

ART ON THE MOVE IN THE CITY OF TEMPORARINESS

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the ever-evolving mobility of the art scene in Norway's capital city Oslo. In recent decades, cultural planning has been at the forefront of urban development in Oslo. While that strategy has been successful in regard to generating cultural attractions, like the iconic opera house in Bjørvika, the introduction of new architectural landmarks has caused the obliteration of several cultural production spaces in the inner city. Culture has replaced culture and, consequently, forced artists and other cultural producers to resettle in other parts of town. One reason for this is the dividing line between art as attraction and art as production. Due to a strong emphasis on economic profitability, the cultural planning regime has favoured visible and audience-related cultural venues over invisible and work-related cultural facilities. In response to that trend, a number of temporary art venues have been installed in recent years. On the one hand, this has given the displaced artists new opportunities to work and exhibit. On the other, it has reinforced art production as a temporary discourse and maintained culture as an instrument for boosting urban functions other than ongoing art production. Typically, artists are only allowed to settle for a while, to create a feeling of vibrancy while an area is in transition. The issue I am trying to highlight in this article is how this constant state of temporariness affects the scene and its ability to stay productive. My investigation is based on semi-structured interviews with artists on the move in Oslo and a statistical survey on work-spaces for artists, combined with theories on urban temporality and mobility. As argued by Paul Virilio, being on the move can be highly destructive to people's ability to control their own lives, especially if they are forced to stay in circulation. My interviews have revealed that artists frequently complain about a low level of everyday stability, which affects both their social life and their creative output. Spatial and temporal uncertainty makes it difficult for them to produce large-scale and complex artworks. This situation, however, is not unique for today's society. Historically, art has seldom been a practice of permanence. Artists have been moving around, by force or free will, for centuries. In addition, life has become increasingly more mobile for people in

other occupations as well. Contemporary urban citizens tend to change their livelihood more often than before. Being on the move is considered trendy and forward-thinking, particularly among young professionals. A similar trend is unfolding within the sphere of the arts right now. In contrast to the narrative of unwanted resettlement, there is a distinct affinity for temporality in contemporary art, as Christine Ross has shown. This “temporal turn” also includes a positive vision of the artist as a mobile and dynamic character, whose restlessness is a creative asset. A concrete example of this mindset is *On the Move*, an international cultural mobility network that encourages artists and other cultural professionals to move around in order to enhance their careers. The art scene in Oslo is currently caught in the middle of this dichotomy of negative and positive temporalities, and I argue in this paper that the situation stifles and stimulates creative production in equal measures.

KEYWORDS

Mobility, art, temporariness, planning, displacement

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, strong claims were made about creativity as a special asset in interurban competitions.¹ This gave rise to the widespread idea that the instalment of new cultural attractions was the way to go for any city wanting to boost its economy. Today, however, cultural planning is no longer at the forefront of urban planning in many Western cities. A major reason is that the so-called “Bilbao effect” has worn out,² since many glamorous cultural monuments of the 1990s and 2000s have struggled to prove their worth as long-term moneymaking machines. Even Richard Florida, who identified and coined the term “creative class,”³ has admitted that his theories on culture and creativity as boosters of the general economy do not always hold true in practice: “On close inspection, talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits. Its benefits flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional and creative workers whose higher wages and salaries are more than sufficient to cover more expensive housing in these locations.”⁴

The lack of trickle-down benefits is also detectable within the cultural field itself. While many cities have gained large cultural attractions, less has been accomplished in terms of nourishing a wider range of cultural productivity. The emphasis on cultural attractions aimed at tourists rather than at local art producers has gradually expelled artists and other creative labourers from

the rejuvenated inner cities. In effect, cultural planning has set up a barrier between culture as attraction and culture as production.

