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Sculptura în spațiul public
_Sculpture in the Public Field_

REZUMAT

Această cercetare se axează pe modul în care artiștii consacrați și lucrările lor, mai ales cele de sculptură, funcționează în spațiul public. Specificul acestor spații crează un context cu totul diferit de acela al muzeului sau al galeriei și prin urmare nu toți artiștii reușesc sau își doresc să realizeze lucrări potrivite pentru publicul mult lărgit. Pentru a exprima mai bine aceste situații, mai multe exemple au fost luate în considerare din punctul de vedere al reacției privitorilor: de la scandalul provocat de lucrarea _Tilted Arc_ a lui Richard Serra, la mult iubitele opere ale lui Anish Kapoor, până la cele ale lui Antony Gormley și Damien Hirst, vom încerca să înțelegem reacțiile ce variază de la indiferență la furie. Particularitățile artei din spațiul public trebuie să fie observate și acceptate pentru a avea o mai bună înțelegere asupra așteptărilor tuturor celor implicați în acest proces. Acest lucru este important mai ales pentru profesioniștii din domeniul artistic ce tind să nu realizeze faptul că succesul unei opere de artă în acest spațiu nu este niciodată determining de membrii lumii artei, fie ei alți artiști, curatori sau critici, și nici reputația sau opera artistului în sine nu are relevanță prea mare. Fără a înclina spre o abordare populistă, au fost prezentate și analizate posibile soluții pentru controversele caracteristice artei din spațiul public, pentru a încerca identificarea celei mai fezabile care ar putea să ajute la progresul acestui domeniu artistic.

CUVINTE CHEIE: arta în spațiul public, sculptură, estetica populară

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the way well-known artists and their art pieces function in the public space, with an emphasis on sculpture. The specificity of these spaces creates an entirely different context than that of the museum or gallery and therefore not all artists can, or even choose to create suitable works that manage to engage this greatly expanded audience. In order to better express this situation, several cases of renowned artists have been taken into consideration, concerning the way the public reacted to their works: from the debacle of Richard Serra’s _Tilted Arc_ in New York, to the beloved works of Anish Kapoor, and from Antony

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Gormley’s Angel of the North, to Damien Hirst’s Verity we will try to understand the public’s reactions that range from indifference to outrage. The particularities of public art need to be observed and accepted in order to get a better grasp on what to expect from all those involved. This is especially important for art professionals who tend to overlook the fact that in the public arena an artwork’s success is not in any way determined by the members of the art world, be they other artists, curators or critics, nor does the rest of the artist’s œuvre have any relevance. Without leaning towards the populist approach, some solutions to public art controversies have also been analyzed in order to find the most feasible and sustainable one, that could eventually help further advances in this field of art.

KEYWORDS: public art, sculpture, popular aesthetics

1. Overview

If in 1979 Rosalind Krauss started her pioneering essay with the observation that “surprising things have come to be called sculpture” (Krauss, 1979, p. 30), this is certainly not less true today. However this paper does not wish to point out either the many transformations of the medium, nor dwell in any sort of historicism. Instead it will accept the broad definition of the term “sculpture” and deal with its manifestations exclusively in public places around the (Western) world and their various consequences. But even more importantly, by observing what constitutes successful public sculpture, it will try to offer some pertinent solutions for its specific predicament.

Although the term may seem obvious at first, public art is not quite so easily definable as art-that-occupies-a-public-space, simply because the definition of public spaces can be bent by discourse. Some museums, unlike most galleries, can also be considered public spaces, yet of course the issues raised by public art do not concern the art in museums. The answer here lies in the viewer’s choice, or lack thereof in encountering the artwork in question, because while museums cater to a targeted and willing audience, public art is more or less thrust upon the innocent passersby who can’t help the fact that they live/work nearby a certain location. This simple fact raises the audience of an artwork to great numbers, depending on the location, from a larger variety of occupational and educational backgrounds that a museum is ever likely to experience and in turn the expectations from public art are undoubtedly different on behalf of everyone involved, whether they admit to it or not.

