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## **Creatively rethinking the augmented Society of the Spectacle. A discussion on art and the political**

### **1. Introduction**

The contemporary late capitalist mode of production has exacerbated the decline of the public sphere, universalized its earlier consumption-oriented refeudalization of society and radically restructured every layer of its economic, cultural and technological bases (Fuchs, 2016; Habermas, 1989; Jameson, 1991). A pervasive mediatization with sweeping disenfranchising networked translocalization incessantly augments the devastating effects of our uneven spatial development (Carpentier, 2007; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Manfredini, 2022c), the violence of conflictual cultural trans-culturalism (Éigeartaigh & Berg, 2010) and the subjugation by policed sociospatial transduction (MacKenzie, 2006; Manfredini, 2022b). The cumulative effect of these phenomena unremittingly disrupts all relational processes, negatively deterritorialising their assemblages and destructively introducing abstraction in politically reactionary conflicts (Hardt & Negri, 2004), producing widespread molecular fragmentation of the *socius*, depoliticization and dissolution of the commons, while overpowering the powerful others (Hardt & Negri, 2017).

This process is supported by a brutal neoliberal political ideology that purposefully dismantles the welfare state by freeing the market and capital from the restrictions instituted with social democracies based on notions of equity, democracy and diversity. Neoliberalism is the main reference of the film *Redux of The Society of the Spectacle* directed by artist and critic Daniela Grubišić about her own creative work, which is central to this paper for its effort of developing, deploying and documenting advanced anti-hegemonic detournement strategies and tactics of subversion-by-sublation of the public sphere in public space. The film documents and speculates on the emancipatory agency of selected creative work that reroute and hijack mundane surfaces and daily

moments to liberate spatial enclosures in which they are entangled, by opening them up to relational dynamics of the processes of montage that perforate, cut and fold them. It presents creative actions that re-abstract the disruptions of the contemporary society of the hyper-spectacle to create new possibilities for the driving forces of the consumer/prosumer society (Ritzer, 2019) by activating the residual forces of the consumed consumer society at the core of the urban consumption landscape, redirecting the spectacle to an augmented social production of space – material, social and mental.

Today's rampant growth of private sphere can be reversed by repoliticization processes both in material and mediated spaces (Terzi & Tonnelat, 2017), guaranteeing the exercise of an extended Right to the City into the planetary dimension of urban development (Brenner, 2014) as the right of the contemporary rooted cosmopolitan (Calhoun, 2003) to participate in the production of networked urban spatialities by conceiving, instituting and living politically through the continuous reaffirmation of equality (Harvey, 2019; Lefebvre, 1991; Rancière, 2010). Fifty years after the fierce appraisal of the unequal class relations and conditions that emerged in the postindustrial society by Guy Debord in the seminal *The Real Split* (Debord & Sanguinetti, 2003), the counterforces to the *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1983), notwithstanding the dramatic augmentation of their capacities, struggle to create agonistic mixed, translocal and transcultural worlds that allow forms of individual reappropriation of the means of production that abolish condition imposed dependence, discipline and alienation.

This writing aims to introduce and present a reflective redoubled critique on the attempt to creatively contribute to these counterforces through art. It discusses a film on the creative work of Daniela Grubišić that documents her daily detournement creative practice of public space subversion-by-sublation. Firstly, it analyses the sculptural work component by deconstructing its counter-abstractive process aimed to reestablish instances of emancipatory relational resonance. Secondly, it explores the filmic work designed to reverse emplaced annihilating conditions. Finally, it critically evaluates the capacity of these artworks to construct a coherent discourse about the possibility of establishing rich relational intensities, foregrounding their efficacious agency in engaging multiple actants in a collaborative formulation of a counter-hegemonic culture. Through a discussion on a series of artworks that redress and operationalize Debord's (1983) detournement strategy by implementing it in a double – folded – way, this paper addresses a meta-oeuvre: a film that reassembles the series in a redux of the foremost Debord's film, *The Society of the Spectacle* (whose monologue is reinterpreted in the first part of the meta-oeuvre), through an approach aimed at disentangling the transgressive agency of public art from its colluding complicity of the carnivalesque regime (Langman & Ryan, 2009). The paper starts with a close reading of a series of oeuvres revolving around *X Surfaces Developed in Space*, a Grubišić's artwork produced to critically position the artistic contribution as a practice that conjuncturally upends the spectacle of our everyday practices by deploying tactics of radical rerouting.