If you look to Oslo, there is a direct consequence of this policy: many artists and other cultural producers have lost their everyday work environments. Since the early 2000s, more than ten large workspaces for artistic collectives have disappeared from the inner city, either because the buildings were put to new use or demolished in order to free up space for new buildings.⁵ The Fjord City, Oslo's beacon of cultural planning, is one of the main culprits, due to its failure in keeping independent art production alive in the heart of Oslo. In 2013, the last remaining art collective was forced to move as their rented production venue, Borgen [the Castle], was torn down. Other priorities – a new railroad line and the restoration of a medieval park – weighed more in the municipal process that sparked Borgen's demise. Similar things have happened elsewhere in the city, too.

These demolition scenarios are emblematic of the narrative about artists on the move in Oslo and the temporary lifestyle that comes along with this continuous mobility. It is fitting, perhaps, that even the term “residence” is commonly associated with temporality among artists, as in “artist in residence”, commonly used to describe artistic activities limited in time. Artists, however, are not alone in moving about in the contemporary city, voluntarily or by force. In the following I shall outline some theoretical and empirical insights into the limitations of a migratory way of life, as well as the potentially advantageous aspects.

THE DARK SIDE OF MOBILITY

Few scholars have been more critical about the implications of modern mobilities than Paul Virilio. Many of Virilio's crucial terms and concepts, e.g. dromology and dromocracy, derive from *Speed and Politics*, in which he connects the rise of political totalitarianism with the state's ability to prevent the free circulation of the masses.⁶ Political regimes can induce control over mass mobility in two different ways: by keeping the masses at bay through the use of enforced mobility – or the opposite, by preventing them from moving about. Within this locked framework, the masses are pawns in dromological game they are bound to lose. Throughout *Speed and Politics*, motion is associated with military power and the pure dedication of an army in movement. It is the mass movement, not individual reflection, that spurs the military machinery forward. Virilio calls the performers of such blind dedication

“dromomaniacs”, a term which is also found in psychology, describing compulsive sleepwalkers.⁷

Among Virilio’s numerous examples are the German Nazi regime of the 1930s,⁸ which manipulated the population through mass rallies – for instance orchestrated mobile performances in purpose-built arenas like the Zeppelinfeld in Nuremberg – or impeded them by locking enemies of the state up in prisons and concentration camps. Virilio has developed his theories further in books like *Strategy of Deception*⁹ and *The Administration of Fear*,¹⁰ where he increasingly turns his attention towards the control mechanisms of surveillance and other mobility-controlling technologies.

Similarly, theorists like Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé have lamented the urban consequences of mobility cultures gone astray. Among their common foes are car culture and globalism, which presumably have transformed the modern cityscape into an increasingly undesirable place for humans. Again, mobility represents a double negative. Cars have conquered the cities, created congestion and pollution, thereby condemning pedestrians to a subordinate role. People are prevented from moving as easily and comfortably as would have been possible without vehicles. Globalism, on the other hand, has created a culture of relentless flow that makes it impossible for most people to latch onto what is happening, culturally, economically, and spatially. Things are moving so fast, the argument goes, that places lose their meaning as recognizable sites. Instead, they are destined to become purely logistical spaces or, to use Augé’s term, “non-places”.¹¹ I will return to address the established critique of that particular term in a moment.

Another layer of this dark side of mobility relates to various forms of temporariness. In these times of economic turbulence, forced temporariness has been highlighted in a number of fields. Migration studies¹² have reported on significant social problems due to a rising contingent of temporary foreign labour, in Europe and elsewhere. In several countries around the world, workers are trapped in a permanent state of temporariness. They have no regular job options, but they do not have the economic means to mobilize themselves. This permanent lack of migratory potential creates a “sudden absence of motivity”.¹³

The dilemma of workers falling short of permanent opportunities is not restricted to foreign labour, however. One of the first Richard Florida-inspired

bubbles that burst had to do with the fact that the demand for highly skilled, high-wage jobs has been exaggerated.¹⁴ But some governments still believe in the economic growth mantra because it distracts attention away from the thorny political issues around equality, opportunity, and redistribution. This means that job market expectations are not in tune with reality. Problems of temporariness in the global job market may affect the other side of the table as well: the employers. A recent study by two Norwegian sociologists¹⁵ revealed that a decline in loyalty within the workforce has represented huge difficulties for many companies, particularly in the Nordic countries.

