1 Introduction

From Ottowa, the Huron and the Potowatamie
Then French and Europeans, enslaved Blacks came to be free
an immigration influx, then a torrent from the South
The People Of Detroit, 'tis true they come from many routes
To old Black Bottom's death, and then the birth of Lafayette Park
Old strip farms, townships, properties, transitions we've embarked
Horses, autos; racetracks, roads; now Slow Roll rules the lanes
The time has come, it has begun, Detroit sees change, again
Newcomers here will walk with us into the coming years,
Join those of us who've still held on, see how we've persevered
We faced upheavals through the years, that caused Detroiters many tears
So now, again we rearrange - the lifeblood of this town is Change
(Music, 2015, para. 4)

One might assume that Detroit's major export goods are cars or musicians; after all, isn't it the Motor City? The Motor Town, home to Motown? But this is not the case – at least not solely. What the city of Detroit, located in Southeast Michigan bordering Canada, is known for, in the US and beyond, are its associated narratives[1], images, and imaginings. At the beginning of the 20th century, these images highlighted the city's strength and aesthetics, such as 'The Paris of the West' (Martelle, 2014, p. 58), 'the greatest working-class city' (Binelli, 2012, p. 8), or 'the Arsenal of Democracy' (Binelli, 2012, p. 8). What was once thought to be the epitome of the *American Dream*, however, later became known as 'a death trap' or 'a ghost town' (Draus & Roddy, 2016, p. 67), a city of crime, poverty, and loss with depopulated and dystopian landscapes depictured in movies such as *RoboCop* (Verhoeven, 1987) or *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jarmusch, 2013). Narratives about a dying or dead Detroit (Eisinger, 2013; LeDuff, 2014; Okrent, 2009;

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1   When I use the term 'narrative', unless noted otherwise, I refer to publicly told "[…] stories that string together events to construct meaning and establish discourse […]" (Mohatt et al., 2014, p. 6). They "[…] are indicative of intersubjective understanding […] and are common among a group of people […]. Public narratives, thus, are the stories that shape collective memory through reliance on narrative elements such as characters, actions, places, and time […]" (Mohatt et al., 2014, p. 6).

Sands, 2015; Tabb, 2015) became as common as the label 'third world city' (Draus et al., 2010, p. 664; Herron, 2007, p. 674), claiming Detroit to need foreign aid (Ewert, 2015). And as if this wasn't enough for one city's (identity) crisis, imaginings of rebirth, revitalization, regeneration, and resurgence of the city (Arnaud, 2017; Bachelor, 1998; Briller & Sankar, 2013; McCarthy, 1997, 2002; Trendafilova et al., 2012) appeared alongside those of the city as a blank slate, urban prairie or postindustrial frontier (Kinney, 2016, pp. 45f., 2018, p. 782; Kurashige, 2017, p. 94) from at least the late 1990s onwards. Detroit has been rendered so exceptional and 'other' (Hackworth, 2019, p. 114) that it almost appears to be a symbol rather than a city. Many of these depictions are highly problematic: They deny the presence as well as agency of Detroit's 670,052 (United States Census Bureau, 2018a) present-day residents, they reproduce settler tales and colonial wordings, they are biased, shortened, and often attributed from the outside rather than from within the city. They often blame (former) residents for things they are not responsible for, and they lack depth and expertise.

While "[…] these narratives and images get in the way of understanding what is actually going on in the life of the city" (Draus & Roddy, 2016, p. 68), they are, after all, not made up out of thin air. The city of Detroit lost almost two-thirds of its residents between 1950 and 2018, the largest proportion of them being White[2] (Sugrue, 1996, p. 23; United States Census Bureau, 2018a). Vacancy is currently rated to be between 20 and 30% for residential addresses[3] (Drawing Detroit, 2019) and vacant lots and buildings are not limited to certain neighborhoods but are spread out over the whole city (Dobraszczyk, 2017, p. 154). Additionally, poverty rates, especially for children, are disproportionally high – 43% of children under 18 live below the poverty line in Detroit whereas it is 18.4% in the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn Metropolitan Area and 17.6% in the State of Michigan (United States Census Bureau, 2018a). Crime rates have been high for decades and, in 2019, Detroit's violent crime rate was the highest among cities with more than 100,000 residents with 13,040 violent crimes[4], among them 275 murders (Criminal Justice Information Services Division, 2019a; MacDonald & Hunter, 2020). And Detroit and its surrounding suburbs are among the most segregated areas in the US concerning race and class (Reese et al., 2017, pp. 368f.; Vojnovic & Darden, 2013, pp. 88f.). While these numbers might speak for themselves, they are not a result of chance or accident: "It was no storm that carried Detroit away. The disaster here was and is a matter of design. In that sense, Detroit is no

