# Creating relations through art

The social aspects of street art and graffiti in London

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This thesis combines anthropology and urban studies theories to discuss and analyse the ambivalent position of urban art in London. The thesis focuses especially on the social elements of street art and graffiti and the various relationships the artworks create and enable in the urban environment. It is also discussed how dominant cultural policies have affected urban art practises and how this all reflects the contemporary urban trends and issues in London. The questions asked in this thesis is what kind of social relationships do street art and graffiti create and how do these relationships connect to the increasingly privatised and controlled public space and place in urban environment? In relation to that, it is also asked whether the current cultural policies in the city are changing street art and graffiti practises from a free expression to the public to a tool that is used for economic profit.

The data for the thesis was gathered during two months of ethnographic fieldwork in London. The main methods were semi-structured interviews and observation, and the fieldwork also included participation observation and walk and talk ethnography. The thesis focuses primarily on the views of people practising street art or graffiti, which is why majority of the interviewees were artists.

The first analysis chapter of the thesis employs Alfred Gell's anthropological theory of art and the focus is on specific urban street art and graffiti works and the relationships in their proximity. The second analysis chapter discusses the social relationships on a slightly broader scale while going deeper on the unique aspects of London street art and graffiti scene. The last analysis chapter discusses the topic on the widest scale and elucidates urban art's position in relation to major urban trends in London, such as dominant cultural policies and the use and potential of public spaces in the city.

The aim of this thesis is to present and analyse urban art as a social phenomenon and analyse the various social relationships street art and graffiti enable and create in the increasingly privatised urban environment. The other main point is to discuss the increasing popularity of urban art and concurrent cultural policies and whether it is changing the phenomenon in a way that the original rebellious nature of urban art would disappear and turn into a commercial practise.

Based on the fieldwork and earlier research done on the subject, the concurrent cultural policies have not affected street art and graffiti in a way that they would be shifting into a realm of commercialism. The reason behind this is that the policies employed by actors that are using street art for economic benefits conflict with the major ideological aspects of the urban art practises. Rather, the urban art scene has both extended and divided in a way that different urban artworks can have contradictory motivations and agendas behind them.

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tämä antropologiaa ja kaupunkitutkimusta yhdistävä pro gradu –tutkielma käsittelee urbaanin katutaiteen ja graffitin ristiriitaista roolia Lontoossa. Tutkielma keskittyy erityisesti katutaiteen sosiaalisiin piirteisiin ja niihin suhteisiin, joita katutaideteokset luovat urbaanissa ympäristössä. Tutkielmassa keskustellaan myös siitä, miten tällä hetkellä vallitsevat kaupunginvaltuustojen linjaukset ja toimintamallit vaikuttavat osaltaan urbaaniin taiteeseen ja miten tämä osaltaan heijastelee laajemmin kaupunkiympäristössä tapahtuvia muutoksia ja niihin liittyviä ongelmia. Tutkielmassa pohditaan sitä, millaisia sosiaalisia suhteita urbaani katutaide luo, ja miten nämä suhteet ilmenevät suhteessa jatkuvasti yksityistyvään ja kontrolloituun kaupunkitilaan? Tähän liittyen tutkielmassa keskustellaan myös siitä, vaikuttavatko kaupungin nykyiset kulttuuriset toimintamallit urbaaniin katutaiteeseen siten, että se on muuttumassa välineeksi, jolla pyritään saamaan taloudellisesta tuottoa.

Tutkielma pohjautuu aineistoon, joka on kerätty kahden kuukauden mittaisen kenttätyön aikana Lontoossa. Päämetodeina kenttätyössä olivat puolistrukturoidut haastattelut ja havainnointi, minkä lisäksi kenttätyöhön kuului jonkin verran osallistuvaa havainnointia. Tutkielmassa keskitytään erityisesti katutaide- ja graffititaiteilijoiden näkemyksiin, minkä vuoksi suurin osa haastatteluista tehtiin taiteilijoiden kanssa.

Ensimmäinen aineistoluku lähestyy aihetta keskittymällä yksittäisten teosten yhteydessä ja läheisyydessä olevien suhteiden analysointiin Alfred Gellin antropologisen taiteen teoriaa hyödyntäen. Seuraavassa aineistoluvussa suhteita analysoidaan hieman laajemmalla tasolla ja syvennytään paremmin Lontoon katutaide- ja graffitipiirien uniikkiin maailmaan. Viimeisessä aineistoluvussa aihe kytketään osaksi laajempia urbaanisia ilmiöitä ja kehityslinjoja sekä pohditaan urbaanin taiteen suhdetta vallitseviin kulttuurisiin toimintamalleihin ja julkiseen tilaan nähden.

Kenttätyön ja aiheesta tehdyn aiemman tutkimuksen perusteella urbaani katutaide ja graffiti eivät ole muuttumassa täysin kaupallisiksi ilmiöksi, vaikka tämänhetkiset kaupunkien toimintamallit niihin vaikuttavatkin. Syynä tähän on se, että kaupunkien harjoittamat toimintamallit ovat täydessä ristiriidassa urbaanin taiteen ideologisten näkemysten kanssa. Sen sijaan vaikuttaa siltä, että urbaani katutaide ilmiönä on laajentunut ja jakautunut siten, että eri urbaanien teosten taustalla olevat motiivit ja tarkoitusperät voivat olla täysin ristiriitaisia keskenään.

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# Table of contents

# 1. Introduction

It was years ago in Amsterdam, where I first really started to pay attention to urban street art and graffiti. I was on a holiday, and my plan had been to take photographs of the beautiful city and the famous landmarks and buildings. However, I was so enthralled by the different styles, images and colours on the walls, of the talented artwork all around me, decorating the streets and bringing up colour everywhere, that most of my pictures from the holiday are about the different street art and graffiti works that I saw. Some smaller, almost hidden: some enormous and showy, impossible to miss. The second time I was blown away by the art on the streets was in Melbourne in 2016. It was not about a separate work here or there: the images were everywhere. When walking around in the eastern suburbs of the city, it was almost like walking in an outdoors art gallery: around every other corner there was a beautiful, spectacular urban art painting, which just captivated me to stop and admire the work for a while. In addition, I loved the atmosphere the works created: they awoke the death, grey walls with colours and often thought-provoking themes. Every time, wherever I saw an urban artwork, the same questions came to my mind: who had made this work? Why? What had inspired him or her, and why had they chosen this very location? What was the motivation behind making these images: what was the reason why people made these works?

Long before I started planning my master thesis, I was both puzzled and fascinated with street art and graffiti. After I started studying urban studies, my interest in different urban phenomenon and cities only grew. Early on in my studies, I decided that in my master thesis, I would like to combine anthropology and urban studies. The reason why I wanted to focus on an urban phenomenon is that increasing amount of people are "clustering in urban areas" (Florida 2012, 187). Cities have for a long time in history played an important role in relation to countries' economy, but their importance has rose into spotlight "in today's knowledge-driven innovation economy" (ibid, 188). In contemporary world, cities are the places where connections and innovations are created and where different networks meet (ibid, 189). Moreover, the cities do not just offer a place for these creative actions – "they stimulate… [creativity] as well" (Florida 2012, 201). Despite this, the cities have been long "under-analyzed" in anthropology (Toulson

2015, 31) and there has been a call for more anthropological research to take places in the cities (Toulson 2015; Pardo & Prato 2012). The current essential position of cities in the contemporary world makes them important fields for further research, which is why I wanted to study an urban phenomenon in my thesis.

After I had vaguely decided the subject of my thesis, the next question was the place. Where should I do my fieldwork? I had started to lean towards London for many reasons. While New York City remains as the most famous city in context of public urban art, London has been described as "perhaps the second most renowned epicenter in the world for graffiti and street art" (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272). There are many reasons for this. First, London hosts several known art schools and is home to countless art museums and galleries (ibid.). London is also home for numerous different creative lines of businesses and fields, such as "interior design and architecture firms" as well as "numerous advertising agencies" (ibid.). The city has also been famous since 1950s for its "vibrant youth culture and protest subcultures" as well as "publicized deviant and/or counterculture groups" (ibid.).  This mixture of the highly educated people with art-school backgrounds and the various countercultures makes London not just a fertile but also a unique place for graffiti and street art.

In addition, the city's geographical location affects its position in context of public urban art since London has for decades provided "an easy access to other international centers of graffiti and street art" (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272). Because of that, the city has a "gateway" position between other European cities and American street art and graffiti culture (ibid.). There are several instances where American graffiti artists or street artists have started their European careers specifically from London with the help of local artists. This is hardly surprising, since as Ross and Ferrell point out, "The city presents minimal barriers for American graffiti and street artists in terms of language and contacts" (2016, 272). Due to that, London is one of the first places in Europe where graffiti landed, and in the contemporary world, it remains a popular place for international artists to visit, start or proceed with their careers (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272).

While browsing information about urban art in London, I came across a street art agency and figured that they could give me some advice regarding my upcoming fieldwork. I told the agency about myself, about my thesis and my situation, and asked

for any kind of advice on how to proceed in case I would come to do my fieldwork in London. They answered that there could be a way they could help me – while I would simultaneously help them. They were looking for a communications and content intern. I would help the agency by working there as an intern, and at the same time they could help me with my research and making contacts. Only a couple of months later, I was on my way to London.

My internship place gave me a completely new perspective on street art and graffiti. Suddenly I was not just this tourist, wandering around the streets and admiring the pieces[1] painted by artists that I would never personally meet – suddenly I was in an office where the artists would come and go, different projects were planned and the questions concerning street art and graffiti works were completely different. It was not about who or why, it was about how and when. How could we get a permission to paint on that street? How much will all the expenses be? When would the artist be able to paint that wall? When could that place be painted – when would the permission be given, when would the artist(s) have time? The only time question 'who' was asked was in relation to "who owns this building, from whom should we ask for a permission to paint?" I realised two very fundamental aspects during my internship. Firstly, there is nowadays a commercial interest and market value when it comes to street art and graffiti. Secondly, especially the legal side of street art and graffiti has become more visible, and urban public art in all its forms has become increasingly popular in London.

My master's thesis is influenced by my own, long interest in urban phenomena and street art and graffiti, by the very different perspective that I acquired while working as an intern in a street art agency in London and finally, by my fieldwork, that again changed my perspectives on urban art. My original interest led me to focus on the artists themselves: I wanted to find out how they view their work, how they see their pieces in connection with the environment and how they aim to connect with the public. Because even though street artists or graffiti artists – I will enlighten soon why I separate these two groups – are still marginal groups, they are not exactly rare in East London where my fieldwork primarily took place. I will analyse also the changes regarding current dominant city policies and changes that have been occurring in London when it comes to public space and how it affects everyone living there. All the aspects mentioned

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[1] piece' is a common term that is used when referring to "larger, more elaborate, colourful and stylistically demanding" street art or graffiti works (MacDonald 2001, 80).

above connect to the focus of this thesis: different relationships connected to street art and graffiti. By different relationships I mean the various relations artists have with each other and in relation to their works, as well as the relationships artists have *via* their works with public and with urban environment.

## 1.1 Research questions and perspectives

Street art and graffiti are "emotionally charged" issues in contemporary cities (McAuliffe 2012, 189). Depending from the source, paintings on the streets have been described to be "pure... and the most natural manifestation of public art" as well as "defacement, destruction, and an anathema" to a society (Schacter 2008, 36). Whether street art and graffiti are vandalism or art has been a popular topic (Willard 2016; Borganoff 2009; Stewart 2001), and usually at least briefly mentioned or discussed in most of the writings about street art and graffiti (see for example McAuliffe 2012; Schacter 2008; Cronin 2006). However, nowadays the question is not that black-and-white, at least not in cities like London. Street art and graffiti used to be viewed as nothing but illegal defacement of property especially during 1980s and 1990s (Borganoff 2009, 14-21), but in contemporary cities they are increasingly often recognised as "legitimate art" (Molnár 2017, 385). In contemporary London, the question is not so much about whether everything painted on the walls are labelled as either art or vandalism – nowadays, a better question would be that *which* works are seen as art and why.

Some people argue that it is the legality of the pieces, which defines whether they are art or not: if a person has asked permission and painted the piece legally, it is art, but if the piece has been painted illegally, it is vandalism (Willard 2016). Mary Willard explains that an argument behind this view is that "bad ethics make the art worse" and thus work of art is flawed "*just* because of its ethical flaws [emphasis added]" (2016, 95). But since for example Banksy's illegally made piece, '*Girl with a balloon*', was voted as the most loved "work of art" in 2017 in UK (Kennedy 2017), there must be more to the issue. Moreover, if we exclude legal graffiti and street art areas, how could anyone know whether a piece on a wall was made with a permission or not? In some cases, it can be easy to guess: it would make the headlines if someone in London would illegally paint a huge, detailed mural the size of a building illegally and not be interrupted – not that too many would even try to do that, for obvious reasons. Despite

this, it is not always possible to tell whether an artist has painted a certain work with or without the property owner's permission, especially in certain areas with very little surveillance (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272). Someone could claim that it is the reason and motivation behind making the piece, which makes it art or vandalism – as in, was the piece on the wall meant to be art or no. However, an artist can only affect to a certain extend how people interpret the piece: something meant as pure vandalism can look like a piece of art to someone, and a piece an artist thought was his best artwork ever could look like pure vandalism to some viewer.

This leads to an interesting question: how can one define in the first place what 'art' is, and how should one analyse it from an anthropological point of view? In order to analyse the different aspects and relations in connection to street art and graffiti, I turn to Alfred Gell and his anthropological theory of art. In his book *Art and Agency – An Anthropological Theory*, Gell argues that "anthropological theories are… about social relationships, and not anything else" and anthropological theory of art should thus be formulated based on that same basis (1998, 5). According to Gell's theory, "the nature of the art object is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded" (1998, 7). This means that art objects do not have any kind of "'intrinsic' nature" that would be "independent of the relational context" – an object does not turn into 'art' unless it is consciously defined that way (ibid.). Based on that argument, Gell argues that from an anthropological viewpoint, "in fact anything whatsoever could… be an art object" (1998, 7).

