Figure 1: *Psychylustro* Map from 30th Street Station up to North Philadelphia Station, Philadelphia, US. Pictures © Katharina Grosse c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2024. Original in color.

Following *Psychylustro*: An (Imaginary) Travelogue through the Matter of the City

Rebecca Billi

Looking for *Psychylustro* (2014), Katherine Grosse's monumental public artwork alongside the railway tracks in Philadelphia, I start my journey at 30th Street Station, searching for the line heading north. The building fits the imaginary of 'the central station,' the type where the climax of a Hollywood film might take place. Even in pictures, the colossal size of this neoclassical edifice and the strong physical presence of its limestone façade are undeniable. When I was a kid, I had a toy village set at my grandparents' place, inherited from some older cousin. At the time, I would always make the train station my house because I believed it to be the biggest and most beautiful building in the collection. Beyond the evidently strong opinions I had on the size and look of my desired residence, the fact that the railway station stood out amongst the other pieces of the set indicates how, through history, stations have become recognizable sites, landmarks of and gateways to the city.

The train I am looking for will take me up the Northeast Corridor, through Philadelphia's northern areas, where German artist Katherine Grosse realized *Psychylustro* as part of the city's *Mural Arts Program.* The artwork is composed of seven artistic interventions—seven individually titled urban paintings—located at different points along the tracks.[1] *Psychylustro* is best experienced as a passenger on the train, the different installments of the artwork appearing one after another along the route (fig. 1). I am on a journey to explore how art infiltrates and discloses overlooked components of the city, and how it can provoke readings and narratives that open up to the eye that wants to see them. A city is

[1] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "Psychylustro."

made up of many different spaces and elements that compose its matter, yet it is common for those constantly interacting with it to become distracted witnesses of the stories inscribed in its fabric. Many of these overlooked spaces and elements belong to the wider category of infrastructure, essential systems that ensure life in the city can proceed smoothly. Infrastructures therefore represent unusual urban elements—often monumental in scale, yet, when working properly in their supporting role, hardly noticeable. I want to suggest that introducing an extra feature in the urban context—a foreign element—like a piece of public art, can revive the attention of urbanites towards their surroundings. This unfamiliar item can invite new readings of the elements composing the matter of the city, even of the most overlooked ones, unveiling insights into the urban context and the socio-dynamics shaping it.

Psychylustro showcases how art can perform an essential role in de-familiarizing the aesthetics of infrastructure and pushing us to examine it afresh. The routine associated with rail travel often leads to indifference, but Grosse's artwork is able to introduce the disruption necessary to break the individual out of the estrangement the contemporary city induces. Challenging the senses, art helps expand the notion of urban matter and raises questions about the role that infrastructural systems play in cities and everyday life. The novel artistic elements of *Psychylustro,* standing out as alien to the rail network, offer a way to awaken perception and imagination.

I have found the platform and I board the train carriage, making sure I am sitting next to the window. The train pulls away, commencing its (and my) journey. As it sets off, I am struck by just how long movement has had a place in the history of thinking, stretching back to the claim by Greek philosophers of the Peripatetic school in the fourth and third centuries BCE that movement fostered thought. More recently, writer and historian Rebecca Solnit has explored the act of walking as both a cultural and philosophical practice. Examining the history and politics of walking, Solnit presents the practice as both a way of (re)engaging with the world and a strategy to reclaim public space.[2] Solnit understands walking as an active exploration and an invitation to rediscover the details of

[2] Solnit, *Wanderlust.*

a world we tend to rush through. She invites her readers to engage with walking beyond moving, as a transformative experience. In her theory, walking is strictly bound to creativity—fostering and inspiring it—and facilitates connections, including unforeseen ones.[3]

Being on a train means that I am being transported, making this a more passive experience of movement—the line follows a specific route, and as a passenger, I cannot change the path as I could on foot. It is nonetheless possible to apply parts of Solnit's theory of walking. Even if the element of choice is taken away by the nature of the railway, new connections can also be created when one is being transported. As it is still possible to keep an active engagement with the surroundings, these surroundings can be both rediscovered and seen anew, forming links and inviting thought. Instead of sitting back and letting the city run alongside my window, I can try to individuate connections I had not noticed before. I can actively look out, instead of letting the moving scenery lull me into detaching from my surroundings. The art I am soon to encounter will help to pull me out of a disengaged state, turning the train corridor into a contemporary version of Walter Benjamin's arcade.