2   Throughout this study, I use the capitalized terms Black and White when referring to racial groups, acknowledging that both are not natural categories but social and historical constructs (see American Psychological Association, 2019; Appiah, 2020). This, however, only applies when I use the terms in my own words, meaning that I have not changed (capitalized) them in quotes.
3   Additionally, Detroit has always been a rather low-density city with single- or multi-family (duplex) housing (Galster, 2012, p. 60; Hackworth, 2019, p. 29).
4   According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation violent crime "[…] is composed of four offenses: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault" (Criminal Justice Information Services Division, 2019b, para. 1).

exceptional place; on the contrary, it is the most representatively American place on the planet" (Herron, 2007, p. 669). This is not to say that Detroit is not unique – following Doreen Massey (1994, p. 5), every place is unique or specific when 'place' is considered as the coming together of particular social relations at a particular locus at a particular moment in time. Rather, the underlying causes of Detroit's demise are structural. Among them is the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial city, accompanied by an increasingly capitalist and neoliberal urban development shaped by austerity, and the institutional racism that was expressed in discriminatory practices on the housing market such as redlining[5] that continue to have an effect to this day.

In at least the past two decades, part of the neoliberal script has also been the thesis of culture-led regeneration as well as the creative city, promoted especially by Richard Florida (2004). Post-industrial cities in Europe and North America in particular have adopted strategies where "[…] the arts (within a broader category of the cultural and creative industries) have gained a key role in strategies to deal with urban problems from social exclusion to the rehabilitation of post-industrial sites" (M. Miles, 2005, p. 889). Within this framework, attracting creatives is mostly regarded as a necessary step towards urban regeneration which follows "[…] a development vision that is profoundly market orientated (creative cities, assets, and actors, always in competition) and individualistic (creative subjects as hedonistic free agents)" (Peck, 2007, pp. 1f.). It, therefore, comes as no surprise that around and after Detroit's bankruptcy case in 2013/ 2014, articles asking if or how art is saving or could be saving the city were published (Ewert, 2015; La Force, 2014; Montenegro, 2014; Tolf, 2014). These articles evoked my curiosity. Not with their actual message, though, but rather with what the subtext told: It seems that there is a relationship between urban space and art, artists, and artistic practices in Detroit, even apart from mere economic interests and top-down development strategies. Artists seem to be attracted to but also inspired by Detroit, and the city, in some form or other, is reflected or processed in artistic practices. These practices, however, have yet not gained much attention within geography and urban studies.

Therefore, this empirically based study explores the relations and interactions of urban space and artistic practices in Detroit focusing on visual art practices that are often done without permission, commission, and authorization.

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5   Redlining is a practice "[…] by mortgage lending institutions to draw a red line on a map around certain neighborhoods to indicate where loans are not to be made" (Vojnovic & Darden, 2013, p. 92). These neighborhoods were usually those occupied by Black and often poor residents.

1.1   Production of art – production of space

I draw from a perspective where I assume that art – and hence, the artist and their practice – is connected to society, to space, and place, and thus to the urban in material and immaterial relations. All artistic positions have references to the present and to the social conditions in which the artists live (Scherzinger, 2017, p. 265)[6]. When thinking of space, I follow Henri Lefebvre's (1991b) theory on the production of space, regarding space as a social product. This approach, as Schmid (2005, p. 10) suggests, if not only treated as a spatial theory, but as a social theory, brings together cultural, linguistical, political, social, and economic aspects of the production of space. Additionally, the concept of place as conceived by Doreen Massey (1984, 1994) adds to my theoretical perspective. It enables, among others, analysis of the uniqueness as well as conflicts and power struggles of social relations that come together at a particular locus and moment to form what is known as 'place'. The guiding research question of this study is, therefore: **To what extent are artistic practices producing spaces[7] in Detroit; and to what extent are spaces producing artistic practices in Detroit?**