This grossly enlarged audience made up of people which are hardly museum-goers and largely uninformed about art, be it contemporary or otherwise (Senie & Webster, 1989, p. 288), is still potentially powerful and does not shy away from a debate, especially when it concerns something that affects day to day life. The public’s availability and interest for art-related initiatives can be noticed through the participation in projects that call for their responses (Jury, 2014) and also through the many debates they themselves call on issues of
public art (Doss, 1992, p. 63). Although some argue that public art is not defined simply by its large audience, but by the fact that it uses the public as a generator for the artwork, and through the kinds of questions it poses (Phillips, 1989, p. 332), this is a rather wishful definition that fails to encapsulate a great deal of works inhabiting the public space that are far from doing either of those things. However, this can stand as a valid goal for this type of art, and it is in these guidelines that the majority of theoretical concerns are directed.

When one begins to think about public art and public sculpture in particular, the most obvious pieces that come to mind are the commemorative kind that adorned the parks and public squares for centuries. Even though the need for memorials is still present in this day and age (Elsen, 1989, p. 292), the paradigm has suffered a significant shift as sculpture largely lost this purpose (Hughes, 1985; Senie & Webster, 1989, p. 288). Mainly fuelled by the building frenzy of the 20th century, a new type of public sculpture emerged, rooted in the modernist ethos. These minimalist works seem to be the perfect accompaniment to the International Style in architecture, (Senie & Webster, 1989, p. 288) that is omnipresent especially in large cities in the USA, but also in newer neighbourhoods across Europe. Derogatorily, yet affectionately dubbed “plop art” (Senie & Webster, 1989, p. 288; Blackman, 2011, p. 139; Blum et al., 1989, p. 339) these works often do nothing to determine the local culture and say nothing about or to the locals. Called “enlarged and displaced museum art” (Crimp, 1981, p. 77), their characteristic is uniformity, much like the architecture that surrounds them, and even though they seem to be everywhere they slowly started to give way to another trend that made it its goal to counter the modernist idea of nomadic sculpture, and that is site-specificity.

Site-specific is not a style onto itself, but rather a way of thinking about sculpture and place and its manifestations are visually very diverse. Although the idea of a work being executed for one particular location to which it lends itself wholly (Kwon, 1997, p. 86) may appear the best approach when it comes to public art, this too has started to be replaced with a so called “interference art” (Blum et al., 1989, p. 339), which, while it doesn’t take into account the specificities of its placement, nor particularly the type of people who inhabit it, has the great advantage of making the audience realize that serious art can, and maybe even should be fun (Elsen, 1989, p. 294). This type of art is often interactive, offering a release that most people seem to appreciate and enjoy.

While research shows that European countries spend significantly more of the taxpayers’ money on public art that the USA (Cordes and Goldfarb, 1996, p. 77), most of the theoretical debates are concerned with the latter. This would suggest that Europeans have a more matter-of-fact approach to public sculpture and it is an implemented system that seems to be working. Despite the fact that a lack of clear objectives and obvious evaluation criteria was noted (Blackman, 2011, p. 137), this has not deterred the discourses on what public art should strive to be, including ones concerned on its potential health benefits (Coulter, Parkinson cited in Smedley, 2013). The problem that quickly follows though is the method through which to establish if the objectives have been reached (Blackman, 2011, p. 148). All of these talks start
off from the very positive premise that when done right, this type of art, more so than any other should be inclusive and not exclusive (Blackman, 2011, p. 139), make people feel good about where they live (Doss, 1992, p. 67), offer direct cultural and educational advantages (Dumas et al., 2007, p. 30), boost civic pride (Blackman, 2011, p. 146), and have the opportunity to become a recognized symbol of the area and thus marketable as such (Morris, 2012). Keeping these standards in mind we will take a look at some examples of public sculpture in order to observe how they managed to either succeed or fail in attaining them and why.