Therefore, based on Gell's ideas, I can refer to street art and graffiti as art in this thesis, because whether they are universally seen as art or not does not matter, as long as in *certain relational contexts* the pieces on the walls are viewed as art. With that in mind, I would like to return for a moment to the 'is street art and /or graffiti vandalism or art' conversation to further demonstrate why Gell's theory is specifically suitable for the topic and themes of this thesis. It is fair to conclude that the 'Is it art or vandalism' conversation is currently "an intractable debate" in which neither the artists nor the authorities are willing to "recognise the others' perspective" (Schacter 2008, 36). However, this does not affect my thesis negatively: on the contrary, it allows my analysis to approach certain topics and ideas I would not be able to if my research focused solely on institutionally recognised artworks. Instead of trying to label street art and graffiti either as art or as vandalism, based on Gell's ideas I would rather like to

pose an argument that this division is unnecessary or even harmful when analysing different aspects of urban art scene in London, if one wants to really thoroughly analyse the topic. I base this argument on Gell's points concerning the possible exclusive aspects when analysing art: he argues that in relation to institutionally recognised artworks, there are "undesirable exclusive connotations" in a way that if something is 'exclusively' a work of art, it cannot be anything else (1988, 12). Since the point of Gell's theory is to not exclude any of the elements of the objects that are being analysed, Gell suggests that the anthropological theory of art should not "restrict its scope to recognised works of art" (1988, 12). He further notes that even though anthropology of art should not exclude recognised works of art as a possible research topic, for the reasons mentioned above they should not be the *primary* focus (ibid). Considering that street art and graffiti are "produced outside of the clutches of the fine-art system" (Schacter 2015, 203), Gell's theory suits particularly aptly for this thesis.

If street art and graffiti are viewed strictly from the legal point of view, most of the artists paint illegally and thus their works can be indeed labelled as vandalism (Macdonald 2001, 2; McAuliffe 2012, 190). However, if the aim is to not exclude any of the elements of said objects, the same works can be art at the same time. This is one of the fundamental issues when it comes to the nature of street art and graffiti. The pieces – especially illegal ones – are rarely just about art, but about other factors as well. Urban art has a long history as a "counter-hegemonic" practise (Cronin 2006, 3) because of the political aspects of the phenomenon. Not all of the pieces contain a political message, but they can for instance make people question things taken for granted in urban environment (Molnár 2017, 394). Even legal urban art has a power to transform and affect how spaces are viewed (Nandrea 1999, 114). In addition, just as Gell argues in his book about art objects in general, the pieces create connections between different actors (1998). Thus, Gell's theory, which intentionally does not exclude any elements of art objects, fits perfectly for my thesis, since I focus on different aspects and elements *around* and *related* to street art and graffiti.

I will discuss the different social relationships connected to urban street art and graffiti works in relation to Gell's anthropological theory of art especially in the first analysis chapter, which focuses on specific urban art pieces and relations connected to them. In order to analyse street art and graffiti from a broader level, I connect the topic to various urban studies discussions that discuss the potential of public spaces and places in urban

environment as well as the neoliberal city policies that affect them. Street art and graffiti scene in London is wide and very various, which is why I first present different sides of it separately before I analyse the topic in relation to larger urban phenomena. In chapter 3, I analyse the relationships apparent in relation to pieces made at a legal street art and graffiti jam. After that, in chapter 4, by focusing on the very origin of the graffiti phenomenon – tags and tagging – I move to analyse the relationship between artists and their urban environment as well as different relationships between artists themselves. I also analyse the relationships between different works that are in proximity of each other. Finally, in chapter 5, I compare the commercial side of urban art to the illegal one, as well as ponder the street art and graffiti's role in public space of the city. I discuss how the relationships between different types of works differ in how they connect with the urban environment, in their relation to the public and between the artists and the works that they create.

That said, my first research question is: **What kind of social relationships do street art and graffiti create between different actors, and how do these relationships connect to the increasingly privatised and controlled public space and place in urban environment?** My second research question is **whether current cultural and economic policies in the city are transforming street art and graffiti practises from a free expression to the public into a tool that is used for economic profit**.

## 1.2 Fieldworks methods and notes

I used qualitative methods to analyse and acquire data for my thesis. Before I started my fieldwork, I read earlier studies written about street art and graffiti, especially by social scientists. At the field, my two main research methods were semi-structured interviews and observation. My research focused especially in East London areas Shoreditch, Hackney Wick and Camden but I also visited a legal graffiti area in South Bank and a northern suburb Tottenham. I did the fieldwork in autumn 2017 and it lasted approximately two months.

I did nine long and five short semi-structured interviews during my fieldwork. In addition to that, I had occasional short casual conversations with artists visiting the street art agency I was working at. The majority of the people I interviewed are street artists and graffiti artists since my thesis focuses on the relationships connected to them and their artworks, but I also interviewed a co-founder and a head of one of the street art

agencies in London. I chose semi-structured interviews as my interview type because that method allows quite conversational like casual interviews while still resulting in comparable data. The reason why I decided to do semi-structured interviews was the conversational element of the method: semi-structured interviews are relatively easy to arrange in a way that the interview proceeds casually from one question to another and enables a conversational atmosphere. Given that most artists practise illegal activities, I assumed that they might talk more openly about that side of their life, if the atmosphere during the interviews is not too official but more relaxed and casual.

I mostly approached potential interviewees via social media, and majority of my interviewees were found that way. The rest of the artists I met through earlier connections or through my internship place. The longer I had been in London the more I had contacts, and it became easier to find potential interviewees. The length of the interviews varied between thirty minutes and one and a half hour. The shorter interviews were done in a spontaneous manner when I was observing a certain event or a place and lasted for few minutes.

Observation played an important role as my other main research method. I went to observe a legal street art and graffiti jam in Shoreditch; I visited the main 'hotspots' for street art in London: Camden, Shoreditch, Brick Lane and Hackney Wick and a legal graffiti area in South Bank. I also participated in walking ethnography when I went to an organised street art tour in Shoreditch. In addition to that, I also employed participation methods when I joined a group of paste-ups artists for one Saturday when they went to a Northern London area, Tottenham, to put up their art illegally. I also joined a street artist Boby LV in his tour around Shoreditch after our interview, during which time I placed one of his stickers on the wall on his behalf and checked for him that no one was looking when he put up his art. Moreover, by working as an intern in a street art agency, I participated in the legal side of London street art and graffiti scene for two months on an almost daily basis.

I also took a lot of photographs and videos during my fieldwork, especially as part of observations. The photographs I use in this thesis are there in order to illustrate the arguments made and to better elucidate situations and scenarios I discuss in the text. The place where the photograph was taken is mentioned in the caption, as well as the

main issue or aspect the photograph illustrates. I have taken all the photographs featured in this thesis and they have all been taken during my fieldwork.

I had hoped to get an interview also with a London city council employee. Unfortunately, despite my multiple attempts to contact different city councils, I never received an answer, thus I did not get an opportunity to hear personally their point of view about the topic. After mentioning this to one of my street art agency colleagues, he told me he was not surprised: apparently, the councils are extremely busy. The agency had learned that whenever they had to discuss for example a permission with a council, the council would arrange a brief meeting and the agency would have to express their case efficiently and summarily. Fortunately, I found sources that feature comments and interview answers from employees of different London city councils. I will introduce those statements in this thesis to present different kinds of viewpoints regarding how urban art is viewed in London.

Since majority of my interviews were done with street artists and graffiti artists that had been more or less involved also in illegal practises, I have to pay extra attention to protect the anonymity of the people I interviewed. In context of street art and graffiti, this is easy considering that almost all the artists have specific artist names. At the field, every time I had an interview with an artist, I asked the person I interviewed how I should refer to them in my thesis, and people almost unanimously asked me to refer to them with their artist name. The two artists I interviewed who make art in their own name are concurrently only involved with legal art, and they both said I could use their real names in my thesis.

## 2. Street art and graffiti in London

### 2.1 Earlier research

When discussing earlier works and researches done in relation to urban art, one of the most classical topics raised along or simultaneously with asking 'is it art or vandalism' has been to compare graffiti and street art (Molnár 2017; McAuliffe 2012). Street art and graffiti usually refer to slightly different things, even though in many instances the categories overlap. Strictly stylistically speaking, artists differentiate the two based on whether a work includes any type of letters: graffiti and its forms always include lettering of some sort, whereas street art is practically everything else people see painted on the streets. However, it should be noted that in general people connect various features to these two forms in other levels as well (see Molnár 2017). First, the main distinction people tend to make is that graffiti is inclusive in a way that it is for the people inside the subculture whereas street art is for the public (Molnár 2017, 389). Considering that street art started to appear when people *not* involved in the subculture started to paint on the streets and often meant their art for the public in general (Irvine 2012, 2-3) – an issue I will discuss further in the next subchapter – this distinction makes sense. However, nowadays many people who label themselves as graffiti writers or artists also paint for the public (Molnár 2017, 385). In addition, most artists paint anything from large pieces to simple tags depending on the situation, which is why this distinction does not apply as a rule, just in some instances.

Often it seems to depend on the situation and circumstances *around* the work rather than its visual form whether it is considered as street art or as graffiti. The authorities often use the term graffiti in relation to the illegally made pieces and street art when referring to the legal ones, no matter what the pieces visually look like (Molnár 2017, 387-389). Thus, the artists and the authorities can use the terms very differently, since they separate the two forms based on different qualities. To make the whole issue even more confusing, in many articles the authors have just decided to use only either 'street art' or 'graffiti' term, but it comes clear from the context that they are in reality referring to both types of urban art (for example Cronin 2008). In addition, during my fieldwork I heard numerous different opinions and views on the subject. However, the only things I can say for sure is that different people separate street art and graffiti in

very different ways – and that the artists themselves make a clear distinction between these two forms of urban art and for them, it matters a lot whether they are viewed as graffiti artists or street artists. Especially for the latter reason, I will either write 'street art *and* graffiti' or 'urban art' when I am referring to the entire scene.

When it comes to anthropological interest in urban phenomena in general, most of the research is quite recent: Amrit Bhandari notes that urban anthropology was almost "unnoticed until 1970's (2010, 6). The discussion concerning the scarce amount of anthropological research on cities and urban phenomena has continued to this decade (Toulson 2015; Pardo & Prato 2012). For example, Ruth Toulson argues in her article that was published as recently as 2015, that that urban contexts as fieldworks sites have only recently been started to take seriously (2015, 28). However, more and more population are living or moving to live in the cities with various consequences, and that has increased activity in the field of urban anthropology (Prato & Pardo 2012, 1).

Even though anthropological research in urban context and street art and graffiti phenomena are both quite young, there has been earlier anthropological research on street art and graffiti. Especially after 2000, there has been increasingly more research on the topic, from different points of view. Susan Phillips has analysed graffiti from an anthropological point of view in her article "*Notes from the Margins - Graffiti, Community, and Environment in Los Angeles*" (2009). Phillips analyses graffiti as a uniting phenomenon in the urban environment: writings within a group can encourage bonds and "uphold the sense of community" (2009, 41). Phillips also discusses the relationship to the urban place and space made through writings on the city surfaces. Her research focuses on writings made from 1914 to 1960s, predating the 'hip hop' connected graffiti, but the themes and ideas she presents are relevant also in relation to the concurrent urban street art and graffiti.

Urban art and its connection to place and space have indeed been a popular research topic, especially in relation to people's rights to public places in increasingly privatised cities. This subject has been studied both by anthropologists, for example by Rafael Schacter (2014; 2008) as well as in other disciplines, especially in sociology (Molnár 2017; MacDonald 2001). As mentioned earlier, a very common and one of the earliest research topics has been the still unanswered debate of whether street art and/or graffiti is art or is it just a crime, a form of vandalism – Susan Stewart discussed this already

back in 1987. The matter is usually at least briefly mentioned whether or not it is the main research topic of the work or not (Molnár 2017; Willard 2016; Schacter 2008; Macdonald 2001) – just like in this thesis, since it elucidates the interesting and ambiguous nature of street art and graffiti and its position in the societies.

When it comes to graffiti and ethnographical fieldwork, Nancy Macdonald made her doctoral dissertation on the subject. Her 1997 published doctoral thesis and 2001 published book are based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in London and New York. In her work, she focuses on the urban graffiti subculture and the aspects of masculinity within it. Macdonald wrote that in order for female artists to be taken seriously in the subculture, they would have to replace all signs of femininity (incapability) with signs of masculinity (capability) (1997, 137). Graciela Trajtenberg (2016), whose research is situated in Israel and who made her research approximately two decades after Macdonald, also notes that men dominate the scene. However, unlike the women Macdonald had spoken with, the female artists Trajtenberg interviewed clearly had no intention to replace or suppress their femininity (Trajtenberg 2016, 177-179).

The female artists in the very masculine world of street art and graffiti is an interesting point of view, which I considered while planning this thesis: however, even though I did notice during my fieldwork that a notable majority of graffiti artists and street artists are men, I noticed no discrimination or special attitude towards female artists. They were a minority for sure – I would roughly estimate that for ten male artists, there is one female artist – but there are so many women painting in London's streets nowadays that there was nothing too special about a woman being a street artist. Macdonald's 1997 thesis paints a very different image of the situation, but it was published twenty years before my fieldwork took place. Trajtenberg's work dates closer to my thesis, and even though her fieldwork took place in a different culture, it nonetheless demonstrates the changes that have happened in relation to this issue.

An interesting aspect is that all the female artists I interviewed, met or even heard of almost never practised graffiti – and in this connection, I am referring strictly to the style, as in the urban art style that focuses around letters – but they were practically always street artists. The styles and techniques used by different female artists varied a lot from enormous murals to small paste-ups and stickers, but most of these works are

usually labelled under the street art term. Thus, it might be the increase in street art that could be the reason why the female artists have increased in number and have become more accepted and normal. Comparing female and male artists from the point of view of which kind of styles they use could make an interesting topic in future researches. However, since my thesis focuses quite secondarily on the stylistic aspects of the pieces, I will not dig deeper into that subject in this work.

Street art and graffiti as research topics emerge in various other disciplines besides social sciences as well: in law and criminology studies (Ross & Ferrell 2016; Mulcahy & Flessas 2015; Halsey & Young 2006); archaeology (Daniell 2011) and unsurprisingly, in different fields of art studies (DeMarrais & Robb 2013; Riggle 2010). After 2000 and especially after 2010 there have also emerged quite a few master theses and doctoral theses, which either focus on street art and/or graffiti or touch the subject while discussing some other phenomenon connected with it, such as minor urban crimes or cultural features in the cities. Most of these are written by students who have studied either in the faculty of arts or social sciences. There have also been a few documentaries about graffiti and street art. The most famous ones are Charlie Ahearn's *Wild Style* (1983) which presents especially the hip-hop connected graffiti subculture practise and British street artist Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010). McAuliffe argues that the positive responses Banksy's film received demonstrated "wider acceptance of 'street art' in the public sphere" onwards 2010 (2012, 199). However, before I start analysing the concurrent, more accepted position of street art and graffiti, I will have to explain first the reasons that have led the practise there – that is to say, the history of street art and graffiti.