Embedded in this relationship of art and space in Detroit is the assumption that one depends on, reacts to, and produces the other. It is a dialectic relationship which can only be differentiated in theory, while in practice, "[…] space is not a mute, already existing background across which art is produced and consumed, rather the making of art and the making of space are entwined" (Hawkins, 2017, p. xvii). I look at artistic practices to analyze reconfigurations, transformations, and reinterpretations of space and vice versa since spatial practice and artistic practice are regarded here as intertwined (Paglen, 2014, p. 31) and I'm interested in the mutual dependencies and influences of artistic practices and urban space in Detroit. Within this research design, space and the production of space are regarded as synonymous, since space is always active, dynamic, and changing. Thus, the subject of the analysis is not the arrangement of (material) objects and artifacts, but the – practical, mental, and symbolic – relating of these objects (Schmid, 2005, p. 321)[8]. Through this lens, I explore the manifold relations of spaces and artistic practices in Detroit. This conception of space, however, also implies that this study can only be a snapshot in time and space, since Detroit, like any other place, is always changing and evolving.

6   Original: "Alle künstlerischen Positionen besitzen Bezugspunkte zur Gegenwart und den gesellschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen, in denen die Künstler leben" (Scherzinger, 2017, p. 265).

7   Because of the close relation of space and place, their distinction is not always clear-cut and places, defined as the particular articulation of social spatial relations are spatially produced, too. Therefore, and for a more fluent reading, the question refers to both, spaces and places, but only reads spaces.

8   Original: "Der Gegenstand der Analyse ist nicht die Anordnung von (materiellen) Objekten und Artefakten, sondern das – praktische, mentale und symbolische – in Beziehung setzen dieser 'Objekte'" (Schmid, 2005, p. 321).

Since Detroit offers a variety of phenomena that could be analyzed under the above-mentioned art-space-relationship, I chose to focus on visual art and artists who, within their artistic practices, engage with Detroit in terms of its material, social, political, and symbolic layers of urban space[9]. This decision is also based on a shift of perspective such as the one that civil-rights activist Grace Lee Boggs (2012) suggested:

> Detroit is a city of Hope rather than a City of Despair. The thousands of vacant lots and abandoned houses provide not only the space to begin anew but also the incentive to create innovative ways of making our living – ways that nurture our productive, cooperative, and caring selves. (p. 105)

Boggs highlights possibilities and re/creation in Detroit rather than loss, absence, or desperation. While I refrain here from evaluating as strongly as Boggs does, it is the underlying assumption and framing of space in her quote, which is of importance to the present study.

Two main strands of theoretical approaches and research shape this study: On the one hand, they concern space and on the other hand art. I follow conceptions that regard space as socially produced. Societies, including political and economic ideologies, produce their own spaces. At the same time, every individual contributes to the production of space, too, and has the (theoretical) possibility to subvert the common conceptions and productions of space. Lefebvre (1991b, 1996), as well as Massey (1994, 1995a), focus on the dynamics, changeability, and progress of space and place without neglecting the hierarchies and power struggles that are inherent in them. By emphasizing the multiplicities and diversities of space and place, both also offer a (utopian) vision where power relations could be undermined and changed. Social change, then, is spatial change and vice versa (Paglen, 2014, p. 31). Over the decades, an almost endless pluralism of perceptions, adoptions, and interpretations of Lefebvre's opus has been and continues to be published. Besides his original work, I will address his theories by including the readings of Schmid (2005) and Vogelpohl (2011). Both offer perspectives that bring together the strands of space, society, and city that are particularly relevant for this study. Additionally, the publications of Purcell (2002, 2008, 2014) are consulted for an approach to Lefebvre's right to the city which focus on the theoretical layers as well as practical execution of the theory. Throughout his work, Purcell (2014) understands the right to the city as "[…] similarly a beginning, an opening, a starting out down the path toward a possible urban world. That possible world is a long way off, and it is also, at the same time, right in front of us" (p. 152).

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9   It is of importance to state that this study is by no means painting a complete picture of either the city of Detroit or art and artistic practice in the city of Detroit. This never was my aim in creating this study and never will be my aim in any research I do. What I can try to achieve concerning Detroit as my overall spatial research subject, though, and I hope that hereby I will, is to contribute a puzzle piece to the analysis of artistic practices and phenomena in present-Detroit.