In architectural terms, the arcade is a passage, a pedestrian gallery connecting two or more streets, covered by a glass and steel roof and populated by shops, cafes, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. Popularized during the new wave of commercial and technological wealth that in the early 1800s benefitted Europe, and especially France, these galleries are a lot more than simply sites of commerce. They translate in their physical form what German philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel referred to as *zeitgeist*, or 'spirit of the time.'[4] The Parisian arcade was particularly central to the work of the German Jewish writer Walter Benjamin, who explored these commercial passages in his unfinished *Arcades Project*, which he began in 1927 and worked on until his death in 1940. Benjamin's massive work, over a thousand pages in the

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] The *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the time, represents the set of ideas, beliefs, and objectives that dominate and define a specific moment in history, setting it apart from those that came before and will follow. The term is mostly associated to the theories of German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831).

German original, was first published in its incomplete form only in 1982. For Benjamin, the arcade is the most important architectural manifestation of the nineteenth century, the perfect site to display not only the "fetishism of the commodity" but also the "anticipation and imaginative expression of the new world."[5]

"The arcade is a city, a world in miniature," says Benjamin—for him this commercial gallery is a representative embodiment of the social, political, and economic dynamics of its time, the late nineteenth-century European bourgeois culture.[6] Benjamin theorized that in the elements composing the arcade, from the architectural details of the roofing to the way encounters among people within the arcade happened, it was possible to read the essence of contemporary Parisian life.

Infrastructure is as much of an integral part of the contemporary city as the commercial arcade was to nineteenth-century Paris; it is tied to the city's functioning and inseparable from it. A city rests upon its infrastructure, whose main role is to provide support as the name itself implies, with the prefix 'infra' coming from the Latin term for 'below.' This suggests that, hidden along the train route I am following, there will be insights into those urban and social networks they literally and metaphorically enable to run: what can the infrastructure reveal of its city?

From the window, I soon begin to see huge blotches of blazing colors—the first installation of the *Psychylustro* series. There are walls on both sides of the carriage, painted bright orange and rechristened by Grosse as *The Great Wall*. This brings up the theme of barriers. What do these walls do? Do they protect, separate, or conceal? They hide part of the city, making the streets and buildings appear detached from the railway, so that the passenger seems to be moving through an intermediary space that does not properly belong to the urban environment.

On a practical level, these walls were erected in part to form a sound barrier. The sight of a running train might be fascinating but its loud rush and the vibrations it produces are hardly ever welcome guests in the privacy of a home. This is a notion of privacy that is

[5] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 637, 663.
[6] *Id.*, 3.

also, fittingly, a product of that very same bourgeois society Benjamin explores in *The Arcades Project*. When I was living in London in 2017, I had a house facing a section of the District line—the green one—that ran above ground. There was a form of 'underground coolness' in seeing the tube from the windows: the novelty of something usually buried suddenly revealed to me, as if I were seeing something secret and forbidden. The excitement diminished quickly, but even ensconced in our routine habits my flatmates and I were never able to forget that the transport network existed alongside us: the nearness of the tracks caused the building to vibrate as trains passed. It strikes me now that we usually only engage with infrastructure when it has become a personal nuisance. The ability to imagine urban features outside of that narrow personal interest can become a driving force for change, allowing us to not only picture what spaces could be, but to look for alternative narratives in their histories that can challenge our perceptions.