2. The Good, the Bland, and the Ugly

One of the most common critics for the art in public spaces comes from the fact that it is often boring, for lack of a better word as it successfully manages to have no real message to speak of. This of course, causes no uproar, but neither does it fulfil any of the very optimistic characteristics stated above. The situation is indeed common as it comes from two very different sculptural backgrounds that have unfortunately been very prolific. On the one hand we have the older monumental sculpture that recalls a so-and-so historical figure with no particular relevance today, its only advantage being the connection with the local culture and heritage. On the other hand we encounter the modernist works found in plazas around the world, most of them belonging to the minimalist trend, which are mainly just large enough to not get lost in the equally gargantuan architecture that surrounds them. This “banal sameness” (Doss, 1992, p. 67) creates an empty pseudo-artistic environment which renders the works largely irrelevant as they are most often just ignored (Lubbock cited in Bennett, 2012).

Exceptions are present in both types of sculptures, like some iconic statues of leaders and one particularly surprising case of the untitled Picasso (1967) of Daley Plaza in Chicago. A tough piece to love, some might argue, but yet there it is, on postcards of the city and as a player’s token for the Chicago edition of the board game Monopoly. The notoriety of the artist surely had a positive effect here, but one cannot help but wonder if the light caricature aspect of the work did not also have something to do with its popularity with the public.

Things would have certainly been better had these characteristics of public art attenuated in the more recent years, but it seems the lack of creativity carries on as most submissions have been classified as “disappointing, old-fashioned, and awkward” by the committees (Trusted cited in Akbar, 2008). One of the possible explanations for this is the artists’ desires to not shock the audience, but, as Claes Oldenburg said, trying to please everybody only paves the path to mediocrity and decoration, instead of building artistic integrity (Oldenburg cited in Levine, 2002, p. 55), but like himself, there are other artists who arguably made their name through public commissions. One of them is sculptor Antony Gormley, who says he directed his attention towards public works due to the idea that no work is complete unless occupied by a living body (Gormley cited in Charlesworth, 2009, p. 101). His popularity has only increased since installing Angel of the North (1998) near Gateshead in rural UK, but this caused the critics to take him less seriously as they mostly considered him a populist artist and it would seem that
Oldenburg’s warning actually leaves a very fine line for artists to thread. Gormley’s works were recently acknowledged through being listed as Grade II status monuments, recognized as part of the UK’s national collection of art, so they are now protected under more specific laws.

At first it would have seemed that the postmodern concept of site-specificity would provide a valid answer to the indifferent creations of modernism. Through it, the creativity of the artist would be enhanced, the critics would’ve been pleased with the depth of the works, and the public would’ve had the advantage of experiencing a unique work, determined by its and their location. This theory was of course too good to last and as all research regarding public art, here too we have to take into account the cautionary tale that is “the people vs. art”, particularly Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* (1981). It is unnecessary to insist on the details, because many things, both pro and con, have been written on the subject, however context should be provided in order to establish the reason of the unprecedented distain for this artwork on behalf of the public.

Commissioned by the General Services Administration1 (GSA), *Tilted Arc* was installed in 1981 in Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan, which is regarded by many as one of the most unsightly public spaces to be conceived in the USA (Hughes, 1985; Brenson, 1985; Crimp, 1981; Horowitz, 1996, p. 11), thus it can be said that while the sculpture did not provoke the bleakness of the space, it certainly did not improve upon it either, but that was precisely the artist’s point all along (Cordes and Goldfarb, 2007, p. 163). From a conceptual point of view, a critic might be inclined to praise this initiative, as indeed most of them have, however as it turns out, the public is much less prone to accepting ominous reminders of this sort as they are trying to get by with their daily lives. What was essentially a towering, curved, and tilted wall of unfinished COR-TEN steel was interpreted not just as an inconvenient eyesore by most passersby, but as decidedly un-American as well. It was called a literal Iron Curtain (Senie, 2002, p.45-6), a Berlin Wall (Brenson, 1985), as well as a plethora of decisively less ideological accusations.