The latter study indicates an element of hope that is largely absent from Virilio's work on mobility. Many people, young people in particular, actually enjoy the opportunity of not settling down in life, at least not too early. This may create problems for institutions in society that depend on loyalty and stability over time, but it can be liberating for the opportunity-seeking individual. Temporariness has also been a liberating force in the sphere of the arts on several occasions, for instance the art project *Long Live Temporariness*, which drew upon the illegal urban culture of squatting – in itself a temporary venture – in order to facilitate safe spaces in Barcelona and Amsterdam for citizens who were in risk of being subjected to gender crimes.¹⁶

TEMPORARINESS AS A PLACIAL AND ARTISTIC ASSET

Traditional assessments of placial identity, like those of Certeau and Augé, have focused on fixed, stable, and continuous aspects of society. That position has been challenged by cultural geographers such as John Urry, Tim Cresswell, and Peter Merriman,¹⁷ who argue that mobility is also a highly important, and sometimes cherished, aspect of human life. In Cresswell's book *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, he highlights the difference between sedentary and nomadic metaphysics by explaining how the latter understanding of reality can clarify questions of identity in regard to travellers, migrants, refugees, and other groups of people who are characterized by being on the move rather than settling down.¹⁸ Cresswell refers to how traditional migration theory has defined movement as a product of rationality. The general assumption has been that people move because they have reached the conclusion that one place is better than another.¹⁹ That is not always the case. Some travellers may be seeking a permanent place to reside, while others are not. In Cresswell's writing, the nomad becomes an image of the mobilities we all have to deal with as human beings in the modern world and a means of framing this cultural reality theoretically.

The nomadic aspect of life is also a target of interest in art, among both theoreticians and practitioners. A work that predates the nomadic inquiries in cultural geography is an essay published by Patricia C. Phillips in 1989, in which she discusses temporariness in relation to public art. She traces this relation to the visual circumstances of her own contemporary time: “The visual environment transposes as rapidly as the actions of the mind and the eye. In both private and public life the phenomenological dimensions of indeterminacy, change, and the temporary require aggressive assimilation, not because they are grim, unavoidable forces but because they suggest potential ideas and freedoms.”²⁰ Other scholars later made similar arguments about the increasing rapidity of contemporary visual culture and its impact on the arts,²¹ but unlike many of these, Phillips emphasizes the latent positive repercussions of this development.

There is a distinct affinity for temporality in contemporary art, as Christine Ross and other scholars have shown.²² Like Phillips before her, Ross links this trend to a wider societal context: “Perception in [the] late twentieth century and early twenty-first century has been increasingly conditioned by demands of interactivity, multitasking, hypersolicitation of attention, and acceleration.”²³ Artistic projects that play around with traditional conceptions of time are typical for this “temporal turn”, which also involves a framing of the contemporary artist as a mobile and dynamic character, whose nomadic restlessness can be a creative asset. Ross thus aligns herself with Phillips’s search for productive outcomes of temporarily.

One concrete example of this combined interest in temporarily and nomadism is an art project called *Land, Use: Blueprint for a New Pastoralism* by Futurefarmers,²⁴ a diverse group of practitioners formed in 1995. Nature, farming, and green participatory action are key concepts in their work. In this particular project, Futurefarmers were investigating a disappearing form of pastoralism, once practiced by desert nomads in California. Staged indoors at the David Brower Center, the nomadic references included a drawing of a shepherd’s wagon, a temporary shelter, and campfire-ish place of gathering. This was meant to serve a re-enactment of a shepherd’s narrative, emphasizing the temporal manner in which nomads set camp, communed, and then moved on in the days of yore. The life cycle of the old nomads resembles Futurefarmers’ own practice: their growing portfolio of temporariness has taken them around the world, to places such as Oslo, Abruzzo, and Stockholm, to name a few. While always emphasizing matters of local significance

in their approach to site, they nevertheless adhere to the typical image of the contemporary artist whose productivity depends on the ability to be globally relevant and ready to move to wherever the next temporary commission appears.