## 2.2. History of street art and graffiti

When discussing the history of street art and graffiti, it is often pointed out that humans have painted on the walls already thousands of years ago, which makes it the oldest form of art. Why people painted on the walls of different caves remains a mystery: there is no certain answer, only different theories. Nevertheless, whether they were messages for others or a mean to immortalise certain stories, symbols or historical events, they are something shared by many cultures from different parts of the world. (Bogdanoff 2009, 13)

Even though people have made markings to places they have lived in for thousands of years, the history of contemporary street art and the subcultural or 'hip hop' graffiti is much, much younger, only a few decades old (Macdonald, 2001, 2). During 1960's in the United States in Philadelphia, people started to compete on how many different places they could put their name on (Bogdanoff 2009). These names or nicknames were called 'tags'; also nowadays the term 'tag' refers simply to artist's "name or signature" (Macdonald 2001, xii). The phenomenon spread to New York and started to change when people wanted their tags to look better and be larger (Bogdanoff 2009, 14-19). Different styles started to emerge when the writers wanted to be distinguished from the rapidly growing number of other people participating in the same practise (ibid.). People started to add more colours and symbols in their works, and thus 'pieces' emerged; in the 1970s, graffiti was already a visible phenomenon in New York and already presented as a new form of art in certain contexts (Bogdanoff 2009, 18-20). The scene combined and developed "with hip hop's dance and music cultures" (Macdonald, 2001, 2) and a new urban subculture emerged when "the dance-rap-graffiti assemblage" started to become "recognized collectively as "hip-hop" culture" (McAuliffe 2012, 192).

During the 1980's the phenomenon changed: the government started to fight harder against graffiti with laws, regulations and penalties (Bogdanoff 2009, 21). At the same time and in relation to that, the atmosphere of the scene became more violent and other criminal activities started to emerge and combine with graffiti (ibid.). For both of these reason, many people finished their careers as graffiti writers (ibid.). However, some graffiti writers adjusted to these changes differently – they found new and different ways to get exposure for their works: "photographs in graffiti magazines" (Macdonald 2001, 91). In addition, movies, documents and books about graffiti arrived at the markets, and some graffiti writers started to travel around the world (Bogdanoff 2009, 21-26). These new platforms and aspects have affected a lot in bringing "this worldwide subculture together" (Macdonald 2001, 91). The phenomenon "started to spread globally by the mid- 1980s and early 1990s" (Schacter 2015, 203). This was when also art galleries especially in Europe got interested in the phenomenon (Bogdanoff 2009, 21-26).

Even though some graffiti artists painted characters and landscapes on the trains already in the 1970's (Bogdanoff 2009, 20), street art as its own category emerged later. It was

in the 1990s, when a new group of people got interested in acting and influencing in the cities (Irvine 2012, 2). Instead of aiming to join the urban hip-hop subculture and its competitive tagging and graffiti practice, this new group was more interested to "hack the visually predatory codes of advertising, the rules of the attention economy, and the control of visibility" (Irvine 2012, 2-3). These people often had background in art schools, and "they combined punk and hip-hop attitude with learned skills and knowledge of recent art movements" (Irvine 2012, 3). Street art started to originate as a new branch of this urban art phenomenon.

When it comes to the history of street art and graffiti in the United Kingdom, there had been a few singular examples of graffiti in the United Kingdom already in the late 1950s (Daniell 2011, 455). However, it was the hip-hop and gang-related graffiti subculture from New York and its "widespread copying and spread across… the world" that fully brought the graffiti subcultures and practises to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s (Daniell 2011, 455). From the beginning, there were "graffiti writers who weren't part of gangs", who instead of just marking certain areas used the practise as a way to explore the city (Daniell 2011, 455). Before the 1970s, graffiti was not "specifically an illegal act in the UK" (Daniell 2011, 456). However, "In 1971, the Criminal Damage Act was passed in the U.K" and that made the practise illegal (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274). The reasons for the act where the complaints by both local people and visitors, who took graffiti as a sign that authorities were neglecting to keep certain areas safe and under control (Daniell 2011, 456). Graffiti was described as "a sign of urban decay" and Harrogate Council defined it to be "somewhere between wilful littering and vandalism" (ibid.). The act abled the authorities to charge people who were caught painting on the streets or even just carrying equipment for that, like spray-cans (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274). In case someone was convicted, the punishment was usually either a fine or community service of some kind, or in some cases, both (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274).

Term graffiti was "closely allied" with crime and illegality for decades, but this has started to change (Daniell 2011, 456-457). Rafael Schacter comments how "there has been a "boom... of street-art in London since the mid 2000s" (Schacter 2015, 203). There are several reasons behind this. Lee Bofkin, the co-founder and head of a London-based street art agency called Global Street Art, pointed out that "people's appetite for street art" has grown rapidly, and the attitudes have shifted enormously. A graffiti artist Oust commented how nowadays especially street art "has gotten into point

where it's recognised as an art form – people take it seriously". Social media has had a remarkable role in this: artists have been able to share their work online for considerably larger audiences than ever before (MacDowall & de Souza 2017). This has led to increasing amount of people seeing and sharing the works online and thus to larger amounts of street art and graffiti followers on a global scale. In addition, "the appearance of the graffiti 'stars'" has led to street art and graffiti exhibitions in famous art institutions in London – for example in Tate Modern (Daniell 2011, 456-457).

London street art and graffiti scene has changed fundamentally also because various new actors have entered the scene. There are bloggers and photographers, who might never even touch a spray-can, but whose free time or even work might revolve around the practise. Then there are artists who are both painting and sharing both their own and other artists' works on social media: Lee Bofkin mentioned how "there's a community of people who are not just artists, they're sharing" works online. A street artist I interview, HelloTheMushroom, also mentioned about the subject: "you see some Instagram users, they are like sticker collectors… You have some people who need to take pictures of all the murals as soon as they come up. It is like a hobby, street art hunting".

There has also been an increasing amount of street art and graffiti related organisations – for instance street art agencies – as well as people who help artists with the administrative work, especially within the last five years (Lee Bofkin). Street art festivals have also become increasingly popular in London and globally (Schacter 2014). The "boom" in street art and graffiti has not been unnoticed by commercial actors either. Borghini et al. point out how that in street art and graffiti there have appeared "perspectives that encourage a coexistence with institutional forces such as government and the market" (2010, 115). As Lee Bofkin pointed out, street art is not only popular, but also shared widely especially via social media, so "it becomes an asset that can be used by PR companies as a PR tool". The financial actors and markets have noticed the potential in the popularity of street art and graffiti, and even though hand-painted advertisements are not yet a mainstream phenomenon, they are increasing in number (Cronin 2008). For example, Adidas, Zippo and Spotify have had hand-painted advertisements in London made by street artists. In addition, numerous tourist agencies

arrange street art tours in the London areas with a wide amount of urban art in multiple languages[2].

## 2.3 London as a site

Due to street art and graffiti's increasing popularity, originally completely illegal activity has now found its place also in many legal areas. Legal graffiti walls and areas have appeared in London and other cities (McAuliffe 2012, 194-195), which makes it possible to paint in the city legally for fun in addition to making a career in urban art by doing commercial and commissioned works. However, even though there has been increase in legal street art and graffiti especially during the last decade (Molnár 2017), most of the street art and graffiti is still illegally made (McAuliffe 2012, 190). Many reasons and elements affect this.

First, people often start painting on the streets because of the rebellious aspects of the practise: "the adventure, excitement and release of the illegal exercise" are the first aspects, which often caught future artists' attention (Macdonald 2001, 72). The inspiration to start painting is often triggered after seeing illegal works made by other artists (ibid.). Street and graffiti artist Nojil said that looking into other people's art "pushes you to do stuff on your own. It pushes you out of your bubble and you know, you might see something… a certain technique they use and think, 'I could use that, but in this way'". The artists do not usually view the illegal nature of street art and graffiti as an unfortunate downside. One of the main reasons why artists start painting on the streets in the first place are the rebellious aspects of it: "disdain for the law is seen as part of the appeal of this genre by the self-styled "outlaws" who practice it" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 2). Nojil said that "the rebellious side of" street art and graffiti is what inspired him to start in the first place. Street artist Tom Blackford also noted that for him, graffiti was "like this perfect marriage of art and rebellion" and it was this combination of the two, which incited him to start – and to continue. In addition to inspiring people to pick up the spray-can in the first place, also more experienced artists find illegality as a positive and important aspect of the whole scene. In addition to the excitement and rebellious aspects, painting illegality has a certain aspect of freedom behind it: "You know how it is sometimes, when you're not supposed to do something...

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[2] A few street art tour organisers: https://strawberrytours.com/london/tours/free-street-art-graffiti-tour; https://www.getyourguide.com; https://www.shoreditchstreetarttours.co.uk/

But then I thought, wait a minute, I wouldn't have to worry about that. I could just do whatever I want and that's it… You don't have to ask anyone for permission" (HelloTheMushroom).

For some the illegality is not one of the main points, but a simpler and easier option. Street artist Sophie Gresswell, who paints legally, mentioned that permissions are difficult to get; "I can totally get why lots of street artists just go out and do it and don't bother [getting a permission] because it's like a minefield.  People have to go through the councils and… It's a real difficult" part of the practise. Moreover, painting illegally without getting into trouble in London is not that difficult nowadays – if one just knows where to go. Due to share amount of illegal street art and graffiti in London, there are certain areas where there really is very little supervision when it comes to painting illegally on the streets. The artists are fully aware of this: Tom Blackford Art mentioned that "everyone paints in East London: Shoreditch, Hackney" because "That's where it's kind of most permitted". Subdude also said that he prefers Hackney Wick to Camden, because "in terms of street art, it's all very organised" in Camden but in Hackney Wick, "you're allowed to do what you want to do". LadyKaur had decided to go to Hackney Wick specifically because of the nature of the place: "I don't want to have any stuff going on with the police or whatever, so I choose places where it's a little bit more legal".

Thus, in London, artists view some areas as "a bit more legal" or more "permitted" to paint in – and the reason for this is that even the police may turn a blind eye. This became apparent from my interviews: LadyKaur told me that the first time she went painting in Hackney Wick with her friend, "the police just went by and they didn't do anything". Ross and Ferrell explain that one reason for this is that "In these areas the councils (i.e. local governmental units) no longer remove this work because they feel overwhelmed by the sheer number" of the works on the walls (2016, 272). After visiting Hackney Wick myself – during which time I actually witnessed some artists putting up street art posters in the middle of the day with several people walking past them – I cannot really blame the authorities. There is a huge area in Hackney Wick, which is so covered in paint – mainly graffiti-styled works – that it is impossible to tell what colour the walls or fences used to be. Tom Blackford Art described Hackney Wick like this: "Hackney now looks like the f*king Bronx in the 1980s. I went there the other day – I have been to Hackney in the past over the last like five, ten years – And I could not

believe it. It was hammered. It's like everything's okay to paint. It's like there's no law. Hackney these days, it's just graffiti everywhere".



A view from Hackney Wick. Most of the surfaces are covered in graffiti and street art.

Hackney Wick might be an extreme case, but the police's attitude towards street art is not so different in Shoreditch either, even though the area has been strongly affected by gentrification[3]: the "increasing house prices and influx of tech companies" have changed the area "dramatically" within the last decades (Sanders-Mcdonagh, Peyrefitte & Ryalls 2016, 2). Even though the property values are higher in Shoreditch than Hackney, Subdude's encounter with the police demonstrates that the police's attitudes towards illegal street art are not too strict. Subdude told me that he had been putting up paste-ups in Brick Lane, one of the main hot spots of street art and graffiti in London, at 2 am at night with his fellow artist. "Then I finished doing the thing and turned around, and the police were sitting there looking right at me, and I was like oh s*it. But yeah, then I went over there, I walked directly to the police car and then she rolls the window down and I'm like: "Is it alright?" And she's like: "Not really". And I was like: "I can take it down if you want". And she's like "Don't worry", and then just drove off".

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[3] Gentrification is a process where a low-income area through various stages becomes a middle-class area. This process is commonly viewed as a negative thing, since the original residents often are forced to move out of their homes because they cannot afford the increased rental prices (Slater 2006). I will discuss this issue more in later chapters.

When I asked Subdude his opinion on why the police not only let him leave his piece on the wall but also did not fine him, he answered that one reason might be that they simply liked his work: "I think they kind of liked it. I think they looked at it and they were like "Oh, that's funny", so they didn't bother". He also noted that in that area, there are problems with drugs and other "serious things over there. They [police] got more serious issues to deal with".

Schacter has a point when he argues that the artists practicing street art in London enjoy nowadays "a wider berth by police and council authorities" and that "it is now a passively permitted practice" (2014, 164). Along with the rise of legal street art and graffiti, the illegal works on the streets have become more accepted in London. One of the main reasons behind this partial acceptance of illegal street art and graffiti is "the perception that this work creates economic and cultural benefits" (Ross& Ferrell 2016, 272). The increasing popularity of street art and graffiti connected with its widely broadened audience due to internet and especially social media have been "boosting its market value" (Molnár 2017, 401-402). Schacter notes how "the potential financial value of" street art is one reason why nowadays "there is a common hesitancy in terms of its visual removal, a degree of acceptance (or at the least uncertainty) in terms of its legal and cultural permissibility" (2014, 164). However, the case is not about simple or unbiased kind of acceptation: to describe the situation more accurately, *certain* kinds of illegal street art and graffiti pieces are more allowed. This connects to concurrent urban cultural policy: Creative City.

## 2.4 Theoretical perspectives

Creative City is Richard Florida's term that connects to "the key underlying forces that have been transforming our economy and culture over the past several decades" (Florida 2012, vii). In Creative City, "the rise of creativity" is seen "as a fundamental economic driver" in the cities (Florida 2012, vii). McAuliffe notes how the "creative cities discourses" link to "the subsequent revaluation of creativity as a postindustrial salve" (2012, 190). Landry and Bianchini write that "Future competition between nations, cities and enterprises" is not anymore about "natural resources, location or past reputation" – it focuses increasingly on cities' abilities "to develop attractive images and symbols and project these effectively" (1995, 12). This, as mentioned, has led to more approbative attitudes towards street art and graffiti. "The profusion of cultural plans and

public art policies, along with… initiatives promoting the creative city" has rendered a new possibility of viewing street art and "graffiti as productive creative practice[s]" instead of being something that cities should try to avoid or dispose of (McAuliffe 2012, 189).