The critique of Grubišić's meta-oeuvre – produced in close collaboration with Manfredo Manfredini, is used to articulate an affirmative discussion on the emancipatory potential of the total sublation of public space, foregrounding the power of its intrinsic relational counterforces (Harvey, 2018). The discussion draws upon the theory of the

spectacle as a critique of contemporary consumer culture and commodity fetishism, creatively dealing with issues such as class alienation, cultural homogenization, and mass media. Its initial critical reading of the artwork *X Surfaces Developed in Space* and its installations in public space, shows how its public appearance triggers radical actions of deconstruction of dominated situations by rerouting the emplaced rules that annihilated any possibility of subversive reordering life, politics, and art. This discussion, which continues by addressing a series of videos, focuses on expounding how this composite artwork series produces forms of non-mediated relationality and conditions of resonance that, as defined by Hartmut Rosa (2018), suspend the abstractive socio-economic and institutional status quo. It collaboratively articulates longstanding independent projects of both authors of this writing aimed to subvert the growing desynchronizing alienation (Grubisic, 2017; Manfredini, 2019, 2022a, 2022b) by introducing in the everyday practice multidimensional vehicles of deterritorialization that foster agencies of politicization by disruption (Manfredini, 2019) and a critical doubling anchored in place through a folding strategy, allowing for the emerging of a countering spatial production conceived anew. This strategy brackets moments of everyday life in an experiential critique that engages a whole bodily perception of the passivity and loss of agency of the individual in the production of a collaborative space of hope. It reveals illusory tactics of hedonic subjection for exploitative ends of a condition of annihilating social acceleration determined by the imperative of perennial growth and compound rate increase led by hegemonic forces of abstractive capitalism (Harvey, 2018).

## **2. The production of the primary folding**

### **2.1. X Surfaces Developed in Space**

*X Surfaces Developed in Space* is an artwork with a provocatory agency: to disrupt the dominated distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004). It consists of an unconventionally folded, perilously dissected and progressively oxidating plate of industrial steel that interrupts the continuities designed for representative art in public spaces by deviating movement flows of people and vehicles, unsettling aesthetic order, staining the and relentlessly cleaned and sanitized materials that 'beautify' the city, hindering daily practices, and disturbing the policing practices by introducing a hazard that triggers defensive acts. This steel plate is designed for an installation in a central public space where it appears as a queer object. Yet, its alterity is not actual: its presence as basic semifinished object is that of an open assemblage with myriad applications that materially fold into it. Through folding, it resonates with the near-ubiquitous emplacements of itself in the surrounding environment as buildings component (e.g. plates of iron gates), appliance (e.g. cage of refrigerated units), and interior fittings and furnishings (e.g. bar chairs, tables and counters). Its fold, however, is patently subversive and provocatory: a large curvature defines this embodiment of a plate that encloses what is external to it and makes it internal. Multiple cuts on its body expand this agency by locally allowing for new internalizations through inflexion or deflection of the primary curvature liberated by dissection. This interruption of the continuity

of the curvature creates protruding sharp and pointy flaps that redouble the hazard of the installation. The threat to the public is enhanced by the accelerated natural oxidation of the plate that exudes a familiar coating: a signal of potential contamination and index of uncontrollable becoming.

The folds subvert the customary order of things by showing the eludibility and the possibility of breaking loose from the constructed dominating system within our world of commodities. The metal sheets as an unfinished product for transformative transformation, such as the deformation and the tin treatment to make it into, say, a Campbell's soup tin sent and consumed throughout the world, unsustainably, supported by a massive spectacle that includes the carnivalization of Warhol's work annihilating the understanding of the implications of alienation.