The work’s many qualities aside, following a no less controversial hearing (Hughes, 1985; Brenson, 1985; Senie, 2002, p. 37) and an eight years long legal battle, the work was eventually removed and deposited in a storage unit in Brooklyn (Senie, 1989, p. 298), marking the fulfilment of the artist’s prophecy that to dismantle it, would equal its destruction (Serra, 1991, pg. 579). The testimonies heard were actually two thirds in favour of keeping the artwork, but their relevance was diminished by the fact that they belonged to the members of the artworld, both local and international (Horowitz, 1996, p. 8), while the final decision simply took into account the *vox populi*. This matter is questionable in the sense that it basically nullified the artist’s contract, which is why this story makes such a great case study from multiple points of

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1 The GSA is a branch of the Federal Government of the USA, which as part of its ‘Art-in-Architecture’ program offers 0.5% of the allotted budget for every new Federal building, to art. This program exists since 1962 and continues to this day, the artists eligible for this funding have to be either American citizens or permanent residents. More details can be found by visiting their website: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104456.
view. This research however will focus on the grand failure this has been for site-specificity for public art, essentially dismissing the entire concept as artist’s choice or preference (Kwon, 1997, p. 85-87). This failure can be interpreted throughout Serra’s statements on the subject that, even more worrying are not only his own words, but they seem to mirror the attitude of the artworld towards the general public, a very dangerous game to play when discussing public art.

The rugged, dismal aspect of *Tilted Arc* was evaluated as the ultimate blue-collar aesthetics, representing the American dream itself through honest, raw materials (Brenson, 1985), although why anyone would seriously believe that Manhattan lawyers and businessmen would be sensible to that aspect is anyone’s guess. The artist himself was presented as a working-class figure, former steel mill worker that made it big, but when one faces the reality of him being Yale-educated Fulbright scholar, this too stands out as an elaborate mythicization of his character while biased importance is given to certain biographical data as best fits his work. It is a well established fact that people tend to be suspicious and hostile of that which they do not understand so it should come as no surprise that Serra’s hermetic work caused such reactions.

In this case, he is the opposite of a populist, his words ranging from the elitist to the downright condescending as he was apparently unwilling to take into account his expanded audience, all the while placing the needs of the art above those of the people (Serra cited in Cordes and Goldfarb, 2007, p. 163; Elsen, 1989, p. 291). This is all well and good as long as his vision is not forced upon the masses, which did not look with kindness and understanding upon the reasons he gave on why *Tilted Arc* should stay in place. If one is to consider the following statement: “(…) one has to consider the traffic flow, but not necessarily worry about the indigenous community and get caught up in the politics of the site.” (Serra cited in Senie, 2002, pg. 41), a hint of colonialism can be read in his discourse and it is easy to see how this would not benefit and advance public art anymore than mediocrity would have done.