Creative City has placed street art and graffiti in an incoherent position in relation to law and urban policies. Due to both the increasing popularity of street art and graffiti and the rise of Creative City policies, the city councils have understood that removal of street art and graffiti might be – in some cases – a mistake, since the illegal work or works in question might be economically beneficial for the city or the area. The city councils and other authorities have understood that street art and graffiti have a potential of making certain area more "edgy" and "authentic" (Schacter 2014, 164-165) – and thus more attractive for tourists and visitors. "Place making or place marketing" is one of the main features of Creative City (Schacter 2014, 163). City councils and agencies sometimes use street art as a tool to make some place "a branded commodity", which they use to attract more tourists and middle and upper class people (Schacter 2014, 163-164) – that is to say, to attract the type of people who have money to spend.

However, even though urban art "has been co-opted" to certain extend with urban policies and projects so that "street art and murals have risks that they can be involved in negative side of gentrification" (Lee Bofkin, personal communication), the issue is ambiguous. Street art and graffiti have their roots and they often still nowadays work firmly *against* phenomena connected with Creative City such as increased privatization and restriction of urban areas. As Molnár notes, the rise of popularity of street art and graffiti started interestingly happening at the same time when "control over urban space has tightened significantly" in cities due to growing privatization and increased surveillance of urban places (2017, 385-386). "Visual order" is something highly emphasized in the governance of many contemporary urban cities, and street art and graffiti act as proof that these policies are not accepted by everyone in the city (Molnár 2017, 392-393).

Increased privatisation of areas as well as other unequalising urban phenomena such as gentrification are very visible in London. Florida points out how London's attractiveness for the wealthy people from around the world to come and visit and the image of the city as a place where anyone can start a new life has left the local people in

a difficult position, "behind by fast-moving economic change" (2012, 369). There are differences between different areas in the city, but there are places where "London's rich and poor often live right on top of each other in rapidly gentrifying enclaves" (Florida 2012, 369). Florida notes that similarly to other international "cities, the vast majority of London's political energy seems to be directed toward the needs and interests of an elite sliver of its population" (2012, 370).

Street art and graffiti have an ambivalent position in relation to these urban issues. While on the one hand, some street art is used in order to advance neoliberal policies (Schacter 2014), on the other hand, illegal urban artwork have been viewed to act as "a popular and creative backlash", which aims to "reclaim public space especially from excessive commercialization" (Molnár 2017, 386). Molnár is not alone with his thoughts: when it comes to analysing street art and graffiti, the discussion about reclaiming public space back to the local people from the commercial actors emerges often. To name a few examples, Alison Baker writes that by painting street art, young people are "able to 'claim' the space" and to represent themselves as well as "their ideas and collective identification in the form of a piece" (2015, 1011). Jeff Ferrell (1993) also argues based on his fieldwork that graffiti writing is about resistance against "the hegemonic hold of corporate/governmental style over the urban environment" (Hamm 1993, 207). Interestingly, it seems that the more regulated a society is, the more likely it is that illegal graffiti and street art will appear (Daniell 2011, 458). Considering how "the unvarnished corporate remaking of London" strongly influences the city and the urban environment (Florida 2012, 370), it is no wonder street art and graffiti scene is noticeably large and popular in particularly in that city.

Whenever street art and graffiti are analysed in context of public places and space, the discussion inherently links to the discussions about who has the right to change the urban environment, the space around them: in other words, who has the right to the city. In his famous work *Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre (1996 [1968]) writes that he sees the concept "urban" as "a social reality" consisting of different relations (ibid, 103) that are "based on use value" as opposed to exchange value (ibid, 131). According to Lefebvre, the right to the city is not about being able to for example visit cities, but about "renewed *right to the urban life*" (ibid, 158). For Lefebvre, space is not something separate form people's daily lives but instead "inherently political, indivisible from the imbalanced social relations that structure it" (Schacter 2008, 50-51). Mark Purcell

interprets that Lefebvre's point is that the right to the city is about people's right to manage collective decisions themselves rather than letting state officials do those for them (2014, 147). David Harvey further developed Lefebvre's ideas and has brought new aspects to the 'right to the city' discussion. In Harvey's opinion, at the moment "The right to the city... is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires" (Harvey 2008, 38). Harvey argues that the people living in the city should "claim some kind of shaping power… over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a *fundamental and radical way* [emphasis added]" (2012, 5). Breaking the law and concretely, often visually quite impressively, transforming a place could easily be described as something "fundamental and radical".

Most of the urban art connected and used in order to proceed Creative City policies and projects differs essentially from other street art and graffiti when it comes to various relationships around those pieces: between artists and their works, between pieces and the public and especially in relation to space. I analyse and discuss these relationships and their natures in chapter 5, where I also open the ambivalent position of street art and graffiti in relation to different urban policies and phenomena in London in more detail.

As noted earlier in this thesis, I employ Alfred Gell's theoretical viewpoints and his anthropological theory of art when I analyse these different social relationships connected to and in the proximity of street art and graffiti works. As noted earlier in this thesis, Gell includes other than institutionally defined art objects in relation to his theory – but more than that, he defines the whole concept of art differently (1998, 5). Gell follows Howard Morphy's (1994) suggestion to reject "the (Western) institutional definition of art", according to which something is art if it is recognised as such by "institutionally recognized art world" (1998, 5). Rejecting this institutional definition makes sense especially in anthropological contexts: as Gell notes, in many societies anthropologists study, there is no "art world" – at least not in the same sense than in the Western societies (1998, 5). In addition, Gell contests the idea that art could be analysed in a semiotic way if it meant that it would be then analysed like language, as "a 'visual code for the communication of meaning" (1998, 6). He also argues that visual elements should not be the starting point in anthropological study, since it is only because certain forms of art do exist in the first place for some reason, that the way they appear can be evaluated (1998, 3). Gell notes that while it might be interesting for us to know why

certain works of art are viewed as better than others, it does not tell us *why* people create art to begin with (1998, 3). Based on these arguments, Gell writes that he "view[s] art as a system of action intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it "(1988, 6). He argues that this "'action'-centred approach to art is inherently… more anthropological" because in that way, the focus can be on the art objects' role in context of the social processes (ibid.).

Even if the visual and semiotic elements of the pieces can be interesting, in relation to street art and graffiti the other elements of pieces are more relevant for my thesis. Moreover, I agree with Gell in that it would be a shame to solely focus on one singular aspect of the pieces, since many pieces obtain several interesting elements. For example, in some pieces the visual elements are clearly a secondary feature compared to political aspects of the piece (Molnár 2017, 393), and sometimes it is clear that the main idea behind a piece is to provoke people to interact. Rafael Schacter argues that because of the "inherent illegality" of street art and graffiti, even the pieces with no clear political statement can be considered as "political statement[s]" (2008, 50). Virág Molnár also notes the street art and graffiti's political elements (2017). According to Molnár, street art and graffiti's essential connection to politics has not so much to do with direct political statements found in some artworks but in the practice itself: "it lies in creating situations that question people's taken-for-granted ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling" (2017, 394). This also fits with Gell's ideas concerning art as something that primarily aims to "change the world "(1988, 6), that is, to transform and have an influence on things.

Gell's anthropological theory of art is about "the social relations that obtain in the neighbourhood of works of art" (Gell 1998, 26). Gell argues that the best way to create an anthropological theory of art is to "develop a new variant of" an already "*existing anthropological theory* and apply it to art" (1998, 4). Gell suggests that art could be analysed in that way if "'social agents' are, in certain contexts, substituted for by *art objects*" (Gell 1998, 5). And, this idea of "'art objects as persons'", Gell connects to "Maussian exchange theory" where gifts are understood "as (extensions of) persons" (1998, 9). In order to grasp Gell's logic behind the idea of art objects as persons or extensions of persons, I will introduce the main theoretical terms he applies in his theory.

One of the key aspects in Gell's theory links to 'agency' and its different forms. Gell defines 'an agent' as "one who 'causes events to happen' in their vicinity". So, anything which "initiate 'actions', not just random happenings, can be an agent: "the source, the origin, of causal events independently of the state of the physical universe". (Gell 1998, 16) Practically, a street art or a graffiti piece can appear as an agent since it can "initiate actions" (ibid.) on its own, and different kinds of actions to be clear: on the one hand, urban art tends to attract more urban art, so a piece or a tag on the wall often attracts more artists to paint there (Macdonald 2001, 204). However, it can cause opposite actions as well: someone might remove the piece from the wall because they do not want it there. The agents can trigger causal events, but they are not in control of the actions that they cause (Gell 1985, 16).

However, not all the agents are the same. Gell draws a distinction between 'primary' or "'self-sufficient' agents" and "'secondary' agents" (1998, 17). The "'primary' agents [are] intentional beings" unlike "'secondary' agents, which are artefacts, dolls, cars, works of art, etc." – unintentional objects of some kind (Gell 1998, 20). The relation between these two kinds of agencies is that "primary agents distribute their agency" through the secondary agents "in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective" (Gell 1998, 20). So, Gell does not really argue that artworks *alone* without any connection to social actors could be understood as persons, but what they can do is to " appear as 'agents' in particular social situations": as secondary agents they can be described as "an emanation or manifestation of [primary] agency…. a mirror, vehicle or channel of agency" (Gell 1998, 20). Practically, an artist – a term I use to refer both to street artists and to graffiti writers – as intentional human being can appear as a primary agent, and a street art or a graffiti work they make distributes the artist's agency.

Nevertheless, Gell notes that even if objects such as works of art are just 'secondary' agents channelling the agency of the primary agent, it should not be forgotten that they can still *act* as agents in relation to other actors – they may provoke various actions and reactions (1998, 68). Because of that, Gell argues "that to all intents and purposes it [a work of art] becomes a person, or at least a partial person" (Gell 1998, 68) at least momentarily in a specific social context. Gell further justifies attributing agency to things without consciousness by reminding that people in general "attribute intentions and awareness to objects like cars and images of gods" (1998, 17). Gell is not alone

when he suggests that objects should be analysed in certain contexts as more than 'things'. Webb Keane follows his lines of thought when he criticises "the ontological division of the worlds into 'spirit' and 'matter'" or "distinction between persons and things" (2003, 409-410). Keane proposes that "in order to situate material things within a dynamic social analysis", we should abandon that distinction at least to some extend (ibid, 410). Keane suggest that we should "open up social analysis to the historicity and social power of material things" so that they are not analysed neither just as "only vehicles of meaning" nor as "ultimate determinants" (ibid, 411).

These ideas about objects and their roles in social relations connect to two other important theoretical terms in Gell's theory: 'index' and 'abduction'. Gell writes that even though he uses terms such as 'art objects' and 'works of art', he does realise that terms like that lead to unwanted connotations: "to discuss 'works of art' is to discuss entities which have been given a prior institutional definition as such" (Gell 1998, 12). As in these terms have "undesirably exclusive connotations" since objects that are "exclusively" art may solely be analysed "in terms of the parameters of art-theory". This is problematic to Gell since as mentioned, his theory's "whole tendency… is to explore a domain in which 'objects' merge with 'people' by virtue of the existence of social relations" (1998,12). In order to avoid using "'art object' or 'work of art' or 'artwork' as technical terms", Gell uses instead word "index" (Gell 1998, 12-13).

Gell (1998) borrows the definition of index from Charles Saunders Peirce's semiotic theory (Arnaut 2001, 192). Gell writes that "in Peircean semiotics" index is "a 'natural sign', that is, an entity from which the observer can make a *causal inference* of some kind, or an inference about the intentions or capabilities of another person" (1998, 13). Or, to phrase it shortly, index is "a sign that has a causal relation between signifier and signified" (Arnaut, 2001, 192). Gell uses as examples of indexes smoke as fire's index and a friendly smile as an index of friendliness (1998, 13). As those examples demonstrate – since there can be smoke without fire and a smile can be faked – "inferences from indexes" are not "arrived at by induction or deduction" (Gell 1998, 13). When people make inferences, they have come to some conclusion but "have not made a test, and established that by a law of nature" a specific index in reality would always correlate to or be a result of a specific thing (Gell 1998, 13). To use

Gell's example, people tend to assume there is fire when they see smoke, even if it is common knowledge that smoke does not always necessarily mean fire (ibid.).

In order to explain how people make inferences like this, Gell uses another theoretical term from Peirce's semiotic theory: 'abduction' (1998, 14). According to Peirce, "abduction is a case of synthetic inference" in situations where we do not really have a proof concerning what is going on, but the situation could be explained by "the supposition that it was a case of some general rule" so we decide to "adopt that supposition" (Gell 1998, 14). Therefore, abductions can lead to conclusions, which are not true (ibid.). However, considering that events often have countless possible explanations, abductions are necessary in order for people to make sense of things happening around them in everyday life (Gell 1998, 14). These three theoretical terms – agency, index and abduction – interact in Gell's theory in what Gell describes as "art-like situations" (1998, 13). He defines these "art-like situations'… as those in which the material 'index' (the visible, physical 'thing') permits a particular cognitive operation" which he identifies as *"the abduction of agency"* (ibid.). Therefore, in a "(visual) art situation" there must be some kind of "index from which abductions… may be made" (Gell 1998, 15). That leads to conclusion that the kind of indexes which are "relevant to our theory are those which permit the abduction of 'agency' and specifically 'social agency'" (ibid.).

Let us return to discuss how agencies appear in these 'art-like situations'. Gell writes that "The concept of agency I employ here is exclusively relational: for any agent, there is a patient" and in order for someone or something "To be an 'agent' one must act with respect to the 'patient'" (Gell 1998, 22). Therefore, a 'patient' or 'recipient', which Gell defines as something "which is causally affected by the agent's action" as well as 'agent' positions only exist when they are in relation with each other. Gell further states, that "it will be assumed" that "a 'patient'… is another 'potential' agent" just "momentarily in the 'patient' position" (1998, 22). When it comes to relation between an artist and a piece, "The index… is in the 'patient' position in a social relationship with its maker, who is an agent, and without whose agency it would not exist" (Gell 1998, 23). However, when it comes to relationship between the index and the public, Gell writes that "The public, or 'recipients' of a work of art (index) are, according to the anthropological theory of art, in a social relationship with the index, either as

'patients'… or as ' agents'" (Gell 1998, 24). Therefore, in relation to the artwork, viewer can be either in a 'patient' position or in an 'agent' position.

In the following chapters, I will present these different possible relationships as well as actors and issues influencing those relations by drawing examples from my fieldwork and applying them to Gell's theory. I will focus on these especially in chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 5 I will discuss these relationships more in relation to urban studies discussions concerning Creative City and Right to the city. Via examples, I will also go further into Gell's theoretical ideas concerning the nature of art objects and different relations connected to them.