The multiple folds make this installation a meaningless structure (Jameson, 1992): non-representational operations of folding, dissecting and oxidating engage super-signifiers that manifest the unlimited finity (Deleuze 1988; O'Sullivan in Parr, 2005). Determined by a agrammatical logic, these folds supersede and reaffirm signifiers, concurrently, showing how a "finite number of components yields a practically unlimited diversity of combinations" (Deleuze, 1988: 131). The folding moderates the "absence of the centre" by creatively engaging the crisis of common logic and the loss of meaningful references. It reinstates complementary fictions produced and imposed by hegemonic actors, such as leading corporations and leading political parties. Its materiality detours the integrated spectacular landscape of the consumption apparatus made of several complementary yet competing fictions produced and imposed by the hegemonic actors of leading retail and entertainment corporations. The redoubling folding of the film introduces a reflection where transgression opens to resonance by territorializing the practices of each context, documenting the break of meaningless structure in everyday life, disengaging the accelerating abstraction and opening other spatialities to (e)motion.

X Surfaces Developed in Space explore the relationship between a sculpture and space to understand the transformational agency of the former over the latter in open and closed, private and public spaces of either concentrated or extended urban spaces. The work modulates relationships through size and material variations on the multiscalar dimensions, depending on the space in which it is emplaced: functionally, structurally and discursively. Its embodiments range from landscape or urban public art scale to domestic or personal ornament, establishing narratives of subversion that involve the city's architecture in contestation processes. As an individual sculpture or assemblage of serial repetitions, it dismembers and dislocates the distributive spatial regime, forming a whole installation with strict relations of dependence (Fig. 1).

Oxidations add a patina that relates it to the passage of time and the course of its existence and establishes its roots by marking with rust its territory. As post civil (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008) monument of the postmodern urbanity, it overcomes the pursuit of representational aims and celebratory or acculturating agendas. It is partly a concept of elaborating the idea of the surfaces in a space that opens or closes a given spatial condition. It also includes dissections that reveal the operability of the surfaces, dissolving their continuous geometry. It opens outwards, creating an imaginary space

and reflecting in it the process of its production through the steel plate's manual and automated machining processes.

Searching for and experimenting with surfaces in space through careful thought and deliberation, the surfaces unfold by resolving in space through continuous sketching until the work is exposed. The work is geometrically placed in equilibrium to form a whole and with secondary arrangements of the surfaces that introduce multiple transformations. The public engages with the installation as an active participant in the interaction with the sculpture, passing between individual parts of open and closed surfaces hiding and seeking both actually and digitally through the multiple platforms of the digital public sphere. Three geometric semicircles, with different arrangements, form the sculpture as a whole, giving it architectural significance and presenting it as part of a whole gallery, an interior and exterior natural or urban space. This sculptural installation has a future purpose of being placed in urban public space. The installation would be placed as part of a public area in the courtyard of the building complex, a public educational institution, thus forming an overall urban educated whole. Also, this sculptural installation is intended for installation in a public urban promenade or the like, where it would interfere with the hectic flow of actants, both humans and non-humans. Its performance would contribute to the inclusion of art in the urban sphere of life. Sculptural installation is in the existing dimensions and intended for placement in the gallery and museum space.

The Production of X Surfaces Developed in Space: The material folds are produced through a machine that bends the three steel plates 1.5 mm thick and measures 2m x1m in half circles of 1.25m radii. Subsequent manual cutting and bending involve splitting the sheets into two pieces horizontally and vertically by 15 cm and manually bending them in the opposite direction, creating a small leaf shape in the pure geometric semicircular shape of the sculpture. One of the three sheets is cut 15 cm vertically and bent so that the entire art installation gets its movement. When viewed from above, it forms a spiral maze of surfaces inserted into one another, forming a series of three geometrically arranged sculptures.

Different layouts of geometric surfaces give us different art installations with differently developed surfaces. Looking at the geometric surfaces separately, they create a single sculpture in the space on the front, opening the space and closing it on the opposite side. Cutting the surfaces opens the closed surface and changes the curvature's direction, opposing the pure semicircular surface and appropriating extra surrounding space. The plate was washed with Nitro to remove the oily protection. After that, it was treated with salt and water to prime oxidation and create a patina receptive to the natural forces of the environmental conditions. The sculpture developed an irregular coating interacting with weather conditions through a chemical reaction. Rust also represents the influence of time on the material in the transcendental meaning of the influence of time and incidental phenomena of the material, giving the sculpture time as a fourth dimension.