At the center of *The Great Wall* an arched passage opens. Probably once intended to allow another branch of the railway to come through and connect to the main line, what is left now is a residual liminal space. Every element composing an infrastructural system is designed according to that element's intended use. Through this functional aesthetic informed by technological standards, and with the railway's linear progression and defined path, the tracks become a site where the specific city dynamics that compose the urban matter can be unveiled. Like the arcade in nineteenth-century Paris, in the early twentieth century the train was the epitome of the European myth of technological progress, with railroads at the center of the celebration of modernity that followed the Second Industrial Revolution.[7] Even though this glorification never reached the almost religious fever pitch reserved for cars, the importance given to the train is evident in the work of many futurists writers, artists, and architects. They recognized in the train's running

[7] The second Industrial Revolution is usually dated between 1870 and 1914, although a number of its characteristic events can be dated to the 1850s. It is defined by a rapid rate of pathbreaking inventions, its focus on the collaboration between technology and science and the changes in the organization of production. Mokyr, "The Second Industrial Revolution," 1.

silhouette a symbol of industrialized society and the promise of a new century driven by technological innovation. "We state that the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed," writes the father of the futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in his "Manifesto Futurista" from 1909.[8] Marinetti then goes on to claim that futurists will sing of "the broad-chested locomotives, pounding on the rails, like huge steel horses bridled in pipes."[9]

With technological progress gaining new contemporary symbols and representatives, the train is not a source of amazement in the same way as it used to be in the early- twentieth century. Moving through and between cities has become just another way to get to work, a mundane form of commuting. Once you take the same train every day, time after time, the surrounding urban context quickly starts to merge and impressions become one continuous image. After a while, you do not see the view outside of the carriage window anymore, but engage passively with your surroundings in the mode from which Solnit would invite us to break away. Yet while infrastructure is generally perceived as either practically or conceptually invisible amongst the elements that make up the matter of the city, reading the railroad as an *arcade* in Benjamin's sense opens up the space for new narratives to unfold.

Wheels screech on the tracks and, outside the window, flashes of urbanization reveal themselves in passing. The city unfolds along the path and peeks out from behind walls, offering snapshots of life to the passenger looking out the window. If this watchful passenger is able, even in a state of apparently passive engagement, to actively observe the sights appearing before their eyes and respond to them seeking further insights, then that passenger in a way becomes a *flâneur* of this imagined railroad-arcade.

The *flâneur* is the urban explorer and the indigenous inhabitant of the Parisian arcade. In nineteenth-century France,

[8] "Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una nuova bellezza: la bellezza della velocità" Marinetti, "Manifesto Futurista." [My translation]

[9] "Le locomotive dall'ampio petto, che scalpitano sulle rotaie, come enormi cavalli d'acciaio imbrigliati di tubi." Marinetti, "Manifesto Futurista." [My translation]

intellectuals were so fascinated by the stories inscribed in the urban fabric that they created a figure that would embody their practice of leisurely strolling through the city streets observing both the architecture and the flow of urban life. The term was first coined by poet Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life."[10] In this work, the *flâneur* navigates the city, detached and attentive at the same time, as an observer of modern urban existence, from which he seeks poetic inspiration. The concept was later picked up by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Benjamin's *flâneur* does not inhabit the streets of Paris, however, but the commercial arcade, which was for Benjamin the symbol of a new modern sensibility informed by the association of commerce, technology, and art. The Benjaminian *flâneur* is both a product of the urban environment and of the new capitalist society. In his strolls, he is able to capture insights into everyday life and its commodification. While still a spectator in the Baudlerian mode, Benjamin's *flâneur* partakes in an engagement with his surroundings that is active, purposely seeking fragments and cues in the urban and social context to inform his reflections on contemporary life. The reader of *The Arcades Project* follows the *flâneur* through his wanderings with little commentary from the author to guide interpretation. The reader instead must seek clues in the text, the same way Benjamin does with the city itself, whose architecture and decorations become signs to be read.[11]

Rather than being limited to *just seeing* when going from one end to the other on this rail journey, I wonder how to *actively look* for fragments and cues analogous to those pursued by Benjamin's *flâneur*. What stories would I be able to identify along the routes, and what kinds of readings of the city could I discover if I paid attention? How can I approach routine differently and what can prevent me from slipping into passivity?