Temporariness is not just a contemporary artistic fascination; it is also used instrumentally by many local governments around the world in order to generate activity during periods of urban transition. Dean Carson, Doris Schmallegger, and Sharon Harwood call it “the institutionalisation of ‘temporariness’ as the driver of growth”.²⁵ This is transferable to a number of temporary art projects in London, for instance those included in the Art in Empty Spaces umbrella, which is a council-driven initiative in Hackney, East London. The purpose of this project is to breathe life into properties that have fallen into disrepair. Instead of just waiting for new plans to hatch, the local council has encouraged artists to fill the empty buildings with short-term displays of various kinds. On the one hand, this provides an opportunity to produce and exhibit. On the other, it represents a kind of willed gentrification. The artistic work enhances the given area, thus preparing the ground for entrepreneurs to move in and redevelop it. The next logical step is that the local art scene is forced to move due to higher rent and property prices.

A typical example of this urban cycle is *Meanwhile Space* in Stoke Newington, which was an art venue located in a shop awaiting development and a long-term purpose. With the support of the Hackney council, the shop hosted seventeen projects in 2013. As soon as the council received a planning application, however, the venue shut down. This scenario is in keeping with the expected pattern of a regeneration process, in which artists find themselves caught between work opportunities and being the scapegoats of gentrification, as Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles have described very accurately.²⁶ Tensions between benefits and downsides are therefore bound to occur.

One cannot disregard the social dilemmas at play here. However, temporary art projects are also entangled in a rhetoric discourse through which temporariness is being promoted as cool, clever, and forward-thinking. “Constant change is what makes the world’s best cities worth revisiting”, as Joe Minihane noted in a recent *Lonely Planet* article on art and urbanism.²⁷ Contemporary urban planning is informed by similar dreams of vibrant cities, which rely increasingly on temporary functions, mixed-use developments, and dy-

namic content. The lure of being cool and adaptable should never be underestimated, especially since the idea leans heavily on the rhetoric of newness as exposed through numerous movements in art and urbanism, like Andy Warhol's embrace of pop culture in the post-war period and, further back, Le Corbusier's assessment of mobility as the essence of human existence: "In the modern city one must circulate or perish."²⁸

This backdrop offers a further explanation as to why artists appear on both sides of the barricades. Interestingly, the desire for contemporary dynamism sometimes leads to a devaluation of permanency, as revealed in a 2006 report issued by the London-based fashion agency Construct: "Permanency breeds a state of fear. If you own something, there's always the potential to lose it, while if you own next to nothing, you won't worry about ending up with nothing."²⁹

THE STATS TELL THE STORY

The trouble is, though, that temporariness can create exactly the same fear and insecurity among people, as noted in a fresh study on migration workers: "Although temporariness among skilled migrants has sometimes been understood in a celebratory mode, through notions of circulation and flows, it is often structured by uncertainty caused by time-limited and differentiated access to rights of entry, stay, and employment."³⁰ Artists and other cultural producers in Oslo may not be migrants in the traditional meaning of the term, but the majority of them are accustomed to a migratory working life within the city's boundaries. This gives them one considerable advantage compared to less mobility-driven citizens: coping with change is something they learn to master. They are nevertheless affected by change and temporariness, in numerous ways.

A national survey of workspaces³¹ for visual artists in Norway sheds light on this particular matter. Oslo contains more artistic workspaces than any other city in Norway, but being the capital city and an undisputed cultural magnet, Oslo attracts considerably larger quantities of artists. Consequently, the survey affirms that the general access to ateliers in Oslo has been insufficient for many years.³² Among the 1,093 respondents, 108 declared themselves gravely dissatisfied with their current work situation, with 81 of the latter respondents based in Oslo.³³