# 3. Relations at a street art and graffiti jam

## 3.1 Legal street art and graffiti

In this chapter, I focus on a legal street art and graffiti jam I went to observe in London. I discuss and analyse my experiences and the relationships apparent in said project in relation to Gell's anthropological theory or art. However, at first, I should open in more detail the legal side of urban art in London and introduce the different actors and aspects that influence it. As noted earlier, street art and graffiti have become very popular in London, especially in certain areas (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272). This has led to increasing possibilities to practise street art and graffiti legally.

One of the key actors enabling this are street art agencies. Those agencies organise legal street art and graffiti projects and events as well as obtain permissions for walls or spots for artists to paint on legally by negotiating with property owners. These agencies can be helpful especially for those artists who are only starting their careers or just briefly visiting London. The agencies find the walls for the artists to paint on without charges and they usually provide necessary supplies as well without any costs for the artist. The agencies are financially able to cover those expenses because they acquire their income from arranging hand-painted advertisements or projects for companies. One of the main roles for street art agencies is to work as intermediaries between different companies and street artists.

Now this might raise a question considering why property owners would want commissioned street art pieces on their walls in the first place. As noted earlier, street art and graffiti are quite popular especially in certain areas among public and people visiting London, which certainly affects the situation. However, there are other reasons why people want commissioned urban art on their properties. In certain areas in London, like Shoreditch, most of the walls are painted – with or without permission. As Linda Mulcahy and Tatiana Flessas write, "Very few, if any, roads in the district have escaped the attention of artists" in the area (2015, 8). Shoreditch, a district located in East London, is an area full of small businesses such as cafés, restaurants and stores. Obviously, the properties look visually nicer for the people – potential customers – walking by if they are decorated with legally made art, since with legal pieces, an artist has plenty of time to make a detailed work. Compared to illegally painted works, in

which case the work on the wall is most likely made in a hurry – often it is just a tag or a very simple graffiti.



A picture of two properties: a commissioned piece on the left and next to it, a wall where people have spray-painted simple graffiti and tags without permission.

That is not to say that all illegally made works on the walls are necessary simple or ugly – there are many visually complex illegally made street art and graffiti pieces, which the public values. However, even if the property owner happened to find an illegally made piece on their property visually pleasing by pure coincidence and luck, the nature of street art and graffiti scene in London is that eventually that piece, no matter how good it is, gets tagged, painted over or the colour simply starts to fade (Schacter 2008). Therefore, for a property owner, a more long-term solution for keeping the walls of their property looking nice is to make a deal with an artist or an agency to keep that place 'clean'. Keeping a place 'clean' means in this context that if someone paints illegally on that property, the property owner can ask the artist or agency with whom they made the deal with to paint a legal piece on top of the illegal one. Then, if someone paints illegally on top of the legally painted work, or after a certain period of time the paint has started to fade away, the actor who promised to keep the place clean either fixes the original piece by adding more paint or paints a completely new piece on top of it.

The street art agencies do this free of charge, so getting legal pieces on properties do not even cause any extra expenses for the property owner. That is in relation to the cases where they let the artists paint whatever they want – in case the property owner wants something specific on their wall, artists naturally ask for a fee. Considering that Shoreditch is so famous for its street art that tourists actually come there just to take photos of different pieces – not to forget that multiple tourist agencies arrange street art tours there – the deal is good for both artists and property owners. Artists get visibility since people photograph and often post on social media the pieces made (MacDowall & de Souza 2017) – and the property in question can simultaneously gain visibility, since it also shows or might be marked on the photo. This also makes it more desirable for the property owners to let people legally paint on their walls – it can attract more customers.

Sometimes a street art agency acquires a permission to paint a larger area, like a side of a building or an entire alleyway. In those cases, multiple artists can work at the same time. These legal events often last hours or even days and are commonly called 'jams'. Usually during a jam, each artist makes a singular piece alone or as a collaboration with one other artist (the cases where multiple artists work on the same huge mural are usually different type of commissioned projects). During my fieldwork, I witnessed one of these street art and graffiti jams when a street art agency called Global Street Art got a permission to paint an entire alley, Fleur de Lis Street, which is located in Shoreditch.

This example from my fieldwork allows me to demonstrate various relationships presented in Gell's theory, since I observed not just an alley full of finished pieces but also the actual process of making them and the relationships apparent during that point. I will present and analyse these different relationships connected to and in proximity of these legal pieces made during the jam in detail in this chapter. In addition, some of the feedback the jam in question received later raises other types of relationships with the art to the spotlight: how the people who dislike all or some of street art and graffiti view the pieces and what might cause these reactions. Even though street art and graffiti are increasingly popular in London, not everyone is a fan, and the relationships people against some or all of it have or in some cases, refuse to have, are at least equally interesting than those between an artist and an admiring viewer. Gell's theory offers interesting viewpoints also in relation to these other kinds of relationships.

I visited Fleur de Lis Street twice: the first time was when I went to watch 'the jam', as in when twenty artists – eighteen men and two women – painted the entire alley full of legal street art and graffiti pieces. On the day of the jam, I saw the process of making the pieces, found out about the origins and topics of some of the works and was able to witness different relationships between artists and their artworks – or to use Gell's term, indexes. Not to forget the different relationships between the pieces, the artists and recipients that occurred during the day of the jam. The feedback the jam received a week later brought up different aspects of the various relationships between indexes and recipients.

In this chapter, I will analyse the issues and relationships connected to the day of the jam and in relation to the feedback it received. I will start by describing my experience on the day of the jam, then I move to analyse different relationships apparent that day, and then in the last part of the chapter, ponder the reasons behind negative feedback towards some or all urban art. My second visit to Fleur de Lis Street I will discuss in detail in the next chapter of this thesis. It occurred two months later and was quite different on many accounts: it presented other types of relationships than the day of the jam. A lot had changed, which gave me a perfect example to analyse not only London street art and graffiti scene but also different examples of relationships Gell presented that can occur especially between recipients and other actors in relation to art. However, let us first return to the day the pieces were created.

On the day of the jam, I arrived early in the afternoon and stayed for about two hours. I came there in the middle of the jam: all the artists had already started making their pieces, but none had yet completed their work. Some of the artists finished their pieces during the time I was there, but most of them continued to work after I left. Each artist made one piece. Most of the pieces were more graffiti styled, that is to say, the piece consisted primarily of stylised letters, though most of the graffiti pieces made during the jam included a character or a figure of some sort. Some of the pieces could be clearly defined as street art. The atmosphere was relaxed: the artists were occasionally chatting with each other; the smell of the spray paint was noticeable but not too strong and there was some music coming from the loudspeakers that were placed in the middle of the alley. The music was not so loud that it would make talking difficult or carry too far, but loud enough for everyone to properly hear it within that approximately forty metres long alley. There were couple of beer cans on the ground, but mainly just water bottles

– and plenty of spray-cans in canvas bags, which had the street art agency's logo on them.



Artists in action at Fleur De Lis Street jam.

Fleur de Lis Street is, despite its misleading name, a quite small and narrow alley. At the other end of the alley, Fleur de Lis Street crosses with a quite busy street with lots of traffic and people walking by. Especially at that end of the street, many passers-by stopped to look and some took photos with their smartphones before they kept on walking – even in Shoreditch, it is not too common to see so many artists painting at the same time, and these twenty filled the entire alley. The other street at the other end of the alley was much quieter, and a few times some of the artists went there to take a break. Most people who walked through the alley during the jam at least slowed down to see what is happening around them and some of them took photos. However, a few people just walked through and merely glimpsed the action around them.

The artists were painting next to each other and chatting. It was easy to see what a graffiti artist Oust meant when he referred to these kind of events as "social graffiti". Urban art jams are often as much about socialising as making art: Oust pointed out how it is a lot about the atmosphere and how "it's like a best day out with your mates". The artists painting on the alley seemed to be on a good mood. No one paid too much attention to me, but it was easy to go talking to the artists briefly, though I did not want

to disturb anyone who was painting at that moment, so I only talked to people who were taking a pause. The artists clearly did not mind that I took photos, on the contrary; some artists even stepped aside for a second so that I could get a better shot. I always asked permission before taking a photo, in case someone would mind, but no one did. This was hardly surprising though, considering that it was a legal project. A French artist Creed Oner, who had come to London specifically for the jam, did specify that I can take photos but only as long as his face is not in any of the shots. He explained that the reason behind this is that he had done the same piece also in illegal places, so he did not want to be recognised. He did seem to like that I took images of his piece though, by taking a step back and giving me more room to take images from different angles.

## 3.2 Captivating agencies

In order to analyse the various relations connected to or in proximity of the street art and graffiti pieces made at the jam, I revise the main elements of Gell's theory and connect the key terms of it to the different actors and agents apparent at Fleur De Lis Street jam. To briefly recapitulate, Gell's "'anthropological theory of art' is the theoretical study of 'social relations" which occur "in the vicinity of" artworks aka indexes (Gell 1998, 7). These "Social relations only exist in so far as they are made manifest in actions" (Gell 1998, 26). Different agents execute these actions and they are directed on 'patients' (ibid.). Now, these relations, which occur between different types of agents and patients, "obtain between four 'terms' (entities which can be in relation)" (Gell 1998, 26-27).  These four terms are "Indexes", "Artists (or other 'originators')", "Recipients" and "Prototypes" (Gell 1998, 27). Gell writes that his anthropology of art "describe[s] and elucidate[s]" what Gell calls "nexus", in which "Index, Artist, Recipient and Prototype… coexist" (1998, 28).

The first two terms apparent at Fleur De Lis Street are easy to identify; the artists who originally made the pieces are unsurprisingly in 'the artist' position, and the pieces they made are 'indexes'. When it comes to 'recipients', there were multiple different kinds of them. First, public in general: people who were walking by and sometimes stopping at the alley both during the jam as well as after the event. Second, the street art agency employees, who provided all the necessary equipment and were in charge that everything was proceeding as planned. Third, the artists in relation to pieces made by other artists, because obviously each artist was in 'artist' position only in relation to the

artwork they had painted. The fourth group was not evident on the day of the jam, but they had left clear visual proof of their visits afterwards: the taggers as well as other graffiti writers and street artists who had visited the alley after the jam and my first visit, before the second time I went there. I will analyse their actions and affects in detail, when I tell about the second time I visited Fleur De Lis Street. And last, I must include myself to the list of the recipients: a student collecting data for her thesis, taking notes and pictures and interacting (and hopefully not bothering too much) the artists with short conversations and interviews. Out of the four terms Gell uses, 'prototype' is the one, which was not always very apparent or even existing: some of the pieces had prototypes, others did not. However, fortunately this does not matter in relation to Gell's theory, because as he states, some indexes do not have prototypes (Gell 1998, 26).

Now, before I move on to the examples of different relationships apparent at Fleur De Lis Street, I introduce a few more aspects from Gell's theory. First, according to Gell, different relationships in the vicinity of artworks are "based on the premise that all four of the 'terms'… can be considered as social agents of different kinds, and as such, are capable of being in the 'agent' or 'patient' position" in relation to "one another" (Gell 1998, 28). As in, none of the terms are locked in the 'patient' position – they are always potential agents, just "momentarily in the 'patient' position" (Gell 1998, 22). Secondly, an important part of Gell's theory is the central position of index: an index is always in some way evident in the relationships analysed in Gell's theory (1998, 36). The reason for this is that "unless there is an index, there can be no abductions of agency" and since Gell's theory's "theoretical enterprise is precisely the abduction of agency from indexes", the presence of the index is necessary in all the relations that are analysed (Gell 1998, 36).

Now to the examples from the field. First, the most obvious relationship to note between an artist and an index is the one where the artist is in an agent position, acting on the index, which is in a patient position. Gell calls this "the elementary formula" in which the "index usually motivates the abduction of the agency of the person who made it" (Gell 1998, 33). In these cases, the index appears as "a congealed 'trace' of the artist's creative performance" (ibid.). Gell notes that this formula is apparent especially in cases where the artist's style is very distinctive and immediately connects everyone's mind to the particular artist in question (1998, 33). At Fleur de Lis Street, a quite

famous Irish artist Eoin's piece fits Gell's description quite aptly. Eoin has a unique style; apparent in all the pieces I have seen by him – both in London's streets and on social media. I find the piece he made at Fleur De Lis Street also a great example of how difficult it can sometimes be to determine whether some artwork on the wall is street art or graffiti. There are letters in his works, but they are stylised in such an abstract way that at the first glance, it is hard to say whether one is looking at a street art piece portraying abstract patterns or a very unique and technically complexly made graffiti piece.



A street art or a graffiti piece? Artwork by Eoin at Fleur De Lis Street.

Now, as I observed and admired the piece, I entered a relationship with the index as a recipient. Gell writes that in the occasions where the viewer allows "his or her attention to be attracted to an index and submits to its power, appeal or fascination" as "a patient, responding to the agency inherent in the index" there is a relationship where the index is an agent, acting on the recipient who is in a patient position (Gell 1998, 31). Now, considering that "the index is a 'made thing', the outcome of the agency of an artist" (Gell 1998, 51), this relationship is not that simple. While I admired and 'submitted' to the index's appeal, I at the same time submitted to the artist's agency: since even though the index can be "an agent (with) respect to the recipient" at the same time it remains "a patient, with respect to the agency of the artist, which it mediates" (Gell 1998, 51).

Therefore, both the agency of the index and the agency of the artist acted on me, the recipient in a patient position. However, agency of an index and agency of an artist do not always act on an equal level. If a recipient primarily admires the index, the artwork in question, and quite possibly in context of street art and graffiti either does not know or does not care who the artist who made it is, then the index's agency has a more dominant position in relation to the recipient in question. Gell explains that the index influences the recipient primarily "by subverting the recipient's *sense of self-possession* in some way" (Gell 1998, 31). This happens if "the recipient takes on the nature of the index" (ibid.). To give an example, if a scary piece makes a recipient feel scared, the recipient has taken, for a moment, the index's nature. After the viewer adapts the index's nature, for example a feeling, the index becomes a kind of "false mirror" that seems to present the viewer his or her own feelings (Gell 1998, 31). However, this type of relation works in its simple and pure form only in cases where "the index is not seen primarily as the outcome of an external artist's agency" and if the work has no prototype (Gell 1998, 32). As already explained, the artist's agency is always present in the relationships too – and in context of street art and graffiti, it is always acknowledged. In order to give a comparison point, there are art objects, usually somehow religious in nature, which people think came into being without (at least an earthly) artist (Gell 1998, 67-68) – but street art and graffiti pieces do not fit into this category. Therefore, we can conclude that the artist's agency is always present, though its importance and weight in the relationship varies.