On this route it is art that offers a way out, as the bright colors of the *Psychylustro* installations keep succeeding each other before my eyes, rousing my attention time after time. As my journey continues, I can see more branches of the rail network coming in

[10] Baudelaire, "The Painter," 1–40.
[11] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics*, ix–xii.

and out of the main track on my left, and some particularly sturdy plants growing in the area around them. This is the kind of invasive low vegetation that you do not have to take care of because it will always prosper, even in inhospitable locations. Wildflowers and low bushes bring some green to the gloomy metal grays and rusty reds of industrial architecture. Soon, however, the green to my left starts to become slightly *too green* to be entirely natural. A little building comes into sight, breaking the horizontal continuity of the view. An artificially bright green little building, this is the second installment of Grosse's work, titled *The Hut*. Intriguingly, the idea of 'the hut' represents the essence of architectural thought, according to French architecture theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier, a passionate advocate of the necessity to return to simplicity in building in the wake of the technological revolutions of the late eighteenth century.[12]

To Laugier the 'primitive hut' is a model for his contemporaries to rediscover and pursue, writing in the mid-seventeenth-hundreds, he claimed that at the basis of all architectural production lies the combination of only three elements: the column, the beam, and the pediment.[13] The concept of the hut was picked up again almost a century later when Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, architect and architectural historian, would step away from Laugier's view of the hut as "found in nature" and present it as representative of the human ability to overcome and subordinate nature through reason.[14] As a feature standing lonely to the side of the rail, Grosse's hut also appears as a stronghold of human creation, almost cartoon-like as it towers over the low vegetation, standing out in its new bright green skin. As the hut is the essence of architectural thought, movement is a core principle of architectural unity and it is fundamental in place-making—going from a start to an end connects two spaces and creates a new one between the points. By bringing individual areas together, movement brings cities together. Without roads and transport links to establish relationships amongst different parts of the city, there is nothing but an assemblage of edifices.

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[12] Laugier, *Essai sur l'Architecture*.
[13] *Ibid*, 8–12.
[14] Bressani, "Notes," 327–50.

The train continues its run against the backdrop of Philadelphia, the city seeming even more detached from the rail as a strip of land comes in to separate the tracks from the city. As I look around, I think again of the theories of Benjamin and the arcade. Benjamin's interest did not only lie in the Parisian arcades during their prime; he was also fascinated by their decline, by what ruins and fragments would come to say about the capitalist society that built them. The railway in Philadelphia is not a ruin, but it also undeniably bears the trace of passing time, a sign of how this infrastructure is perceived in the wider context of the city and the level of care and attention given to it. The railway is defined by routinary use, only existing in the public eye as a function of the stations it connects. Despite this, artists, writers, and painters have given attention to railroads, finding new ideas in routine, writing exciting narratives, and imagining new prospects for everyday urban elements. Picking up on the serial nature of train journeys and their character of belonging to a wider network, Grosse used the seven artistic *acts* of *Psychylustro* to reinvent the experience of traveling a beaten route. Her piece exemplifies the ways artists have found to work with infrastructures beyond simply intervening *on* the material, instead infiltrating those systems to build upon characteristics already present. In the case of *Psychylustro*, this happens particularly through the work's engagement with thematics of movement and scale. Bright orange, green, and pink paints seem to have been thrown out of the moving train in the work's seven urban paintings. The manner in which the color is distributed enhances the perception of speed and movement, already induced by the speed of the train, in relation to the cityscape that stretches by outside the window.