Surfaces are functional or non-self-contained, closing the volume and defining interior and exterior conditions. Geometric figures of semicircles construct such volumes with different arrangements. The relations between surface and space shift the

perception of space. Smaller cuts and bends on the surface in the opposite direction open additional links to the surrounding space. Geometric shapes and composition methods produced with mechanical methods give the surfaces an abstractive capacity. Pure surfaces reduce aesthetic to materiality as an aspiration for embodying gestures of intervention on the surfaces. The conceptual critique is directed at the postmodern fetishism of sculptures, architecture and decorations of our daily landscape.

**Material and Material Processing:** The thin plate of metal used to create the artwork was processed through simple processes, such as bending, cutting and splitting. These processes are possible due to the flexibility and durability properties of the material. These processes were also deployed to produce various objects, from coins to ships, starting from its range of primary forms: rectangular panels of various sizes or strips on wheels. The sheets were obtained by rolling structural steel with a black coating that is substituted by rust if exposed to the elements of time. The three rectangular sheets were processed in three phases. They were initially bent with a machine that compresses their inner part and extends the outer without removing the shavings. Three semicircles were made by bending sheet metal 1.5 mm thick and 2m x 1m. In the second phase of production, the sheets were manually cut. A hand saw and a manual frame saw were used. When cutting, the tool blade vertically enters the material, loosening the material by breaking or cutting it. Penetration of the hand saw into the material produces a rough vertical cut. The third phase used mechanical, manual processing. For bending the metal in the opposite direction, a template was used and the parts were manually separated. A plunger and an iron embossing template were used to form a 15 cm bent.

## 2.2. The films

### 2.1.2. X Surfaces Developed in Space

The first part of the film, it is representing the sculptural installation in context of the Debora critical theory that radical action in the form of the construction of situations... situations that bring reordering of life, politics and art (Fig. 1).

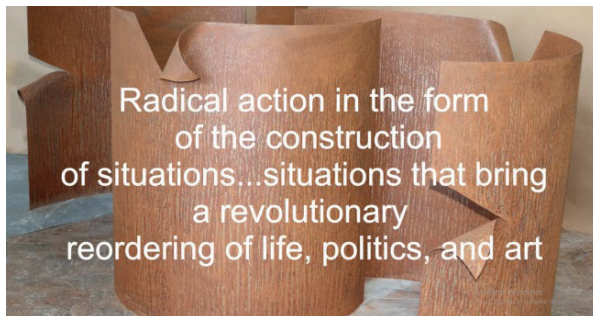


Fig. 1. Daniela Grubišić, *Surfaces developed in space*, 2019, Arts Academy of the University of Split.

### 2.1.2. Human body

The sequence of this film depicts, according to Debord theory, the social relationship between people that is mediated by images. The main idea of this sequence is to show the interpersonal relationship in this case, the relationship between a woman and a man changing through different shots by mutual interaction or individual performance (Fig. 2, 3, 4).

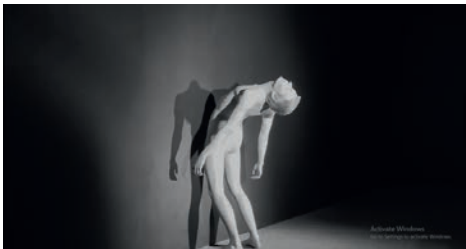


Fig. 2,3,4. Daniela Grubišić, *Human body*, 2018, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany.

### 2.1.3. Reality-virtuality continuum

The name of this sequence is *Diagonal*, which in its performance, is an artistic intervention in the urban – natural environment. The idea behind this sequence is to show the real and virtual relationship and interrelationships. In the existing video showing the urban part of nature in a couple of frames, a drawing intervention is performed, merging individual prominent angles in nature in which the mapping is made, and finally the mapped drawing itself. This sequence is also as an example of theory of Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman of *détourné*, existing art being placed in a new context (Fig. 5).