Regarding art, I follow perspectives that emphasize the relation of society, urban space, and art as powerful and dialectic ties, as already stated above by Hawkins (2017, p. xvii) and Scherzinger (2017, p. 265). Luger (2017b), too, remarks that both, "[a]rt and the city are constantly being made, re-made, operating within and helping to shape the currents of power at various scales […]. Art and the city are, have always been, and will always be, inextricably linked" (p. 231). Further, publications on public art as well as site-specific art, such as those by Cartiere and Zebracki (2016b), Deutsche (1988), Kwon (2002), Lewitzky (2005), and Lossau and Stevens (2015b) are central to the approach of art and/ in/ as public space since they engage with diverse forms of relations between public, art, and space, largely irrespective of culture-led regeneration and creative city narratives. And finally, this study is informed by works such as by Berger (2018) and Rosler (2010, 2011a, 2011b) which focus on artistic practices that actively participate in urban development.

While plenty has been written about art and/ in cities in geography and urban studies, the relationship of art and urban space has not received as much attention, especially not from a perspective that is informed by the spatial theories of Lefebvre and Massey. Exceptions are the works that engage with graffiti and street art such as Iveson (2013) and Zieleniec (2016) that look at these practices through the lens of Lefebvre's right to the city. Like many practices of graffiti and street art, the artistic practices at the center of this study are self-initiated, not commissioned, and sometimes at or across the border of legality, too.

This theoretical, as well as empirical gap, is where the present study comes in, aiming at four intertwining objectives:
- describing, understanding, and interpreting selected artistic practices in Detroit from a geographical perspective,
- applying Lefebvre's as well as Massey's spatial theories as perspectives and foils to look through in order to analyze the relationship of artistic practices and space,
- contributing to the scholarly work on Detroit that has been going on for decades within and beyond geography and urban studies,
- and finally, on a subordinate level, enriching current debates on art, artists, and artistic practices within the discipline of geography by paying attention to the topic of the artistic production of space apart from regeneration strategies or economic foci.

1.2   Structure

The book structures into ten chapters of which chapters 1 (Introduction) and 10 (Conclusion) constitute the framework.

Chapters 2 and 3 lay out the theoretical focus and provide the theoretical perspectives necessary for the discussion (chapter 8). The focus of chapter 2 lies on introducing diverse perspectives on art which can be divided into three main themes. First, relational art and socially engaged art are introduced. The central

issue of these concepts is the relationship of art/ artistic practices and their engagement as well as relationship with society. Second, the focus slightly shifts towards space when the relationship of art/ artistic practices and urban public space is explored. At the center are the concepts of art and/ in/ as public space as well as site-specific art. The chapter closes with a discussion of culture-led urban regeneration strategies often associated with and applied in post-industrial cities. These different theoretical discourses not only set the scene but also provide points of reference taken up later. Chapter 3 introduces the two spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey, and thus adds the second major theoretical approach for this study. Beginning with Lefebvre and the historical context of his works, I will retrace his steps from engaging with the city, the urban, and then with space, culminating in his concept of the production of space which will be central here. After a brief look at his thoughts on the right to the city, the first part of the chapter closes with discussing the challenges connected to these theoretical approaches. The second part focuses on place as conceptualized by Doreen Massey in her theory of a global sense of place. After laying out how Massey understands and differentiates space and place, I will move to the characteristics of place. Of particular importance for the present study will be the uniqueness, multiplicity, changeability, and dynamism of place as well as the connected issues of power and dominance.

Chapter 4, the interim conclusion, bridges the theoretical discussions and the empirical part, bringing together the key points of the theoretical strands and refining them regarding the research question.

Chapter 5 engages with the methodical approach. Beginning with an introduction to ethnography, I will proceed with discussing ethnography as a field-based practice and engaging with matters of reflexivity, positionality, and the situatedness of knowledge. The second part of the chapter addresses the specific methods that I applied to gather data – 'moving ethnography', participant observation, and interviews – and explains why and how I applied them, and finally, how the gathered data were analyzed. The chapter closes with a methodological criticism as well as an outlook concerning methodical and methodological points.

Following this, chapter 6 now focuses on Detroit. The emphasis in the first part of this chapter is on Detroit's history, especially the 20th century, as well as recent developments. This look back into the city's history is necessary since, first, space and time are regarded as entwined (Massey, 1994, p. 5), second, no place disappears in the course of development (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 86), and third, "[…] social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short, every social space has a history […]" (1991b, p. 110). This part of the chapter closes with a slight change of perspectives where I look at the issues of race and urban change from the perspectives of my interviewees to add this to the city of Detroit's historic and recent developments. The second part of the chapter focuses on art in Detroit, highlighting current trends and discourses concerning visual arts in Detroit that also provide ground for

further discussion in the subsequent chapters. The chapter closes with introduc-
ing the interviewees and additional artists that are at the center of this study.