Lack of predictability is a regular theme in the survey. This goes for Oslo as well as the other cities. Almost 80 per cent of the respondents rent their

workspaces, of which 50 per cent are rented on the open market. This means that their workspace future is in the hands of stakeholders outside the artistic field. There are legal obstacles, too, or more precisely: a lack of legal protection. More than three out of ten respondents confirm that they have been renting ateliers without a written contract for one rental period or more. The survey also reveals that artists swap location frequently. In fact, 10 per cent of the respondents have changed workspace six times or more over the past ten years, while 18 per cent have changed four to five times, and 41 per cent have changed two to three times. These numbers are not entirely unusual – indeed, renting a space has been the key to artistic productivity for many decades – but there are very few among the respondents who would choose renting over ownership if given the opportunity. The survey is very clear about that. There is one exception, though. Some artists prefer short-term contracts in cases where they only need a production space for a specific project, limited in time. They do not want to pay more for more than they need.³⁴

This situation leads to the inevitable question: Why do artists move around a lot? Firstly, there are more artists than ever before in Norway. There has been a growth rate of about 30 to 40 per cent from 1994 to 2006,³⁵ and the total number of artists is still growing. This creates more pressure and competition for workspace. This must be seen in relation to a period of rapid transition in the five biggest Norwegian cities, resulting in major alterations in the existing urban fabric. The survey from 2014 singles out demolition as the most common reason why artists move.³⁶

Economy plays a big part in this. The single most important reason why artists lack a workspace or struggle to keep one in the long-term is high rental prices. The situation is more precarious in Oslo than in the other cities, since the capital city has the highest price per square meter. Conditions in Oslo are also different because there is a notable degree of workspace variation. Some respondents report production spaces as small as two square meters, while others have 200 square meters solely at their own disposal. Seeing that the need for storage space is crucial to a visual artist – 63 per cent of the respondents name it as their biggest everyday challenge – these differences are hugely important.³⁷ Such differences are amplified by the fact that some artists are subsidized by the public administration, either in the form of renting a municipality-owned workspace or scholarships and stipends. The gap between the public and private market in Oslo is significantly larger these days compared to the situation twenty to thirty years back. Some respondents claim that this creates an “A team” and a “B team” within Oslo’s art scene.³⁸

There are further complications too. While Oslo municipality has succeeded in establishing a decent number of publicly run workspaces in recent years, the artists appear to be disgruntled with the apparent lack of a dynamic strategy for putting these spaces to good use.³⁹ It can thus be argued that they perceive their own artistic endeavour to be reliant upon two diverging patterns: the overwhelming dynamic of a market-driven urban economy and the underwhelming dynamic of public administration.

ARTISTS: THE DROMOMANIACS OF OSLO?

The key findings of the 2014 survey largely correspond with my own in-depth interviews. Ten out of ten informants mentioned an insecure workspace situation as their biggest worry when asked to openly describe their current and previous working conditions in Oslo. As one of them put it: “It is a nomadic existence because you choose the places where you can afford to be. These are often temporary buildings that are either about to collapse, or which will eventually be turned into flats. You rent these places for an unspecified length of time, and you never know for how long.”⁴⁰ Clearly, this creates uncertainty in regard to the planning of future projects and the scale and format of the artistic output. A painting can be produced almost anywhere, whereas large sculptures and installations demand more space and time in order to be carried out.

Another issue that emerged during these interviews has to do with value. As previously mentioned, cultural planning has tended to favour visible, audience-related attractions rather than spaces of production. This kind of prioritization means that it is difficult to defend the right to keep a facility solely for the sake of its interior functionality, unless the building has an obvious value beyond that, for instance cultural heritage value. Those who administer cultural heritage in Oslo, the cultural heritage management department staff, have developed a nuanced schema for assessing the value of various objects of historical importance, but are known to neglect the value of ongoing cultural activities. Firstly, because the cultural heritage management office does not have a mandate to protect those values. Secondly, because the cultural heritage sector lacks a proper vocabulary to assess the cultural heritage of the future. Two of my informants were very particular about that, with one saying that: “To see the value of what is being done while it is being done, here and now, is something our society is unable to do. It must be canonized before it is recognized as valuable.”⁴¹ The other pointed out a concrete result

of this lack of protection: “I had a studio in the former chocolate factory on [the street] Stockholmsgata during a period when the whole neighbourhood was full of small businesses, artist studios, rehearsal rooms and the like. Today all that is gone. There was clearly no concept that could countenance the value of preserving these activities.”⁴²

Ongoing cultural activity is not a mandatory theme in planning either. Every time a new planning process commences, be it private or public, it has to be in compliance with a predetermined checklist. The content of this list is closely monitored by the planning department of Oslo, where the plan is evaluated step by step. This list contains a wide scope of topics: children’s welfare, the traffic situation, green space, security, universal design, to name a few. Ongoing artistic activity, however, does not feature, which means that any plan can pass through the system without even mentioning that there are artists currently working in the area.