There is a curious disconnection that happens on trains as we are transported between stops. The railroad takes you in between times and in between places, in a no-man's land that does not apparently belong to either public or private space. Trains do not move at the same pace the human body does, turning stations into mediators between the time of the city and the time of the railroad. Space and distance feel different too, coming undone under the

effects of speed.[15] Grosse seems aware of this as *Psychylustro*'s smooth color fully but steadily floods the liminal spaces next to the railway, building upon and heightening the railway's distortion of time and space. Physical, mental, and theoretical connections are created. And while the *flâneur* walks the city, he nonetheless engages in an act of motion that can also be experienced by being transported. *Movement* is more than an action of a body; it is an informed act that can break habits and reveal the layers that compose our urban environments. Whether engaging as a walker or a passenger, different aspects of the city are made visible through movement.

The combination of art and technology as Grosse's colorful strokes encounter the rail reflects Benjamin's presentation of the arcade as a space where art, technology and utilitarianism blend, where reality and fantasy come together. Benjamin sees this as a 'phantasmagoria,' a spectacle of commodity culture, through which the public seeks distraction and, ultimately, arrives at alienation.[16] In the case of art intervening in infrastructural networks the Benjaminian model is subverted. Rather than using art to escape the ennui of modern society, here the artwork becomes the means for a rupture that can seep through detachment and draw attention back to the material reality around us. It happens unexpectedly, "like a stranger coming through a door," as Grosse says of her work, while

[15] Schivelbusch, "Railroad Space," 31–40.

[16] The word 'phantasmagoria' refers to a type of horror theatre invented in the late 1790s in which a moveable lantern would project 'a parade of ghosts' for its spectator. Comparative literature and literacy critique professor and scholar Margaret Cohen claims that Benjamin associated the term 'phantasmagoria' with commodity culture's experience of its material and intellectual products, drawing an analogy to what Marx defines as 'commodity fetishism.' A phantasmagoria fools its audience, by presenting a representation "mediated through imaginative subjective processes," hence a non-objective "expression" of the world. (Cohen, "Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria," 94.) To Benjamin, the phantasmagorias represent the wish symbols and cultural values of a capitalist society where worth is based on material possessions and its display. He uses the term to define the arcades and traces a comparison to commodity culture where material objects and goods become illusive distractions. ("They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 7).

Philadelphia as a city acts as a backdrop, becoming a sort of symbol for the contemporary city more broadly.[17]

Another painted brick wall runs along the track, a bright pink one this time—the *Drama Wall*. The pink paint carries on beyond the end of the bricks, flooding onto the trees and low bushes that populate the patch of land next to the train. There is suddenly a pink forest outside of the window to my left, a dystopic landscape flattened by color, enhancing the impression that this route is not leading me towards the north of the city but towards other worlds and multiverses. But in a sense, this is what is happening; the train line I am on brings together different areas of Philadelphia—singular worlds of their own—turning the rail into a thread that ties the city together.

Circulation routes also represent living historical traces of the cities that grew around them. If you take a city plan and remove the buildings, the city still seems visible: the matted web of roads, tram tracks, and rails allows for the dynamics of the city and its urban configuration to come through. Pondering on topography and cities' appearance always, almost automatically, brings the city of Palermo to my mind as I have always been fascinated by how smoothly its architectural and social history are weaved in the way roads are laid out, making those stories relatively easy to decipher. Between 2017 and 2018 I was involved in a project "investigating, reflecting and proposing future scenarios for Palermo," in Sicily, as part of the educational program of the 12th edition of Manifesta Biennial.[18] In the dense, messy knots of roadways populating the *La Kalsa* area, you can read the years in which the city prospered as an Arab settlement, while the presence of the Normans is visible in the areas around the cathedral and the aptly named *Palazzo dei Normanni*, the royal palace. Palermo's two main roads, Via Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda, cross at the center of the city, splitting it into four sectors at the *Quattro Canti*, enduring traces of the *cardo* and *decumano* axis that characterized cities funded by the Romans. At the same time, the strict geometry of the cut that Via Roma imposes on the city is indicative of the changes implemented in the late

[17] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "'Psychylustro'," 0:45–0:57.
[18] Poltz, "Manifesta 12 Studios."

nineteenth century, in pursuit of that 'imperial' aesthetic for cities cultivated by the newly formed *Regno d'Italia*.[19]