Chapter 7 now presents the results. It is structured into five artistic practices
that I identified in the data as well as in the literature research and the study of
other source material: 1) seeking, finding, and recycling material, 2) working site-
specific, 3) making and/ or displaying art outside, 4) focusing on community, and
5) documenting and creating stories about Detroit. While differentiated in this
chapter, the practices can overlap or even become indistinct. The term 'practice'
refers to how artists operate. It includes the actual making of art but also the ideas,
thoughts, and concepts connected to it, and therefore could also be described as
their *modus operandi*.

To discuss these practices further regarding their spatiality, in chapter 8, I
will consider the approaches to art in chapter 2 as well as the theories of space
and place outlined in chapter 3. The chapter begins with reconsidering the his-
torical, economic, social, and political circumstances of the city of Detroit dis-
cussed in chapter 6 regarding their production of space, especially the represen-
tations of space. Then, based on the structure of chapter 7, the practices' relations
to space are at the center. Each of the five practices refers to a specific aspect of
space and the production of space. These aspects – while of course not being this
clear cut in reality but rather overlapping – are corresponding to the practices
mentioned above, and are named as materiality, site, public, social, and story.

Chapter 9 completes the discussion by bringing together the empirical
strands of practices and spatial aspects and specifies them regarding the research
question.

The study closes with a conclusion where the individual chapters are brought
together for a final review as well as a reflection on its limitations and challenges.
This final chapter ends with an outlook on further research that emerged
throughout the course of this study.

Before this introduction closes, I would like to address that this study is writ-
ten in the first person. Instead of using a rather objectified 'the author' or 'the
researcher', I most often write as 'I'. This is grounded in a perspective shaped by
feminist geographies that deny an objective way of doing research and call upon
positionality and the situatedness of knowledge as well as the responsibilities I
have as a researcher. I chose an active, rather than a passive voice to emphasize
that this study, too, is written from a perspective that is positioned, situated, and
therefore a partial story (Belina, 2013, pp. 10f.; Haraway, 1988, p. 589).

2   Art, society, and space

The relationship of the arts and geography is an established one but also one that is dynamic and diversifying, as Hawkins (2012) states in the introduction to her article *Geography and art. An expanding field. Site, the body and practice*: "Recent work has reorientated the temporal focus from the historical framing of 18th- and 19th-century landscape painting practices towards a body of 20th-century art, encompassing everything from early and mid-century modernist visual art through to digital and intermedia practices" (p. 52). Geographers have engaged with a variety of artistic media, themes, and theories (for a compilation of various studies by geographers/ with a geographic focus see Hawkins, 2012, pp. 54ff., 2014, pp. 2f.), among them the relationship of art and space which, according to Hawkins (2017), "[…] are inseparable […]. To think of art is to think of space. But yet art is not just in space, it is also of space, and importantly space is of art" (p. xvii). This also implies, as Paglen (2014) suggests, that geographers, unlike art critics, focus on

> […] questions along the lines of 'How is this space called "art" produced?' In other words, what are the specific historical, economic, cultural, and discursive conjunctions that come together to form something called 'art' […]? […] Instead of approaching art from the vantage point of a consumer, a critical geographer might reframe the question of art in terms of spatial practice. (p. 30)

So, when addressing art in this chapter, I do not always refer to space or the art-space-relationship explicitly, but I still do address art through my lens as a geographer and, naturally, in respect of the research question.

Now art[10], similar to related terms like culture and creativity, is lively debated, complex in its meaning, and impossible to define and clarify ultimately.

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10   While art in this chapter is discussed rather broadly, this study's focus lies on visual arts in particular. This umbrella term is adopted here to emphasize the visual aspect and experience of them and in order to distinguish them from other art forms such as performance arts, auditory arts, or literary arts (Esaak, 2019). While the mediums of visual arts range from decorative arts such as jewelry making or pottery to drawing and painting, those gathered

Therefore, in line with the underlying exploratory and empirically based approach of this study, I will open possible directions to consider art rather than give a conclusive definition. Thus, the readings I offer are chosen in relation to the artistic practices that are described and discussed in chapters 7 and 8. This chapter begins with a focus on the social aspects of art and offers an introduction to the concept of relational art, followed by the subject of socially engaged art. The second half of the chapter then turns its focus towards the relation of art and space, concentrating on public space as well as culture-led urban regeneration strategies.