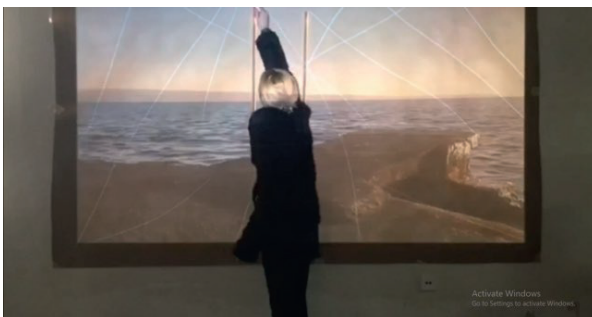


Fig. 5. Daniela Grubišić, *Diagonal*, 2017, Arts Academy of the University of Split.

#### 2.1.4. Urban space – urbanization

This film sequence shows today's rise of urbanization through different shots such as elevators in the mall, streets in different periods, shops with goods, etc. The urban environment is presented as a critique of contemporary consumer culture and commodity fetishism (Fig. 6, 7, 8).



Fig. 6,7,8. Daniela Grubišić, *Urban city*, 2019, Kiel-Hamburg, Germany.

#### 2.1.5. Hand

In this sequence of the film, the hand is moving to circle around a candle. Fire symbolizes danger and also a source of heat and is often used for religious purposes. The idea of the film sequence itself is to show notion, according to Debord theory that too involves real life begin replaced by representation of life (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Daniela Grubišić, *Candel and hand*, 2019, Arts Academy of the University of Split.

#### 2.1.6. Talk – urban dialogue

In this sequence, there is a dialogue about changing the current place of residence. Dialogue consists of motivation through thinking that leads us to the decision to change the place of residence from a one urban space to other urban space. According to Debord



theory Spectacle involves using spectacular images and language to disrupt the flow of the spectacular which is refers to this sequence.

### 2.1.7. Escape

The last sequence of the film shows an escape from one situation to another. The action begins with an idea of a sunflower flower being held in the hands. The sunflower symbolizes the sun as a representation of daily life. Through the course of certain events or established norms we are trapped, limited to certain situations in life, escape can sometimes serve as a break with the current situation according to the Hartmunta Rosa theory of resonance (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Daniela Grubišić, *Escape*, 2019, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany.

## 3. Redoubling the folds: Redux of the Society of the Spectacle

The film *Redux the society of the Spectacle* progresses the critique of the contemporary spectacle by collating the work *X Surfaces Developed in Space* and the other films introduced above. Folding these pieces into a single project, this film intersects real and virtual spatialities, draws links between fragmentary actions and remaps their relations to produce a compound effect. The film affirms a space of negation – a sublation that has taken on a visible from multiple moments of resonance and reappropriation.

Incorporating diagonal lines into video projection creates the relationship between the virtual space of the projected video and the current space and time in which the drawing action takes place, balancing between the real and virtual space. This part of the film is also an artistic performance that emphasizes the importance of producing and reflecting on art. Today we often replace the real world with the virtual, online world, spectacularizing today's society.

The Redux of the Society of the Spectacle addresses the relationship between people as a form of socialization moderated by images in which spectacle actively alters human interactions and relationships. Relationships between people are conditioned by changes both emotionally and socially. Sometimes relationships are conditioned by changes in living locations, social situations and norms, and sometimes by our aspirations and desires. Today we operate in a society where the spectacle conditions our relationships and interactions with other people, coproducing an alienating form of urbanization.

The film includes a section that documents the increasing speed of change in current urbanisation processes. Ultra-fast kaleidoscopic images distract and influence our lives and beliefs; advertising instantly remanufactures new desires and aspirations; contemporary consumer culture constantly reframes commodity fetishism practices; the spectacle of real life is replaced by fleeing representations of life. The film pivots on a sequence with a hand on fire challenging the scripted safety of everyday life. The end of the film gives us the point that no matter the situation, there is always a way out, either manifested in physical form such as escape or the thought process when we move from one thought thinking to another flow of thought. In the thought process, the new idea gives us space to discover new possibilities. The spectacle is interrupted by rerouting and hijacking its very same spectacular images and language. The apparatus of the spectacle is unveiled. The spectacular nature of our society, which is changing, renewing and supplementing again and again, exposed. The film offers escape opportunities from dominated conditions with the possibility of substituting them with new situations, images, and commune resonances.