Reliving the long history of Palermo while surrounded by the very different materiality of Philadelphia, I am pulled back by the sight of *The Green Passage,* which is not green at all; bright orange paint covers the landscape and enhances the feeling of displacement that these artworks aim to trigger with their highly artificial colors. This evident disconnection—between expectations and the reality of what is happening outside of the window—leads the observer to question what 'real' is. Looking to the left I see pink wooden pylons, a panorama of leftover materials. Grosse calls this section *The Trestle*. Bright landscapes surround me on both sides, sceneries of unexpected colors.

Color is effective in generating astonishment; it has a strong transformative power and is able to subvert expectations. It can re-awaken and re-enchant. Wassily Kandinsky, a pioneer of abstract painting, devoted great attention to this affective capacity of color when tracing the fundamentals of his art theory in his celebrated book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[20] Kandinsky claims that color produces two main effects on the eye. The first is a physical one, "when the eye itself is enchanted by beauty and the multiple delights of color," which he compares to the way a spicy dish can "titillate the tongue."[21] The second he defines as a psychic effect that causes an "emotional vibration."[22] To Kandinsky, seeing involves not only sight but all the other senses as well, making it the outcome of the interaction between physical experience and the associations forged by the mind.[23]

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[19] The *Regno d'Italia*, or Reign of Italy, was the name given to the newly established kingdom of Italy in 1861. Formerly subdivided in independent city-states and monarchies, Italy became a unified country under the leadership of the House of Savoia, following the Second Independence War in 1859 against Austria and the conquest of the *Regno delle Due Sicilie* (the Reign of the Two Sicilies) at the hand of the army of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The unification brought about a series of policies intended to strengthen the identity of the newly formed State; these included the pursuit of a specific city aesthetic common to the whole country.

[20] Kandinsky, *The Spiritual in Art*, 39–93.

[21] *Id.*, 39.

[22] *Id.*, 41.

[23] *Id.*, 42.

There is more to color, however, than simply associations—as Kandinsky goes on to say, "color embodies an enormous though unexplored power which can affect the entire human body as a physical organism," directly influencing the soul.[24] In Kandinsky's view, an artist can make the soul vibrate through color.[25] I suspect Grosse would agree—commenting on *Psychylustro* and her own artistic practice, she has stated that "[she needs] the brilliance of color to get close to people, to stir up a sense of life experience and heighten their sense of presence."[26]

During this voyage of infrastructure and paint, in between reality and imagination, links are formed and habit is affected. I have been called out of instances of passive engagement with the route by surreal pink, green, or orange landscapes sprawling out before my eyes. Something did not feel quite right, and—reawakened—I have found myself wondering whether such coloring was an effect of the glass or if the trees and ground had actually been tinted. Wonder, amazement, and uncertainty are at the core of this project, helping to generate a new interest and attention toward what is an otherwise predictable and routine occurrence for the commuter. *Psychylustro* creates a new experience for everybody on the train and a new way to engage with the surrounding city matter.

If this railroad has become an arcade through my journey, it seems natural to think that each of the artistic moments making up *Psychylustro* informs a 'dialectical image.' In Benjamin's theory, the elements disclosing the forces shaping culture are to be found through the observation of what he calls 'dialectical images,' snapshots of society that display its contradictions and tensions, and that become readable only at specific moments.[27] Through the lens of the *flâneur,* the reader of *The Arcades Project* is led to engage

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[24] *Id.*, 43.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "Psychylustro."

[27] "For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time . . . It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462–463.

with the dialectical images in the arcades that reveal a social and cultural understanding of modern society. There is also a component of habit present in both Baudelaire and Benjamin's formulations of the figure of the *flâneur*. Just as the regular commuter is generally familiar with their daily train route and the view out of the carriage window, the *flâneur* is used to the city and its streets. Both observe features they have seen before, making it so that there is a routinary side to their wanderings. The *flâneur* keeps looking to further their impression of society—and art can make the commuter look as well. Through its presence at well-defined points along the railway, *Psychylustro* highlights specific moments of the journey along the train's route by using bold unexpected colors. Seemingly frozen, these moments appear as individual images standing out amidst the succession of views outside of the window. *Psychylustro* locates dialectical images along the route, in so doing it has pointed me, as passenger and observer, towards snapshots of Philadelphia giving way to readings of the city and its infrastructure.