2.1   Relational art

The art world[11] has undergone massive changes in the past decades, especially in the twenty-first century.

> Alongside the dominant order of exhibitions, museums, galleries, and art fairs, new art-directed networks, project spaces, and working arrangements have arisen with their own patterns of inclusion, professionalization, and recognition. Since then, a growing cohort of artists has started to operate in diverse areas, such as education, urban planning, research, and social engineering, while at the same time being active in numerous social fields. (van den Berg & Pasero, 2013b, p. vii)

With the fields and areas in which artists are active diversifying, artistic practices are also increasingly blurring boundaries, making it even more difficult to grasp what art may or may not be. Art critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2002), in the glossary of his much-discussed book *Relational Aesthetics*, remarks that "[n]owadays, the word 'art' seems to be no more than a semantic leftover of this narrative[12], whose more accurate definition would read as follows: Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects" (p. 107). Art seems to be thoroughly relational, from its production to its result and from its conception to its reception (Becker, 1982/2011, p. 1; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35), being, so far at least, human-made and thus social. Art can be a

and discussed in the scope of this study are murals (including mosaic decorations) as well as paintings on pavement, trees, or street furniture, installations, photographs, linocut prints, and mixed-media work (e.g., installations combined with written word).

11   Art world is a term especially used by jazz pianist and sociologist Howard S. Becker, describing the following: "All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the artwork we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation. The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we can call an **art world**" (Becker, 1982/2011, p. 1, emphasis added).

12   The narrative Bourriaud (2002) hints at describes art as "[…], a set of objects presented as part of […] *art history*. This narrative draws up the critical genealogy and discusses the issues raised by these objects, by way of three sub-sets: *painting*, *sculpture*, *architecture*" (p. 107, emphasis in original).

signifier of certain times, spaces, or cultures (DaCosta Kaufmann, 2004, p. 342; Hildebrandt, 2012, p. 724).

Excursus: The artist

Just as art and artistic practices are developing, diversifying, and changing over time, so are the roles and tasks (self-)ascribed to artists. It would go beyond the scope of this study to discuss 'the' artist in history and present in-depth. I will therefore only briefly touch upon some crucial developments.

For centuries, artists worked as contractors for "[…] those who paid for them, be it the clergy trying to strengthen believers' faith by installing ornate altars in churches, or the gentry trying to impress the common folk by installing statues and monuments on the streets" (Lossau & Stevens, 2015a, p. 2). Carrying out commissions also meant that artists had to work according to their patrons' orders and were often limited in their expression and creative freedom. During the renaissance, art academies were established in Europe, formalizing and certifying the artistic handicraft (Berger, 2018, p. 59). With art becoming increasingly detached from religious and political ties during the 18th century and the incipient romanticism,

> […] artists have routinely harbored messianic desires, the longing to take a high position in social matters, to play a transformative role in political affairs; this may be finally understood as a necessary – though perhaps only imaginary – corrective to their roles, both uncomfortable and insecure, as handmaidens to wealth and power. (Rosler, 2010, p. 11)

However, customers still played a decisive role in the 19th century, even though "[…] artists, now no longer supported by patronage, were free to devise and follow many different approaches both to form and to content […]" (Rosler, 2010, p. 11). It is the avant-garde era of the 20th century that brought significant change toward "[t]he modernist idea of art as the medium of a self-determined and autonomous subject […]" (Lossau & Stevens, 2015a, p. 1). In her book *Loft Living* (1982), Sociologist Sharon Zukin also identifies a shift towards "[…] art as 'a way of doing' […] [that] affected the way art was taught" (p. 98). According to her, the teaching of art as a way of doing focused particularly on the training of techniques and "[…] made art seem less elitist. If almost anyone can be taught to follow a technique and thereby reproduce 'art,' then anyone, anywhere, can legitimately expect to be an artist" (p. 98). It is therefore not surprising that in the past decades, the number of people who self-describe as artists has risen (Rosler, 2011a, p. 6). But it is not only the technical skills that 'create' growing numbers of artists. It is also the blurring of boundaries of genres as well as boundaries of what is or can be considered art that lead to increasing numbers of artists (Berger, 2018, p. 54). Further, a growing interest in socially engaged art – from artists as well as from funders and commissioners – increasingly creates a dilemma for artists "[…] interested in audiences beyond the gallery […]: serve instrumental needs of states and governments or eschew art-world visibility entirely" (Rosler, 2011a, p. 13). This is closely linked with questions concerning the use or function of art and I will return to these topics again when discussing socially engaged art and public art.