However, if a recipient primarily adores the artist, and the specific artwork aka index in question does not really matter that much but rather works as an example of the artist's skills, the artist's agency is more dominant in the relationship than the index's (Gell 1998, 39). Sometimes the circumstances where the recipient sees the artwork can also affect this. I believe that during the jam, the artists' agencies were in more dominant position than what they usually are in relation to me, the recipient in a patient position at the Fleur de Lis Street jam, because I did not just see the final works, I witnessed the artists in action. Usually the recipient only experiences the agency of the artist *via* the index (Gell 1998, 20). In case of Fleur de Lis Street jam, I witnessed the process itself: I literally saw how the images appeared on the walls because of the skilful use of spray-paint cans by the artists. Thus, even if I did not even know most of the artists or their earlier works, I concretely witnessed how they used their agency on their indexes, and

thus I would say that the artists' agencies were in a more dominant position in relation to me than the agencies of the indexes.

The relationship between a recipient and an index can also work the other way around, as in the recipient may act as an agent and index as a patient. Gell notes that the public has the power to "attribute creativity to themselves as spectators, who can 'make something' out of the raw material presented to them" (Gell 1998, 34). That is to say, a viewer is not always a passive recipient of a clear message given to them by an artist: they can and often they do actively interpret the work of art based on their individual features. In relation to pieces at Fleur de Lis Street, a viewer might actively interpret the pieces in any way they want, especially in cases where the piece lacks a specific clear message. And when they do that, they swift from a patient to an agent position. These types of relationships are not rare in context of street art and graffiti. On the contrary, the works on the streets often aim to provoke people to think and question (Molnár 2017, 394). The artists I interviewed during my time in London seemed to love it if I attached meanings to their works that they had not intentionally placed there.

Gell gives another example where a recipient can be in an agent position in relation to an index. A person who commissioned and possibly funded the artwork might view himself or herself as the reason for the artwork to exist at all, and their "agency is therefore readily abducted from it" (Gell 1998, 33). Since there were people from the agency there to see that everything goes as planned, the people who made the whole project possible by getting the permissions from property owners and provided all the necessary equipment for the artists, this sort of relationship was apparent at the jam too. However, as Gell also points out, obviously, in these relations the artists are active as well and work as agents too, since without them the indexes simply would not come into existence (1998, 36). That is why a more correct way to present this relationship would be to state that the recipient and the artist both act as agents on the index, which is in a patient position.

Now, Eoin's piece was an example of a piece without a prototype. In order to give examples of different relationships to prototypes, I would like to bring into spotlight another piece made at Fleur de Lis Street jam, a piece by artist called Stedhead. Her piece had an interesting kind of prototype. Her work was also maybe the most detailed piece on the alley: she painted her own version of famous poster from Terry William's

1998 movie *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. However, instead of copying the original image, she replaced the main actor Johnny Depp's face with a cat's face. Stedhead told me she made came up with the idea a day before and drew a sketch. She told me that she had been painting for four years, and the she was from the UK, from Isle of Man.



Stedhead's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* inspired cat piece in making at Fleur De Lis Street.

Gell writes that in cases where the prototype is imaginary, made up by the artist, the artist is in an agent position in relation to the prototype (Gell 1998, 38-39). However, in the case of Stedhead's cat piece, the prototype was only partially creation of her imagination: the resemblance to the original piece is so strong that not anyone familiar with the movie in question could miss it. Thus, also the prototype's agency was affecting the artist when she painted it. However, since replacing the original human face with cat's was the artist's own idea, outcome of her agency, the piece can be

defined as an imagined prototype, even if it is simultaneously a version of the original image. The clear presence of the artist's own imagination and agency in relation to the prototype implies that the artist's agency was in a larger role than the original prototype's – instead of just copying the exact image, she made notable changes, which is why in this case her agency is dominating the prototype's. Gell argues that even in instances when the prototype is a person who commissioned the artwork and is presented in the image exactly as they wished to be presented, the prototype can at best *share* the primary agency with artist (Gell, 1998, 37) – so the artist's agency remains at least on the same level, if it is not more dominant. The argument behind this is self-explanatory: as mentioned earlier, the index simply would never come into being without the artist. Thus, the prototype's agency does not really exceed the agency of the artist, even though it remains as part of the relationship.

Especially during the process of making the piece, there are other relations present than just the artist's agency acting on the index, which is in a patient position. Creed Oner mentioned that one of his biggest problems was that he was never completely satisfied with his piece: there was always something to correct or something wrong. Another artist I briefly talked with at the jam – Sophy – told me how she was annoyed how the piece she was making did not turn out to look like she wanted it to. In relation to Gell's theory, these are example of cases, in which the artist is interestingly both an agent and a patient in relation to himself or herself (1998, 45-46). This kind of relationship can appear when the piece is still in process, depending on how well the artist manages to paint or draw what they originally imagined doing (Gell 1998, 45-46). The artist is an agent since they originally planned the piece in their head, or possibly on a paper as a script: but if they fail with painting it, they are also in a patient position, in relation to themselves. The connecting link here – as in all the cases in Gell's theory, as mentioned earlier – is the index, since it is through the index the agency is reflected or channelled; or failed to channel the way the artist originally intended to do.

To remind the reader, in Gell's theory, whoever or whatever is a patient in the relationship is never just rooted in that position, but they remain constantly as potential agents (1998, 22). Thus, during for example the process of making a piece, an artist is during some moments in agent position, and sometimes in patient position. When the painting is not going as it was supposed to, the artist takes a patient position in relation to himself or herself via index: and then, if the painting starts to go as planned again,

they are again in agent position, channelling their agency on the index. The same is true when it comes to the recipient position: a recipient can at first just admire a piece and submit to it: but then, seconds later, the recipient might start actively interpreting the piece in a way, which changes him or her position from a patient to an agent. Also, as noted earlier, "The term index *includes within itself* another term, 'artist'" (emphasis in original, Gell 1998, 51). This leads to conclusion that "the 'index'… encompasses, within itself" multiple relationships – either "'patient' relationships" or "agency relations" depending on whether the index is in agent or patient position (1998, 53-54). I already mentioned how a passive, enthralled viewer submits not just to the agency of the index but via the index, to the agency of the artist. But the same happens other way around: if the recipient is in an agent position in relation to the index, then also the artist is in a patient position (however remaining in an agent position in relation to the index). I continue to analyse different relations Gell presents and discusses in his theory when I describe my second visit to Fleur De Lis Street in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Before that, I move to analyse another kind of issue connected to the jam: what kind of relationships the people who criticised some or all the pieces made during the jam might have with the works based on Gell's theoretical ideas. In addition to that, I present and analyse in general various reasons why some people have negative attitudes towards street art and graffiti.

## 3.3 The exclusive aspects of street art and graffiti

As demonstrated, street and graffiti enable multiple different social relations between artists and audience via pieces aka indexes. However, the relationships I have described so far apply in relation to people who accept and willingly interact with the paintings on the walls. The people who dislike street art and graffiti and wished the city walls would stay clear of them have different sorts of views and relations to the images on the walls. They might see some or all of the works as vandalism, not at all as a form of art – or there might be some other aspects causing negative reactions.

Especially in relation to illegal art, there are many valid points supporting the negative attitudes towards the pieces. First, since the Criminal Damage Act 1971, painting on the properties without permission has been illegal in London (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 3). Practically the validation for the act has "two key pillars" which are "the criminalization of the artist and the protection of the rights of the property owner" (ibid.). Since my fieldwork focused on the artists, I naturally mainly heard positive comments regarding

street art and graffiti and there was no question whether especially the colourful street art pieces were seen as art or not. I had an assumption that the people who disliked street art and graffiti were against just the illegal side of it and it all connected to the rights of property owners. However, in relation to Fleur De Lis Street jam, I learned that some people have problems also regarding legally made street art and graffiti.

The following week after the jam, the street art agency that had arranged said legal event had received some complaints from the residents living nearby. The first complaint was not about the entire project or even a full piece; it concerned a small detail – someone complained about the fact that there was a marijuana cigarette in one of the pieces. That issue was easily fixed: the agency personnel went and painted over that part of the piece, leaving most of the original work as it was. However, someone had apparently also just complained about the project in general, even though it had been legal. In the first case, the complainer apparently had had nothing against the rest of the nineteen pieces: the only thing that had bothered them was the marijuana cigarette in one of the pieces. It was not the street art and graffiti themselves which bothered, but a part of a prototype in a singular piece. In this case, the recipient who complained acted in a way as an agent against (a part of) the prototype – not directly, but still in a significant way since because of their complaint, the prototype was changed. The street art agency employee who fixed the image used his agency there too, but only because of the complaint, which puts the agency employee's agency in a submissive position in relation to the complainer's agency. After the prototype changed from a dinosaur that was smoking cannabis to a dinosaur that was not, everything was fine.

However, with the other complaint, the question was not about individual's relation to a particular index or prototype – it was against the entire project. The most common reason for criticism towards street art and graffiti are their illegality – but in this situation, that was not the case. It is obviously possible only to guess the reasons why this person in particular was against the project in general. Nonetheless, I can present and analyse the arguments made against street art and graffiti that can be applied to both illegal and legal street art and graffiti.

McAuliffe argues that the reason some people dislike street art and graffiti could link to will for control and order in relation to living environment (2012, 192). He argues that the "condition of unsettlement" in concurrent cities has in some instances provoked "the

desire for social order" (2012, 192). This social order is connected to "an image of the clean city" (McAuliffe 2012, 192), which practically translates to that city should appear "as a place of conformity, of *sameness*, of… '*purity*'" (Schacter 2008, 44). Street art and graffiti – both legally and illegally made – break this visual uniformity, and thus by some people, they may be seen as a threat to social order.

Another reason why street art and graffiti are judged in negative manner is connected to their nature and their visible placement in urban environment. People passing by are "characterized... as unwilling or chance spectators" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 11) – meaning that they are forced to engage in a performance they did not intentionally plan or even want to participate in. Schacter writes how especially the usually illegal nature of the pieces has been "believed to actively seek to harm the onlooker, to confront them through a 'threatening and aggressive act'" (Schacter 2008, 43). Thus, the case is not just about seeing something unpleasant: the images are seen to "to *physically* attack, rob, or commit violence to their victims and the local communities" (Schacter 2008, 42-43). Because the images can cause "a bodily response and sensation", they are rather understood as something that "confronted the viewer" instead of just being visually unpleasing (ibid, 43).

This relates to Gell's view on relationships connected to artworks aka indexes. He notes that "seeing creates a physical bridge between one being and another" (Gell 1998, 117). Now, if an artist is viewed as a criminal by the viewer, they could feel uncomfortable having any sort of connection with the person behind the piece, no matter how brief the relationship is and that it is not directly between the artist and the viewer but happens through an index. Gell's analysis on how the other elements of art objects in addition to their artistic ones affect the relationship is also relevant here. In relation to street art and graffiti, especially illegal works, the viewer is usually very aware of the illegal elements connected with the works. After all, an illegal piece on a wall is a visible, concrete proof that a crime has occurred. Gell explains that if the viewer confronts an art object that carries additional meaning and/or the way they were created does, it affects the relationship (1998, 62) – and that is practically always the case in relation to illegal art to some extent. When a person is aware of the other than artistic elements in relation to said object, they do "not see a mere thing, a form" – what they experience is "a visible knot which ties together an invisible skein of relations, fanning out into social space and social time" (Gell 1998, 62).

In context of street art and agency, a person can see (or imagine) along with the piece a reason behind making it. On the one hand, if the recipient views the piece positively, they for example might acknowledge a (positive kind of) rebellious spirit behind illegally made piece, or they can imagine artist's contribution to transform a certain space to something more colourful, something visually more interesting while taking a risk of getting caught. These elements make the piece different: it is not just an art object; it has other elements that affect its nature and how the viewer sees it. And as Gell wrote, these additional elements can work in a way that the viewer does not view the piece as an individual thing but as a part of a larger entity (1998, 62). On the other hand, someone can view the illegally made piece as an insult or inconsideration towards other people or society in general, since it does not respect the property laws. Again, it is usually not seen just as an individual object, but it reflects and connects to various issues such as property rights, vandalism, illegal activities in the cities and so on. These additional elements create a different tie between the index and the recipient, and that can explain why street art and graffiti often provoke strong reactions – for and against these practises (Schacter 2008, 36).

The artists themselves do not view people who dislike street art and graffiti from very flattering points of view. Instead of taking the criticism as a dissenting opinion, "it is taken to reflect an inferior mentality" (Macdonald 2001, 154). I came across this sort of attitude multiple times in London, practically whenever any street artist or graffiti artist described a situation where someone had complained to the artists when they had been painting or putting up their work. Oust mentioned that in relation to graffiti, it takes more knowledge and experience to really "get it", which implies that the reason why someone dislikes graffiti is not an educated opinion but rather just means that the persons lacks information or intel to understand it. This sort of view towards people who dislike street art and/or graffiti appeared often: that the reason why some people do not like the pieces is that they do not, for some reason of other, truly realise what the practise is about. The artists practically see the negative attitudes in a light were the "Outsiders' condemnation reveals nothing now but the limitations of their own minds" (MacDonald 2001, 156). Macdonald writes that the reason why the artists take criticism this way is because if they did not, "outsiders' criticism would also gain some impact. By writing their critics off, writers silence what they have to say" (2001, 156).

Now, my thesis focuses on the relations street art and graffiti create; how they can act in a connecting manner, create relations between different people as well as between people and places: but those people who do not like any form of urban art are simply excluded from these connections. Their criticism does not include them, not even in a negative way: they are not heard, artists do not even try to hear neither understand their point. Ironically, at the same time, the negative attitudes some people hold reinforce the connection between those who do 'get' urban art. As McAuliffe points out, when street art and graffiti are placed in "transgression of right and wrong" due to conflicting feedback, it only incites the illegal practise by adding "the thrill of doing something that is risky and illegitimate" (McAuliffe 2012, 191-192). This had led to street artists and graffiti artists forming their own "shared moral justification... that devalues property rights in lieu of the needs of graffiti writers" and street artists to engage in their practise (McAuliffe 2012, 191-192).

"Shared moral justifications" (ibid.) are just one aspect of the various social aspects, habits and rules connected to illegal street art and graffiti practises (Schacter 2008, 44). In this chapter, I have analysed some relationships presented in Gell's theory via legal street art and graffiti examples from Fleur De Lis Street jam. However, the illegal side of the scene opens a completely new realm of different relations, especially in relation to urban space and place. I will discuss these relations in the following chapters. I start by going to the very origins of the graffiti movement: tagging.