Serra’s work and reputation did not suffer especially since the artistic community rallied up on his side, but it is worth mentioning two important details concerning his following artworks. First of all *Tilted Arc* remains to this day unique in the sense of being constituted from a single “wall” (Senie, 2007, p.11), and second is that most of his public art commissions later came from Europe (Senie, 2007, p.10). This is not to say that they were received with open arms, his work in *Clara-Clara* (1983) was moved around Paris quite a bit and at one point people from the neighbourhood where it was placed started using it as a communal bulletin board (Elsen, 1989, p. 294), so the inaccessibility of his art carried on across the pond, but with much less legal and media uproar. It is pretty clear by now that public art can’t please everyone nor should it try to do so, and it seems plausible Serra’s artwork was also rejected because of the values imposed on the people by consumer culture, but what about when artists embrace the glossiness? Does that make them exclusively shallow attention seekers, and more importantly, does it diminish the eventual qualities of their works?
Anish Kapoor’s public sculptures are just so, huge things of joy, with their mirrored surfaces polished to an impeccable shine with devices used for grinding optic lenses (Dodgson, 2010, p. 762), they are also wildly successful and the critics’ opinions on him range from the Shiny but Deep to Every Shiny Object Wants an Infant Who Will Love It (Shiff, 2011, pp. 6-33), as there are more and more voices that are concerned with the fact that public art is too juvenile (Doss, 1992, p. 64; Williamson, 2014, p. 31). One of Kapoor’s permanent works is Cloud Gate (2005) in Chicago’s Millennium Park, affectionately called The Bean, it may have been inspired by mercury as the artist states (Garofalo, 2005, p. 64), but it does indeed resemble a gigantic Jelly Bean, levitating peacefully and unthreatening. It doesn’t seem to raise any controversy, simply mirroring the surrounding skyline impressive in itself. It is easy to say that its lack of critique over the environment stands for an aimless and content-free public art (Williamson, 2014, p. 30), but a strange inversion takes place as you step under the Cloud Gate’s arch, the city is no longer visible, just the people. A quiet swarm of distorted figures replaces the feats of engineering reflected on the outside. This introversion can be seen as a subversive mean of introspection meant to refocus and empower the masses.

Kapoor’s Sky Mirrors (2001, 2006, etc.) no longer preoccupy themselves with reflection their immediate surroundings, neither buildings nor people, instead they look upward bringing a piece of the sky amidst earthly environments. Their weightlessness makes them appear as holes in the continuity of space (Cole, 2010, p. 25) in an illusionistic and surreal manner similar to Magritte’s paintings, they impress both visually and from a technical point of view.

What people see in them is an entirely different matter, although clearly inspired by Serra, Kapoor’s S-Curve (2006) and C-Curve (2007), again reflective and shiny have not been met with hostility, if anything, people love them, if only because they offer a narcissistic opportunity for glimpsing one’s own image. The effect this kind of artworks have on most people was noted before the word “selfie” appeared in the dictionary, as the viewer’s first reaction was to take a photo of themselves reflected in the piece (Lubin, 2014, p. 95). Kapoor is indeed preoccupied by how the people perceive the works as he aims for an emotional response (Kapoor cited in Roberts, 2009), which he does get. This participatory art that elevates one’s sense of self is what brings pleasure to the public, especially in the era of social media and the hashtag # photogenic walls on Instagram, at the same time it is hard to say if anyone out there is at least willing to contemplate the artwork, or if consumption will suffice.

A vastly different approach to public art can be observed in the work of Damien Hirst, not particularly known for his public pieces, but an artist can continue to push his trademark controversy even in this field, although by no means through such ideological discourse as Serra’s site-specificity. One of the major differences is the lack of public funding as Hirst chose to loan his Verity (2010) statue to the small coastal town of Ilfracombe, UK, where he also owns a home and a restaurant (Bennett, 2012). The town’s ambitions of bringing more tourists

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through installing an iconic public art piece is well within the aforementioned benefits, yet all the other terms have been carefully cast aside in this situation. First of all the work itself doesn’t speak of the local area or its inhabitants, so it is clearly not directed towards them. The possible pride instilled in their minds could only come from the fact that they stand to gain some financial bonus from the boost in tourism that it could eventually bring. This is reflected in many of the locals’ opinion who feel disconnected from the statue (Morris, 2012), but also in the worry that, despite an initial peak in interest, the controversy would die down, and thus the solution is not sustainable (Bond, 2012).