According to my informants, the municipality’s governance of artistic productivity also falls short when it comes to workspace accommodation. They accuse the municipality of failing to understand what the artists need, and of killing the spontaneity of a self-grown work environment. The public ateliers, into which artists are assigned from a list of applicants, cannot replace the collegial atmosphere of a self-regulated artistic milieu, the argument goes. In general, their feedback conveys that a customized, post-industrial building is preferable to a public atelier, which might be suitable for certain kinds of artistic production and unsuitable for others. One of my informants put it this way:

The question is: What happens when the public sector determines which artists will be given a place? It’s often the preconditions that are wrong. In the last round of municipal grant allotments, it was clear that female photographers were being allocated the most space. This is of course very nice for women artists – is it not – but what about the older male sculptors and painters? Something happens through the regulated allotment process.⁴³

ECONOMIES OF TIME, PACE, AND PLACE

These issues are also a matter of perspective. Different people and age groups have diverging preferences in life regarding where they wish to work and reside. Some people think of a slow and stable life as a good life. This per-

spective tends to dominate in municipal surveys of life quality in Oslo, where peaceful residential neighbourhoods normally top the list.⁴⁴ According to Jenny Shaw, however, “Not everyone wants a slower life. The young especially, for example, often move to places perceived as faster just as much as the old move to places perceived as slower.”⁴⁵ As confirmed by the survey of workspaces and my own interviews, artists in Oslo desire a bit of both: the comfort of a slow residential life in combination with a regular yet dynamic inner-city workspace. That desire is difficult to satisfy even for citizens with a much higher annual income.

In reality, more and more artists in Oslo have to choose between living close to the city centre or working close to it. A 2010 article in the Norwegian magazine for visual art, *Billedkunst*, claimed that an increasing number of artists decide to move out of Oslo and re-establish themselves in various surrounding small towns, where there is less competition for resources and post-industrial buildings.⁴⁶ Similarly, the survey of workspaces revealed a gradual densification of artists working in the north-eastern part of Oslo, which traditionally has been less sought-after as an area to work due to its history of heavy industry and pollution.⁴⁷

This weighing of the pros and cons of acceleration is not limited to our own time, however. In fact, such decisions are rather similar to those that people had to make in the early twentieth century, when the pace of the industrialized world really took hold of many cities. The emerging speed culture of that era caused frustration and concern, yet also a feeling of progress: “But protests, however moving, cannot negate the fact that the world opted for speed time and again. People complain about the intrusion of a telephone but rarely do without one and organize their lives with as many time-saving devices as they can.”⁴⁸

What Stephen Kern is addressing in that passage is the ever-evolving human quest for finding time in everyday life. The undertaking of that task changes over time, especially if the everyday social circumstances take a different turn. Few things are more challenging in the everyday “battle for time”, argues Shaw, than combining the routines of family life with a job that depends on elastic time-use:

In unconscious terms, family time is essentially anti-linear and opposed to work time, which is linear and progressive. The ensuing opposition or tension between family and work time appears in many forms, but it is mapped most clearly on to place. Working late, at home, at the weekend or on holiday – though increasingly common – almost always leads to bad feelings because, done in the “wrong” place, it represents a basic incompatibility between work feelings (which are about moving on) and family feelings (which are about staying put).⁴⁹