# 4. Tools of destruction and revival

## 4.1 Introducing tags

*""Like the biggest moans people go on about, 'Oh I like the pieces, the colourful stuff, but I just don't understand that scribbling business.' That's exactly it, you don't understand it." (Stylo)"* (Macdonald 2001, 158)

When it comes to tags and tagging, the kind of attitude apparent in the quote above is still extremely common. I have to admit that even though ever since I first saw them, I have found both street art and graffiti pieces interesting, for me tagging was just mindless "scribbling" before I learned more about that particular form of graffiti. Due to my internship place in a street art agency, I became quite fast familiar with street art in its different forms in London as well as with the larger, more colourful and stylistically more complicated graffiti pieces. However, I only really started to pay attention to tagging after some artists I had interviews with, for example Boby LV and Oust, opened how tags and tagging affect the scene. After I realised that instead of being just random scribbling, that there are clear features and motives behind tagging, I started to pay attention to them – first mainly in relation to the larger pieces, though. The more I became familiar with the unofficial rules and codes present in the street art and graffiti scene, the more I started to pay attention also to the singular tags: not so much to specific names, but to their locations especially in vicinity of other tags and pieces.

Tags are stylistically the plainest form of graffiti: They are usually very simple and spray-painted on the surface with one colour. Painting a tag is fast, it usually takes only seconds. Brown, Brunelle and Malhotra describe tagging adequately as "a subtype of graffiti" which should not be "confused with street art" or larger and complicated graffiti pieces (2016, 3). The reason for this is that even though tags appear on the same places and often actually the same people both tag and paint large murals or graffiti pieces, the different types of works have different reasons and meanings for the artist, and the different works often act quite differently in relation to other works in their proximity. In general, street art and larger, colourful graffiti pieces are meant for the public (Molnár 2017, 389). Especially different forms of street art often aim for interaction and the artists intentionally create art that is understandable for to wider

audiences because they want street art to be inclusive in nature (Molnár 2017, 389).
Tags on the contrary are one of the most exclusive types of graffiti because they are
"primarily for internal communication within a subculture", as in meant for other
taggers and graffiti writers (Molnár 2017, 389). It is not uncommon that tags are
deliberately made so that it is hard for anyone else than other taggers to really decipher
the text (Brown et. al. 2016, 3). The purpose of my thesis is to elaborate and analyse the
social aspects connected to and around street art and graffiti, and even if tagging is
usually exclusive towards people outside of the scene, it is very communicative *within*
the scene as well as an important tool when it comes to relation between an artist and
their environment.



A wall filled mainly with tags. A couple of pieces can be spotted too, but tags have been painted on top of
them. Photo taken in Southbank.

The exclusive and obscure aspects of tagging likely play a role when especially in
relation to tagging and tags, "the graffiti world is often considered to be a lawless,
chaotic mess" (Schacter 2008, 44). This sort if view is not true however: as Schacter
writes, there are "complex social structures and codes" involved (2008, 44). Nancy
Macdonald pointed out the same issue already in the beginning of the 21st century when
she wrote how graffiti, including tagging, "is far from mindless or senseless. There is a
point and purpose behind what graffiti writers do" (2001, 2-3). How tags are placed on
the wall in relation to other tags and pieces is usually not random but on the contrary,

quite meaningful and deliberate. In this chapter, I will elaborate these "social structures and codes" and explain the meanings and relations connected to them.

There are different motives and reasons behind tagging. Sometimes graffiti, especially tagging, is seen as some sort of "act of spite or malice, a 'for the hell of it' crime which angry working-class kids use to attack the middle classes… through their property" (Macdonald 2001, 92). I have never heard or read anything that would support this view: taggers almost never have anything against a specific individual property owner, and street art and graffiti artists are found in different social classes. An artist I interviewed, Oust, described the nature of graffiti this way: "graffiti is for the artist. You know I don't go and do a tag on your house for you. I do it 'cos I want to see it". Brown et al. describe that tagging "appears to be esteem building, stress relieving, and identity forming" type of act (Brown et al. 2016, 11). Tagging is also often a very communicative practise (Macdonald 2001).

These descriptions open up motives behind tagging very adequately, but in order to better analyse different aspects of tagging, I further separate four different types of tags: tag as a type of communication; tag as a parasite; tagging used as a mean to connect with urban environment; and tag as a tool of destruction/revival. However, I would like to note that a tagger could easily end up making all these four different types of tags during the same day. Therefore, these different descriptions have more to do with the tags and their different purposes and motivations behind making them; the aim is not to separate different types of taggers. In addition, there can be various meanings and reasons why a certain tag is painted somewhere: these four separated types or reasons behind painting a tag do not exclude other aspects. I would rather argue that usually one of them is the *primary* motivation and some or all of the others have only secondary value, depending on the type of the tag.

In context of street art and graffiti, tagging is maybe the form that is the furthest away from traditional arts. Even the artists who practise tagging often themselves talk about it as "scribbling" or refer to is as a phase when painting on the streets was more about rebelling and less about art. This is no wonder, since tags always feature a "stylistic alphabet and name"; there is never an image or clear political or societal messages (Brown et. al. 2016, 3). There is no aim to please the wider public with visual elements. However, despite these issues, Gell's art theory fits in relation to tagging as well. The

reason for this is that he wanted his theory to include especially objects, which are not traditionally seen as art (Gell 1998, 12). As I earlier mentioned, when introducing Gell's theory, I find his theory exceptionally suitable in relation to street art and graffiti in all its forms – illegal and legal – since Gell did not want to exclude any of the elements of objects that could be potentially analysed in relation to his theory by exclusively determining them as 'art' (1998, 6). He argues that when analysed from anthropological point of view, any object could be viewed as art (Gell 1998, 7).

Thus, I sometimes refer to people painting tags as 'artists' instead of taggers and I place tags in an 'index' position. Taggers and tagging involves interesting type of relationships, especially in relation to other pieces, which I will analyse in relation to Gell's theory. In this chapter, I am also going to use Bruno Latour's theoretical ideas regarding iconoclash and iconoclastic actions (2002), while I discuss the different motivations behind seemingly destructive aspects of tagging. I employ both Gell's and Latour's theories when I discuss my second trip to Fleur de Lis Street in order to analyse different kind of relationships that had happened between the taggers and the pieces after the jam.

## 4.2 Creating relations in the city

Earlier, when graffiti was firmly linked to a specific subculture and street art pieces meant for the wider public were rare exceptions amongst the works on the walls, it was very common, even "expected" that tagging was the starting place for people interested in joining the back then quite exclusive graffiti scene (Macdonald 2001, 74). Artists interviewed by Macdonald mentioned how the interest in the art aspects appeared and grew later, how at first it was just about "putting… [one's] name out" (2001, 220).  A London based artist I interviewed, Tom Blackford, mentioned that back in the late 80s and early 90s, the larger and more complicated pieces were not yet a part of London urban landscape, even though they have "always kind of been the thing in London". He mentioned that during that time, "unless you knew where those places were you never had access to it. The only graffiti I ever saw was tagging on the streets and the pieces or dubs, smaller pieces I'd see on the tracks in London". Back then, tagging had a larger and more visible role in London: "Tagging and graffiti… That was kind of like a cool thing to do, when I was like thirteen, fourteen. Everyone in my school had a tag. There were crews, graffiti crews".

Oust told me that with tagging, there is also a certain addictive aspect to it: "When you start doing the more illegal stuff, you get to see your name everywhere. And when you start seeing your name everywhere, you're like 'Ah, my name could be even in more places', and then you just start putting it everywhere… Wherever I lived, wherever I walk, or take busses or trains, I always make sure that along those routes there's my graffiti everywhere because I do those routes all the time and I wanna see my name wherever I can" (Oust). Oust also mentioned how with some graffiti writers, "the fame gets to their heads" and that they start making dangerous stunts to get their names to difficult places or they might start acting arrogantly. Despite this, he found the addicting part of the practise as a positive feature, because it added a level to it: "I think if it wasn't addictive people wouldn't care so much about it ". Traditionally tagging has a lot to do with one's name, fame, 'getting up', becoming a part of the subculture (Macdonald 2001). That does not mean that the art aspect is not there – however, it usually gains more value later in artists' careers. Macdonald wrote how illegality played less role with older and more experienced artists, who were more interested in the art aspects of street art and graffiti (2001, 220). I noticed the same trend during my fieldwork.

As mentioned above, Tom Blackford connects tagging to a young age and early stages of being an artist. The same is true in relation to other artists I interviewed who had started their street art and/or graffiti career with tagging. They actually often referred to tagging as sort of an early phase: Boby LV, who nowadays focuses on street art styled pieces mainly featuring a character he made up, told about the beginning of his career like this: "First, I was tagging the name only. Then I kind of grew up and stuff". Another artist, Oust, commented that when he was younger, he just wanted "to go out and scribble", and that only later "I started to take it a bit more seriously 'cos I was a bit older and understood it more". Oust described how that was when he got more interested in the artistic and visual aspects of graffiti and started to look up more what the scene was about and how to use different kinds of techniques.

Tagging can still be a 'starting place' to enter the scene, at least for some people. However, nowadays especially when it comes to people more interested in street art, many artists have their starting place somewhere else than in tagging. As Tom Blackford describes, nowadays "you have a lot of people who do not necessarily have the background in graffiti. You got the sort of art school students who are into street art

or influenced by Banksy… You know you can go into shop now, pick up a spray-paint and the best caps and you can browse Instagram and deal the latest sort of trends in graffiti styles, there's a lot less work involved in now" with getting started. So even though tagging remains as a starting place to some artists, it is no longer 'expected', not at least in the same way it was a few decades ago. Learning painting skills on the streets through trial and error instead of having nothing but an art school background is still generally more respected amongst artists though.

Even if the most active phase of tagging usually locates to the early stages of artist's life and career, also more experienced and older artists practise it. The motivation is usually different though: older artists tend to use tagging as a calming method since it can have a "curiously soothing influence" on them (Macdonald 2001, 75). Oust told me that even though he paints pieces and murals for a living, he has no plans on stopping painting also illegally. He told me that he goes tagging especially if he is feeling down. "If I have had a really bad day… I always do this thing, I take like four tins or six tins and I walk until the paint runs out... You can do that and just think about everything, it's like meditation, it is like 'walk-think', you know, have a really good alone-time" (Oust). There can also be a social aspect related, not in a scale of large groups like in jams, but with a close friend: "also if you do it with a friend, you end up talking about a lot of stuff and it's good, it's bonding" (Oust). Macdonald also mentions how older artists use tagging as a stress-relief activity (2001, 76). In relation to larger and more complicated pieces, the artists tend to place more emphasis on technical skills, visual and sometimes political aspects of their pieces and they make the works often for the public. They might have a career as street artists; they might earn their living by painting commissioned pieces or hand-painted advertisements. They do not really have to 'get their name up' anymore, so when they go tagging, it is for them. The simple act of making it, of finding new places, of walking around in the neighbourhood, is simply calming and relieves stress. That type of tagging is very different from what it usually is in the beginning, when it is all about fame, joining the subculture, doing something illegal (Macdonald 2001).

Both in the beginning and especially later in artist's life, tagging seems to be a lot about connecting with environment. One aspect of this is definitely that taggers are often on a constant move to find new places: "with the more illegal stuff, I like to find the more interesting places … the kind of places that make people [wonder] like 'how did it get

there, how's that been done', you know" (Oust). When someone paints on the street, they are deeply engaging in and with the city and many artists experience "a deep identification and empathy with the city" (Irvine 2012, 3-4). The space they are painting in is not just "the abstract space of geometry"; it is transformed and "created by lived experience" (ibid, 5). Through the act of painting, artists are in a way "reintegrating themselves with their landscape" (Schacter 2008, 59). Tagging is not just about putting your name up there, even if it can be a large part of it. It is also about connecting meaningfully with the surrounding urban environment (ibid.).

Creating graffiti or street art works changes the city for the artist – it is not just an occasional hobby; it changes the way one perceives the city. The same is true for the bloggers and photographers, followers of street art and graffiti: they always keep their eyes open for new and interesting pieces. City becomes something different. By viewing the city as a place for exploring, and especially by painting on the surfaces of the urban environment, one can participate in making the space and place and atmosphere: affecting it, changing it, transforming it. Through that, as Schacter noted, "the alienated space of society" can be "in some way recovered" – via their works on the surfaces, the artists "confront the anomie felt in the modern urban environment" (2008, 54).

Another aspect that connects an artist to a specific place, is that the act of painting a tag somewhere can bring back memories. The tags on certain surfaces "appear as traces, signs, and records of the act "(Irvine 2012, 5). When an artist returns back to the place, they have the memory of painting there, which attaches them to that very place and can create a sense of belonging, as if a part of them was there (Macdonald 2001, 194). As Macdonald puts it, "When writers spray their names on a wall, they appear to leave a part of themselves there too" (2001, 194). This connects interestingly to Gell's (1998) art theory, even though he unfortunately never discussed the connection between artworks and "physical environments" people live in (Bowden 2004, 320). I agree with Schacter, who connects Gell's argument to street art and graffiti by arguing "that each tag, each stencil, each image, can be seen as a form of 'distributed personhood" (2008, 38).

One of Gell's theory's main points is that "each artwork... is a place where agency 'stops' and assumes visible form" (1998, 250). Thus, even if a tagger only made a tag for

themselves and no-one else ever paid any attention towards it, that tag appears as in index and can thus potentially enable a relationship. When a tagger sees their tag later, it will bring memories of the time they painted the tag, and it thus crates a relation between a tagger and his or her past agency, past self. Gell gives an example how artist can be both in an agent and in a patient relation to his piece (1998, 45-46), which I analysed in a different context in the chapter 3. Even though his example concerned the relationships apparent during the process of making an artwork, I would say that another example where an artist can be both in an agent and in a patient position in relation to their work is when a tagger later sees the tag he or she has earlier painted there. The same remains true in relation to other kinds of works as well. As Gell writes, artist's "subjectivity... is concretely instantiated, as a series of moments, or 'delays' or 'perchings', in the objective traces of his agency, that is, his artworks" (Gell 1998, 250).