The enormous statue towers over every other piece of public art (Bennett, 2012) and it is a variant of Hirst’s series of flayed pregnant women which have been on view in several other locations. Sword in hand raised high above her head, facing towards the sea in a pose inspired by Degas’s Little Dancer of Fourteen Years (Bennett, 2012), one can’t help but wonder if in this case scale is not indeed a replacement for quality and innovation (Williamson, 2014, p. 29). The most controversial aspect is not the nudity per se, but the gruesome aspect of the exposed fetus, which was described as graphic and à la Hannibal Lecter (Morris, 2012), its legitimacy of belonging into a public space thus being disputable (Kearns, 2013, p.112). The townspeople, despite writing letters to oppose the gift bestowed upon them, mainly just shrug and carry on with their business, as the local authorities could not be more please. Everyone seems to be aware of Damien Hirst’s notoriety and they accept it due to the fact that “he just can’t help himself” (Morris, 2012).

Even though the public’s reaction to public art is difficult to accurately measure, one paper that might provide some clarity is Pierre Bourdieu’s exploration on the characteristics of popular aesthetics. After following his finds one should not be surprised at the people’s dismissal of what are otherwise valid works of art, if only because most of them lack the “specific competences” needed to understand them (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 246). Even though Bourdieu’s sociological research is not concerned with the art in public spaces in itself, it finds great applicability in these situations, (Lachapelle, 2003, pp. 100-106) considering that public art reaches such a large number of people.

One of the first symptoms of popular aesthetics identified is the rejection of the Art for Art’s sake paradigm, due to the fact that the viewer expects each image to fulfil a function (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 244). This can be observed in many of the public’s question about contemporary public sculpture, especially when it is abstract, as they identify it with what it resembles most closely, just like in the case of Anish Kapoor’s bean, or more unfortunately with Serra’s Tilted Arc, which was thought to be a sort of badly positioned windbreaker for the plaza. In the second situation, the public even seemed willing to accept its presence if it was needed because of some sort of urban planning mistake (Brenson, 1985), but only as long as it

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3 Bourdieu uses the terms “working-class aesthetics” and “popular aesthetics” interchangeably, in this research the latter will be used due to the fact that it’s more encompassing as it is impossible to prove that public art’s audience belongs strictly to the working class.
did ... something.

A second characteristic is the people’s desires for the artwork to follow at least some common sense norms of morality, something that is seen in their reactions to Hirst’s *Verity*, which apparently does not comply. Also according to Bourdieu (1980, p. 244) the masses are more than likely to adhere to the concept of inherent beauty, and that is a possible explanation for why Kapoor’s reflective works that deliver the ultimate dose of narcissism are so beloved, while Serra’s decaying rawness of the material was labelled as garbage at a moment’s notice. In conclusion it would appear that a clear message, or indeed a pretty object will trump over an overly conceptual artwork in the minds of the public. The explanation “it is art”, simply does not suffice, and it is perhaps because of this reason that neither artists nor authorities are particularly keen on taking chances when it comes to public artworks. This could sink the state of public art to new lows of mediocrity unless a solution is sought, while still keeping in mind that just by exposing the public to a radical piece does not guarantee its understanding.

3. Further Solutions

Despite all the unresolved issues, public art still continues to pop up everywhere we look. There are a great number of programs dedicated to these initiatives, both from public and private funds, and one of the biggest changes that have risen in the aftermath of the Serra case, was that most of them, including the GSA, have modified their policies in order to include feedback from the public (Senie, 1989, p. 287; Dumas et al., 2007, p. 38; Simon, 1989, p. 32). The public’s involvement is also claimed to have benefits on their affectionate connection with the work in question since they tend to feel like it is the result of their commitment to the good of the community (Blackman, 2011, p. 43, 46), so this aspect is taken into account as much as possible for the sake of building the much desired civic pride and perhaps a social cohesion, even if it is only illusory.