Further, Becker (1982/2011) assumes an interplay between an artist's reputation and their work: "[W]e value more a work done by an artist we respect, just as we respect more an artist whose work we have admired" (p. 23). If, furthermore, an artwork is valued according to its monetary value, van den Berg and Pasero (2013a, p. ix) refer to a concept they describe as 'market imperative'. The term hints at the development towards characterizing artworks according to their (potential) success on the market; a development that is, among others, critical because it commodifies art as a luxury good and might limit its public accessibility. Bourriaud (2002), on the other hand, in his aforementioned book discusses art's relational character in the context of participation, coining the term 'relational aesthetics'. According to him, relational art is "[…] an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space […]" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14). Relational aesthetics are grounded in intersubjectivity, collaboration, and encounter: "Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum" (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 22). Further, Bourriaud (2002) describes art as a social interstice, a term borrowed from Marx, describing "[…] a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system" (p. 16). Thus, relational art creates social interactions, rhythms, and spaces that differ from daily life. It offers a "[…] liminal space between aesthetics and politics […]" (Miller, 2016, p. 168), an experimental area where possible future developments are tested. Relational aesthetics can be found in performances that integrate the audience, for instance, to create social interactions and togetherness (Berger, 2018, p. 50; Bourriaud, 2002, p. 15). It is then an art practice where relations, events, and happenings often only briefly materialize and where the production of an object is subordinate.

    Since Bourriaud introduced his concept of relational aesthetics in 2002 (in English; it was initially published in French in 1998), it has stirred up discussion surrounding participatory art practices as well as been criticized from various angles. Miller (2016) suggests that instead of taking relational aesthetics as a theoretical approach, it should be discussed "[…] as a curatorial vignette of emerging participatory art practices that Bourriaud sought to showcase in his 1996 exhibition *Traffic*, at the CAPC[13] Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux" (p. 169, emphasis in original). Thus, it is more of a documentation of a trend in the art world than it is an art theory. This is similar to Gillick's (2006) observation that "[t]he book does contain major contradictions and serious problems of incompatibility with regard to the artists repeatedly listed together as exemplars of certain tendencies. Yet the crucial fact is that *Relational Aesthetics* was written as a response to the artists whose work it discusses" (p. 96, emphasis in original). So,

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13 CAPC stands for *Centre d'arts plastiques contemporains* which is the former name of the museum (CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, 2019).

whether reading it as documentation or as theory, there are points of criticism that should be considered.

Recurring in most critical receptions are epistemic and ontological issues of relational aesthetics. It is claimed to be "[…] highly schematic" (Kester, 2011, p. 30) and tautological; thus, Miller (2016) asks: "If the work of art is identical to its emergent properties, (i.e. the relations produced) what is the work itself? What is the thing that produces these relations?" (p. 169). Further, Berger (2018, p. 50) states that, referring to the remark that relational aesthetics rather document a trend or phenomenon than develop a theory, Bourriaud merely identifies a similar artistic practice of many artists that seek to create a social framing with a higher sociality. However, not much is said about the artists' intentions, the consequences of these actions as well as actual changes because of these brief moments of contact (e. g. during a shared meal)[14]. Hence, Bourriaud is often criticized for aestheticizing relations (Bishop, 2006, p. 2; Martin, 2007, p. 371). Concurring with the main criticism briefly discussed above, one observation Bourriaud makes should be pointed out, nevertheless. According to him, "[…] the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real […]" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13). What Bourriaud ascribes to art is reminiscent of Wright's (2010) concept of real utopias which refers to "[…] ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change" (p. 6). Both approaches describe the possibilities to experiment and try different social models through art. In the following, I will therefore address the 'social' aspect of art further.

14   Original: "Festgestellt wird von Bourriaud letztlich aber nur eine zunehmende ähnliche Arbeitsweise vieler Künstler*innen, deren Ergebnis die Schaffung einer geselligen Rahmung mit dem Effekt der Herstellung erhöhter Sozialität ist. Über die Intention der Kunstschaffenden, die Folge der Aktionen und tatsächliche Veränderungen über den kurzen Moment des Kontakts (z B. bei einem gemeinsamen Essen) hinaus wird nichts ausgesagt" (Berger, 2018, p. 50).