Around the next curve of the track is an apparently abandoned five-story industrial building—*The Warehouse*. Part of its imposing façade is covered in enormous orange paint strokes. Given the dimensions of the building, the scale of the intervention ends up being inhuman. It cannot be the result of a single person's work and therefore implies the engagement of a larger group of people.

With *The Warehouse*, Grosse is able not only to create links between the passengers on the train and the landscape of the route but also to generate connections among the people involved in its realization. In a video interview released in 2014, Grosse and *Mural Arts Program* curator Elisabeth Thomas explain how six local artists from Philadelphia worked together with Grosse and her assistants to create one cohesive work.[28] A second video on *Psychylustro*, this time produced by the *Mural Arts Program*, also contains testimony from North Philadelphia locals who believe the artwork draws attention to the potential that exists in the area. The importance of this work is not only an outcome of the finished artistic product, as an intervention like *Psychylustro* can inspire communities and give

[28] WHYY, "'Psychylustro'," 0:29–1:30.

hope for the future.[29] The collaborative process to realize the artwork stands as an example of what can be achieved by working together. The very scale of railway infrastructure calls for people to team up to imagine new futures and uses for abandoned parts of the network, and to write alternative narratives for those sections still operational. Communal effort is always required to reimagine and repurpose urban spaces.

As the train proceeds towards my final stop, I am given a glimpse into Philadelphia through a gap between the green walls on my left. These walls are *The Twins* and, like gateways to life beyond the rail, they stand as windows into the city. Through one single opening, they prompt viewers to consider the unseen, to look further, and to reimagine their surroundings. Site specificity seeps in. The break almost symbolically elevates the walls, making this moment different, demonstrating how disruption can make a well-known occurrence special. To 'make special' is a core concept at the base of contemporary theories exploring art practices and what defines a product as 'art.' This concept, as presented by the anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake in her work on the genesis of the notion of art, links the attribution of the category of 'artwork' not to those objects or products able to induce and sustain an authentic aesthetic experience, but to those capable of being set apart as 'extra-ordinary.'[30]

The train is reaching North Philadelphia Station, meaning this extra-ordinary imaginary journey of mine is heading towards its conclusion. Following the railroad with *Psychylustro*, I was led to explore and reimagine spaces and matter, navigating the urban landscape as both a physical and metaphorical canvas. It now appears to me that to better see the city as a whole, one must first attempt to look differently. Art can break through routine, catching attention and opening the door for associations to occur—the particular set of associations that came to mind for me, and which I have led you through, emerged in the space of possibility opened up between Grosse's public art and my own inner life. Art gives an impetus to look again and, maybe, see the matter of the city through

[29] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "'Psychylustro'," 2:13–2:47.
[30] Dissanayake, "The Core of Art," 13–38.

other eyes—to make something new from the world around us. "The distracted person, too, can form habits," says Walter Benjamin.[31] I turn this sentence around, hoping Benjamin would not hold it against me: the distracted person is the one who, more than everybody else, tends to passively engage with the city, basing their interactions on habit. Paraphrasing Benjamin then: The distracted person too can *break* habits. Art can help. It can become the fracture through which habit is subverted.

Having left the brushstrokes and artificial landscapes of *Psychylustro* behind, I have now reached the final stop on my route. The train halts at the platform and I get off at North Philadelphia Station.

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Billi, Rebecca. *Map of Katharina Grosse's Psychylustro*. 2024. Digital collage. 42 cm x 29.7 cm. Pictures of Psychylustro from https://www.katharinagrosse.com © Katharina Grosse c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2024.