While it is obvious that not all good artists make good public artworks, and not all are even interested in this aspect, most of the ones that do describe the experience as “a nightmare” (Kapoor cited in Roberts, 2009; Blum et al., 1989, p. 345). This is mostly due to all the bureaucracy involved, and the many factors both environmental and financial that need to be considered, all the town meetings and committees which surely take the toll on the spontaneity and the artist’s patience, but that are even more necessary when it comes to sculpture which involves particular logistics. These procedures are also meant to make sure everybody knows what to expect once the work is unveiled so they are proactive in that sense. The methodology is by no means perfect and some sculptures still get “voted off” (Doss, 1992, p. 63) while

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4 These are just some of the ones that function in the New York City area:
Art in the Parks http://www.nyegovparks.org/art-and-antiquities/temporary-guidelines
Public Art Fund https://www.publicartfund.org/about
Project for Public Spaces http://www.pps.org/reference/pubartdesign/.
elitist remarks referring to the public as “visual illiterates” (Dixon cited in Lachapelle, 2003, p. 111) are still made on occasion, however striking a balance between artistic integrity and the people’s taste remains a primary concern.

In a study discussing how to decrease the incidence of the “bad” from what are actually supposed to be public goods, four alternatives are offered in the case of sculpture (Cordes and Goldfarb, 2007, pp. 165-8). The first one is “bargaining”, which basically refers to making the work a temporary one, in the sense that even if some or most people do not appreciate it, they will be able to take comfort in that it is only there for a short period of time, while the ones that do enjoy it get to revel in it for the time being. This strategy was also formulated by Patricia Phillips (1989, p. 335), underlining the benefits of this type of dynamics for the public space. It is currently being used by many programs dealing with public art, such as the Public Art Fund, whose temporary pieces in New York City include some of the most well-known artworks like Anish Kapoor’s *Sky Mirror* and Olafur Eliasson’s *New York City Waterfalls* (2008), among many others.

More of the offered solutions are also being put into action, but in their cases the treatment may prove to be detrimental to public art in itself. One of them is moving the sculpture to a less visible location where, given limited access, it doesn’t offend or confuse quite so many people. Although this has been done in some cases, it is but a short distance away from placing the work in a museum, where it can safely live its days as a public art failure. The other method is perhaps even more dangerous as it implies somehow modifying the attributes of public sculpture in such a way that it will be deemed appropriate by the audience, which is what is something to be avoided in order to protect artistic integrity.

The fourth and most interesting solution offered by the authors is to provide sufficient information in order to influence the viewer’s reactions, in other words, to educate the masses concerning contemporary art. This is deemed to be the least feasible of the four (Cordes and Goldfarb, 2007, p. 169), and it is certainly the one that would take a longer time and a higher degree of commitment, but it is also the most advantageous on the long run. Even according to Bourdieu, education is the most important factor in building a cultural capital as it creates sophistication, while social origin comes in on second place (Bourdieu cited in Lachapelle, p. 106).

The educational approach when it comes to public art has long been advocated by Senie, her opinion including that through it even Serra’s work might have been saved from destruction (Senie, 2002, p. 42; Senie 1989, p. 299). Her argument is compelling when taking into account that most if not all museums provide such material, yet when it comes to public art it is mysteriously absent. Following this lead, a series of public art chats were devised upon the unveiling of Sol LeWitt’s *Six Curved Walls* (2004) at the Syracuse University (Ebony, 2005, p. 158), strikingly similar to Serra’s *Arc*, the sculpture was initially met with the same resistance, so the talks were meant to deflect the controversy and successfully reduced the complaints about the work.
It seems that in this era of increasing democratization of art and taste made possible through the Internet, a hermetic discourse is no longer a viable or desirable option, and education could be a way of bringing people into the fold. As the realm of public arts continues to expand and the line between various artistic categories continues to blur, we are starting to face works of art that defy the usual definitions and characteristics. The participatory and interactive pieces seem to be a promising trend that is on the rise, and while the greatest challenge still remains finding what strikes a chord in the audience, the best possible outcome would be the existence of artworks that are meaningful not just because of their accessibility.

References