#### 4. Reflection on the project

The postmodern society of the spectacle has reset the criticism on the overcoming of meaning, value, sense and way of life of modern society formulated by the critical theory that informed the work of Debord, leading to *The Real Split* of the Situationist International of 1972. The postmodern man (Jameson, 1991) has elaborated on the decadence and nihilism of the modern and expressed it in the rise of postmodern art (Vattimo, 1991). Postmodernism witnesses the death of modernism and sees its arrogant demand for uniqueness and responsible for the evils of modern civilization as a futile yet heroic attempt. Modernism was hostile to humanism and dismissed it as a bourgeois issue where reason is abandoned to free people from the established order. Also, postmodernism dismantled the Eurocentric view that that democratic powers should spread Western conceptions and truth, dismissing this as undesirable and meaningless – the awareness of the necessity of understanding the continuous becoming as value. Postmodernism is a form of cultural activism motivated by philosophical theory and political ends and cannot in any way be accommodated in a linear conception of history, as this film documents. Postmodernism looks backwards and forward, taking motives like never before in history. Postmodernism embraces earlier ideas and radically reinterprets their meaning by placing them in context. It combines art forms, thus producing *maximal difference* (Lefebvre, 1991). In visual arts, the postmodern approach opens possibilities. Art can openly address the catastrophe of meaning, the disruption of rational, historical determinism and the progress of art. Postmodern sculpture transforms the modernist autonomy and non-narrative into an emancipatory *sculpture through text* that offers complex combinations of spatialities – social, physical and mental. Postmodern is the production of sense in postindustrial, and in political terms of the postblock (post cold war) era. Postmodern contemporary art urges the contemporary artist to reflect on the condition of today's metamodern man. The Redux the Society of the Spectacle is an affirmation of the Right to Dissensus,

which, as Rancière (Rancière, 2010) posits, exert the disruptive capacity of action to evade coding, orders and distributions and, as such, informs politics as “supplement to every collective body”

Link to the film [https://youtu.be/Agx\\_44l\\_AwM](https://youtu.be/Agx_44l_AwM)

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All photos by Daniela Grububišić

### Contributions of the mentors

Surfaces developed in space: Kažimir Hraste, Arts Academy of the University of Split, Croatia

Deployed forms: Matko Mijić, Arts Academy of the University of Split, Croatia

Human body: Stefanie Polek, Stephan Sachs, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

Diagonal: Vlasta Žanić, Arts Academy of the University of Split, Croatia

Candle and hand: Viktor Popović, Arts Academy of the University of Split, Croatia

Talk: Stefanie Polek, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

Escape: Nenad Čosić, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

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Human body: Patryk Wilk, Anna Geffert, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

Urban city: Julia Sederholm, Claudia Geaboc, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

Talk: Claudia Geaboc, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

Escape: Arturo Sayan, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

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Candle and hand: Antea Biskupović, Arts Academy of the University of Split, Croatia

Escape: Arturo Sayan, Muthesius Academy Kiel, Germany

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**Abstract**

Radical structural transformations of the public realm in our post-civic urban condition progressively reduce relationality and negate the Right to the city. Fifty years after Debord's *Real Split*, the ever-accelerating abstractive effects of the Society of the Spectacle impose a radical redress of the critical theory informing its interpretation. This paper discusses a film on the creative work of Daniela Grubisic, documenting daily detournement practices of public space subversion-by-sublation. An initial analysis of her sculptural work that deconstructs abstractive conditions of domination to reestablish instances of emancipatory relational resonance is followed by an exploration of her filmic work that reverses emplaced annihilating conditions. Finally, a critical evaluation of the combined capacity of these established rich relational intensities foregrounds its effectiveness in engaging multiple actants in formulating effective counter-hegemonic cultural practices.

**Keywords:** Public space, Emancipatory artistic practice, The Society of the Spectacle, Hegemonic culture, The Right to the City, Carnavalesque distribution of the sensible, Public art installation, Visual art film.

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