All my informants mentioned exactly this conflict between work time and leisure time as a reappearing everyday challenge. Everyday life concerns more than staying at home or being at work, however. An important additional factor for the Oslo-based artists is the continuous fight for workspace survival in the inner city. In order to sustain their own spaces of productivity, they’re required to attend meetings, launch protests, file letters to the planning department, phone up politicians, raise awareness in the media, et cetera. In sum, these activities are highly time-consuming and normally always come as an extra commitment. In most cases, urban transformation involves new zoning in the form of a planning proposal. The task of having to decipher an urban plan adds to the daily time pressure, not least because such plans can be almost impossible to comprehend for the unskilled reader. In order to understand the impact of an urban plan, one must stay focused over a long period of time, which is a source of exhaustion. The rhythm of a given planning process may be totally at odds with the rhythm of people’s everyday lives. Such tempo changes can be hugely problematic according to Shaw: “Because time-keeping is profoundly embedded in everyday life, habits and values, accommodating to a different tempo challenges what is expected and can produce intense feelings of dislocation in those forced to march at an unfamiliar pace.”⁵⁰

In short, many Oslo-based artists struggle to keep pace within the existing system of urban governance in Oslo. Time is a social good,⁵¹ and the neo-liberal economy is generous towards those who have the money to live and work where they please. This situation leads to inner-city diversity drain and, according to one of my informants, influences the ways in which artists go about their work: “Art is a part of what it emanates from. Art is precisely as important as the place where it is made. This is why inner-city workspaces are extremely important.”⁵²

CONCLUSION

To summarize, I would like to suggest that the material I have explored in this article finds itself caught between the sedentary and nomadic metaphysics of Cresswell's analysis of mobile cultures in the Western world. On the one hand, if the current urban development trend continues along the same trajectory, it is probable to assume that many artists in Oslo will have to cope with a prolonged feeling of dislocation in the years to come. The feeling of being deprioritized, in addition to the impracticalities caused by frequent physical displacement, undoubtedly has a potentially negative impact on the ability to stay productive. There is an obvious gap between satisfactory working conditions and the realities of life as an artist in Norway's capital city.

Moreover, the present situation seems to generate a class divide, not only between artists and citizens whose daily occupation is more privileged, but also within the art scene itself. While some are able to harvest the benefits of staying in circulation – being in the right place at the right time, receiving grants, seizing available spaces – others are clearly prevented, to some extent, from fulfilling their artistic ambitions.

On the other hand, though, the Oslo art scene can be criticized for its lack of perspective. Being an artist in Norway is, comparatively speaking, not particularly exhausting in the greater scheme of things, especially now that Europe is going through a period of serious economic downfall. Perhaps this reveals a methodological loophole in the survey, and my interviews may have triggered a negative response simply because the informants were encouraged to reflect upon their own well-being, or lack thereof. Or perhaps the widespread debate about the neglected art scene – a frequently emerging topic in the Oslo newspapers – has made it legitimate for artists to raise their voices in concern, thus creating a shared platform of dismay. "Misery has more company than people think" is the headline of a psychological study on the prevalence of other people's negative emotions.⁵³ By taking this logic to its conclusion, one could argue that Oslo's art scene suffers from a state of emotional pluralistic ignorance, to borrow an expression from the same study.

This is a question of expectations. Ideally, all adult citizens should have the opportunity to be in full employment – if they so wish – with access to adequate work facilities and a permanent home. But is unlimited artistic dynamism perhaps incompatible with absolute permanency, in practical as well as artistic terms? Searching for a perfect equilibrium of nomadic and sedentary life qualities is a tricky quest.

Temporariness may be undesirable, frightening even, but it nevertheless has a pull, an inherent energy, that seems to engender artistic activity, in the form of temporal art projects (of which many would never find a place where they are not temporal), temporality as a theme in art, and the sheer vitality that goes with the underdog role. The fight for survival is a kind of artistic boosterism in itself: it sparks protest exhibitions and artistic activism of various kinds, neatly embedded in global art trends like participatory art and related forms of social performativity. I will therefore argue that artistic productivity in the city of temporality can be stimulated and stifled in equal measures depending, of course, on the local context. In the case of Oslo, I would say that the balance is pretty even for the time being.

NOTES

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