role in the struggle against the Apartheid regime (Marschall, 2002). As a symbolic and material appropriation of public spaces, murals were indeed a means to contest and challenge the Apartheid regime, while proposing an alternative vision of what South Africa should or could be.

Following the end of the Apartheid, private companies as well as

¹⁶ <https://www.spvm.qc.ca/en/jeunesse/ado-graffitis.asp>

new democratic public entities have progressively promoted murals as part of their branding or marketing strategies, through the organization of competitions, festivals or commissions (Marschall, 2008). In Newtown for instance, murals were integrated into the urban regeneration project from the beginning as mentioned above and are even periodically renewed through public commissions (Fig. 2, in the background). In 2007, an annual street art festival, called “Back to the city”,¹⁷ was even created that continues to this day. Sponsored by private companies, it promotes mural paintings, hip-hop music, break dancing, etc. What is commonly referred to as street art today seems to arouse enthusiasm from a variety of actors. This is probably due to the convergence of two phenomena: the capacity of this particular kind of art to resonate with South African past and its increasing economic and esthetic value world-wide (Gastman, Neelon, & Smyrski, 2007; Genin, 2013).

Nevertheless, through this process, murals are progressively both commodified and institutionalized, to such an extent that their subversive dimension seems to have become secondary. Conversely, street art that does not comply with the dominant esthetic canon tends to be denied even as street art and to be labeled as graffiti (Mcauliffe, 2012). In this regard, the choice of City of Johannesburg to promote street art by providing walls and commissions to artists has to be understood as another way – less explicit but also less expensive than banning – of preventing the presence of graffiti in the city. The recent decision made in Fall 2016 by the new mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, to reinforce the bylaws regarding the production of graffiti in order to restrict them so as to promote a “investor-friendly environment”¹⁸ marks a new step toward the repression of a certain kind of street art that is referred to as graffiti. In the meantime, others kinds of street art, to which the term street art is often reserved, continue to be promoted because they are seen as trendy and contemporary. The evolution of the space and role dedicated to street art in Johannesburg is thus characteristic of its progressive integration into urban projects conceived to improve the image of the city, and of its consecutive normalization. Art is thus normalized while the city is.

This regulation of street art in Johannesburg and Montreal highlights a contradiction within the production of public spaces. While promoting street art, public authorities ultimately only support an “official” and consensual art form whose visibility underpins the creation of an international and attractive image. All artwork that opposes this desired atmosphere is banished while potentially subversive art is highly controlled. The analysis of art in public spaces is thus enlightening to understand the evolution of what are both public spaces and art.

5. Conclusion

The comparison between Montreal and Johannesburg illustrates that art in public spaces has become a global urban norm that transcends the dichotomy between Northern and Southern cities. Today, “artialized” public spaces are a prerequisite to create attractive and competitive cities. But in both cases, it appears to be more than a mere esthetic transformation of public spaces. On the one hand, the implementation of art is accompanied by a securization of public spaces, whose accessibility becomes restrained for undesirable groups of people who do not conform to the desired image of a globalized city. On the other hand, the emergence of participative and interactive art, by promoting sensory and playful practices, tends to pacify public spaces and transform the experience of the city.

The development of art in urban planning then contributes to the normalization of public spaces. Art symbolically transforms public

spaces into attractive ones but also encourages people to behave in a way that in return participates in the creation of the associated desired atmosphere. In a more subtle way than punitive regulation (Foucault, 2004), art in public spaces creates norms and expectations about legitimate behaviors, and therefore defines the legitimate public. The control of street art in public spaces is obviously part of this dynamic. In fact, by focusing on a specific and consensual form of art, urban planners embellish normalization and exclusion processes so as to make them more acceptable. This raises a certain number of crucial questions: is there an art form that can resist this trend and propose a new way of producing the city that would be less exclusive? And more generally, if the way the cities are produced is also influenced by the way art is, does this mean that there is an alternative urban model in which art as an object and as a practice can play a critical role? The future role and place of art in the city depend on the urban planners' determination and ability to answer these questions.

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¹⁷ <http://www.backtothecityfestival.com/>

¹⁸ <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-11-01-00-graffiti-and-the-legal-bid-to-erase-public-art-histories>

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