The street art and graffiti works, including tags, on the walls are intrinsically combined to the surface they are painted on and thus, to a certain place: "the two elements, image and medium, are fused, and we cannot make clear definition between graffiti and the wall" (Schacter 2008, 39). Now, the pieces are inseparably part of the city: the wall is not just a canvas, but also an intrinsic part of the work on the wall, whether it is a small tag or a large and colourful piece. Therefore, through the pieces they make, the artists too, in a way, become part of the city – or at least, their agencies in a certain moment do. Based on these ideas, the connection is the strongest when an artist is painting a tag or a piece – in that very moment, interacting with the city. When they later see the tag, it is the memory of it and the connection they end up having with their past agency, which creates the connection.

In addition to creating relationships between artists and places, tagging is also very communicative amongst taggers. If something is a certainty when it comes to tagging, it is that if a tag appears on an empty wall, it does not stay lonely for long: more will soon appear (Macdonald 2001, 204). Macdonald explains that the reason behind this is that tagging the same wall someone else has tagged is an acknowledgement that the original tag has been noticed (ibid.). It is somewhat as saying 'Hi, I noticed your tag. I was here too' (ibid.). This is not just an occasional occurrence, it is practically a rule: the first tag can be seen as an opening for a new interactive conversation about to happen. Artists do not often see new tags or pieces "as discrete artworks" – instead, a new artwork is

viewed "as the first utterance in a performance in which other artists offer contributions" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 9). To people who paint tags on the wall, it can become like "a secret sign language – literally: 'There's conversations between people who haven't met, through writing' (Prime)" (Macdonald 2001, 203). This has been part of tagging and graffiti subculture for decades, and it remains as a very visible aspect of tagging in concurrent London.



Tags attract tags. Along with tags, there are few simple graffiti works amongst them as well. Photo taken near Waterloo Station.

Doreen Massey describes 'space' as something that is "always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, 9). The street artists and graffiti artists are viewing spaces quite concretely exactly in this matter: "tags attract more tags" is actually true not just when it comes to tags, but it can be applied to all types of graffiti and street art. It does not matter which kind of works are in question, they attract more to come, and usually the kind of works, which have a similar style: paste-ups attract paste-ups, graffiti pieces more graffiti, stickers other stickers and so on. Also, often pieces with the same type of topics – for example both criticising the same company, social phenomenon or political policy – are often posted next to one another. Star Yard in Shoreditch offers a great place to observe this: the paste-ups are on one wall next to each other, larger murals in the wider yard area, tags are often next to each other or on the side lines of the bigger pieces. It is rare to see a lone illegal piece anywhere in

London, and if there is one, it usually does not stay lonely for too long. Usually separate pieces are commissioned works, and even they are usually painted in the areas with a lot of urban art. Whether the case is about large murals or simple tags, the different paintings on the wall often interact in a way that instead of viewing them as separate works by singular artists, they should rather be understood "as a multi-authored process of constant creative evolution" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 8). However, even if all types of street art and graffiti attract more works to come, this feature remains most visible in relation to tags. This is due both to their conversational and communicative aspect, but also because of the competitive nature of tagging.

How a tagger places their tag in relation to the older tag or piece already on the wall has specific meanings. A tag in a proximity, beside another tag is basically a friendly greeting (Macdonald 2001, 204). However, placing a tag above the earlier tag has a different meaning: it can be a friendly challenge depending on who did it, but often it is meant as degrading someone (ibid, 205-206). When it comes to painting directly over someone else's work, there are different rules and exceptions. The basic rule is that painting a larger and more complicated piece on top of someone's tag is not considered impolite (Macdonald 2001, 209). However, if someone tags over a piece, that is not anymore a friendly challenge, but it can be considered as a "sign of disrespect" (ibid.). However, there are different aspects to this.

The main feature of the piece, the prototype, has been left untouched, but the taggers have tagged on the edges, on the 'empty space' surrounding it. Photo taken in Star Yard, Shoreditch.

In relation to larger pieces, social media and its image formats have brought new elements to placing tags (MacDowall & de Souza 2017, 8). The interesting thing with tagging in London is how the taggers often put their tags partially on top or on the edge of some piece, or on 'an empty space' of the piece. No doubt, an efficient way of getting their tag famous, since numerous tourists, bloggers and photographers take a photo of the piece and put it on social media, and then along with the piece, the tag ends up being shared on internet. This is connected to "the square format" used by some social media mobile applications (MacDowall & de Souza 2017, 8).

This sort of tagging is very common in London: usually, after a while, the edges of pieces are tagged now and thus, when someone takes a picture of the piece and shares it online, the tag, in a way, gains the same media attention than the original piece. MacDowall and de Souza use term 'parasitically' to describe how these tags are placed in relation to the pieces (2017, 8), and I find it very describing and apt in this context. Even though this sort of activity might sound disrespectful or destructive, the artists do not usually consider it to be, as long as the tags stay on the edges of the piece and leave the main prototype or prototypes untouched. Tagging around the piece is seen as a

positive thing and tagging partially on top of the piece, just on the edges might be a 'parasitical' act, but it is not considered too bad either: and it also proves that the tagger believes that the piece in question will be photographed and shared by public.

However, not all the taggers paint on the edges of the piece: sometimes taggers paint directly on top of them. When this happens, a piece is "tagged". If this is done multiple times and/or by multiple taggers, people commonly use a term "bombing". Bombing a piece would mean destroying it, completely covering it in tags. In these cases, the taggers tag directly on top of the piece and the possible prototype of it so that the original work does not look the same anymore – or they might draw devil horns or something similar on the prototype of the image. This might sound like mindless destruction of the piece, but the issue is not that simple. There are various elements and motivations involved: it all connects to the fleeting, momentary nature of street art and graffiti. I will now move on to discuss these aspects of street art and graffiti in more detail.

## 4.3 Tags in relation to other graffiti and street art

Ephemerality of the urban artworks in the city is one of the key elements of street art and graffiti phenomenon (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015). Most of the works on the streets are either removed, painted over or they simply fade away because of weather, "only a small fraction surviving over a length of time" (Daniell 2011, 456). The main reason for this is not the removal of the illegal street art and graffiti by the city councils or property owners, though this obviously affects the scene (Schacter 2008), but it happens nowadays more often because of the other artists and taggers (Schacter 2008, 48). According to Ellsworth-Jones (2012), "The pressure for legal space to paint is so intense that most pieces… usually only stay for a week or two, often less, before another artist comes and paints over them" (p. 43)" (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274). The statement above refers to a popular legal graffiti and street art area Leake Street Tunnel, which is "a disused railway tunnel just behind Waterloo Train Station" in South London (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274). However, even if the renewal of the works does not happen quite as fast everywhere in London, in the most popular spots pieces are painted over quite frequently. "The lack of available space" is a common reason why graffiti and street art pieces end up being painted over relatively fast (Schacter 2008, 48).



Leake Street Tunnel, a legal graffiti area in South London.

## 4.3 Tags in relation to other graffiti and street art

When it comes to painting over other people's pieces, there are rules with certain hierarchical aspects to them. Especially in popular areas, if an artist believes that they are able to "surpass the present design, they will attempt this" (Schacter 2008, 48). A graffiti artist Nojil told me the same thing: "if you can do something better, you can go over that. If you can't do something better, don't touch it. That's kind of the rules". A street artist LadyKaur made a similar point: "there is also coded street art of course like, if it's a good piece, you don't paint over it… a lot of artists understand the code of not touching somebody's piece if it's really good". She pointed out that in cases where the weather has started to ruin the paint already it is "absolutely" fine to paint on top of the piece in question.

However, these unofficial codes apply more commonly in relation to illegal areas. Legal graffiti and street art walls and areas, or 'semi-legal' areas are the kind of places that have their own specific rules. Everyone knows that the space is limited, that eventually your piece will be painted over. As street artist HelloTheMushroom said, it is the "nature of those places". If your piece stays untouched in a legal area for a couple of weeks, you can be happy, and no schisms will appear if after that someone else goes and paints on top of that. If we are talking about a popular spot, it is unlikely for a piece to stay untouched for several months, no matter how good the piece is. This also depends on where one paints their piece though. At the popular Leake Street Tunnel, the pieces on the ground level – as in where you can spray paint without a ladder – change the most frequently (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 274). But if someone goes and paints on the roof, which is quite high from the ground, making it more difficult, not to mention probably much more uncomfortable to paint, it will remain there untouched for much longer. Therefore, even in extremely popular areas artists can in some ways try to affect how long their works will stay untouched.

Interestingly, even though most street art and graffiti works are usually sooner or later painted over, this is not an undisputed part of the scene. Artists talked about how there have been nasty occasions when someone has got upset because they caught someone else painting over their piece. LadyKaur told how people "can get into a massive fight" because of painting over someone else's piece. However, if someone has tagged on the piece, the situation is different. As a rule, artists view a damaged piece as "a fresh canvas" (Schacter 2008, 47). This means that if the original piece has been tagged, anyone can paint over that work, no matter what his or her skill level is – the piece is

damaged so the rule about having to be able to paint something better does not apply. Nojil mentioned how it might be a good idea to take a precaution before painting on top of someone else's work, if one paints on top of a damaged piece: "you can get in trouble – some people have. I have seen artists get pissed off at other artists so it's always a good idea, to maybe take a picture of the wall before you paint it. Just to be like 'Hey look, someone has done this on it'" (Nolij). This can prevent possible uncomfortable situations.



A piece that has been tagged so many times it is "bombed". From Leake Street Tunnel.

Indeed, when I asked from artists how do they pick up a spot where to paint in a popular area or a legal graffiti area already filled with pieces, such as Leake Street Tunnel, tagging came up quickly. Boby LV answered that if an area would happen to be full of great pieces, it would be a hard choice to pick where he would paint his own piece. However, this scenario has never happened. There has always either been a piece that is either not very good, the paint has started to fade or "there could be a good one [piece], but someone has tagged over it, then it's like already damaged" (Boby LV). Nojil said the same thing: "Usually, I pick out what have been tagged or, I don't know, someone has stuck some devil horns on your character or something, you know… messed it up". Usually in legal graffiti areas and in popular spots in London pieces are painted on top of the ones that are already somehow damaged – usually, tagged on. For this reason, taggers actually often determine which pieces are painted over and how fast that happens.

The surprisingly influencing role of tagging makes one wonder what kind of reasons taggers have for leaving some pieces untouched or painting only on the edges of them, and yet tagging directly on top of some other works. I would like to try to ponder this through Gell's theoretical viewpoints (1998). As Gell states multiple times in his book, his theory of art is all about social relations. Taggers, whether they leave a piece alone or paint on top of it, certainly engage in what Gell's theory focuses on, that is, social relations happening in the proximity of artworks or indexes (Gell 1998, 26). I aim to analyse these different relationships in relation to the second time I went to Fleur de Lis Street. This happened two months after the jam I discussed in the earlier chapter of this thesis.

In the earlier chapter, I wrote about a legal street art and graffiti jam I visited at Fleur de Lis Street alley, in Shoreditch. As mentioned earlier, Shoreditch is very popular in terms of both legal and illegal street art and graffiti, and it is hard to find a wall or a building that has been left alone by artists (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 8). Along with larger pieces, tags are a common and typical part of the urban landscape in Shoreditch. Sometimes tags appear on 'empty' walls, but often taggers paint them either on top of or on the edges of larger pieces. In this subchapter, I aim to focus mainly on the tags painted at Fleur De Lis Street alley between my two visits and how they were placed in relation to the pieces painted at Fleur De Lis Street jam. Based on Gell's theory, I will discuss which sort of relationships different taggers who have visited the alley after the jam have possibly had with the pieces and thus also with the artists who made the artworks. During my first time at Fleur De List Street, I observed a daylong legal street art and graffiti jam hosted by a street art agency. The alley was full of artists and all the walls were covered by either finished large pieces or pieces still in progress. The only tags I saw were the ones, which were rapidly disappearing under new layers of paint. The second time I went there, there was no jam, it was just a regular Saturday afternoon. People walked through every now and then, but Fleur De Lis Street is a calm alley so I had plenty of time to observe how the place had changed as well as take pictures of the pieces without anyone blocking the view.

A few of the original pieces were there, but a clear majority of the twenty pieces made at the jam had disappeared under new pieces that had been painted on top of the old ones. Out of the few original ones that were left, one had been tagged over but the others had been left either completely alone or the taggers had only tagged around them.

The artists who had painted the new pieces had also done so legally, with permission of the street art agency in charge of keeping the alley "clean[4]". As I explained earlier, street art agencies and property owners sometimes make a contract, in which they agree that artists can legally paint pieces on certain spots of properties. In case a legally made piece is tagged on or damaged some other way, the agency either fixes the piece or asks another artist to paint a new piece on top of the damaged one. Since one of the main jobs of street art agencies is to find legal spots for artists approaching them to paint on, the latter option is more common.

As mentioned earlier, when artists have to pick which piece to paint over in an area filled with pieces, if possible, they prefer to pick one that has been either tagged on, been there for a while or the paint has started to fade. There had not been enough time for the paint to start fading because of outdoors conditions, which leaves the two other options. Since all the pieces were painted during the jam and had thus been there for an equally long period, I assume that the new pieces were painted on top of those pieces that had been tagged sometime after the jam. I find this assumption probable based on how street art agencies function in relation to the areas they have agreed to keep 'clean'. Another reason that makes this even more likely, was the amount of tags in the alley – and the one piece there that was tagged, but which no artist had yet legally painted over with a new piece. Because as mentioned, sometimes artists just paint new pieces on top of the older ones simply because of lack of space (Schacter 2008, 48). However, this almost never happens if in the same area there is a tagged piece, because as mentioned, a damaged piece equals to a clean canvas for anyone to paint on (Schacter 2008, 47) with no risks of quarrels between artists.

The changes in the alley made me wonder why did the taggers tag some of the pieces and left some alone. I aim to analyse this based on different sorts of relationships the taggers had to the pieces they tagged on in relation to Gell's theory. I will also analyse the different kind of relations they had to the pieces they left *untouched* – because that too can be and, in this context, can definitely be argued to be an active choice. As mentioned, Gell's theory focuses on different social relationships that occur between or in proximity of four different terms: artist, index, recipient, and prototype (1998, 26-27). In this example, I mainly use the term 'artist' to refer to the artists, who originally made

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[4] I know this for sure, because I was working in said street art agency back then as an intern and all the artists had visited the headquarters of the agency.

the pieces during the Fleur De Lis Street jam. Pieces painted during the jam were meant for everyone, which makes everyone recipients: also the taggers. Therefore, I generally refer to taggers as recipients – though in relation to their tags, they appear in an artist position. There were two kinds of indexes present: the original, large, legally made pieces and the illegally made tags. Prototypes were apparent in some pieces and lacking from others – tags do not include prototypes.

Now, usually all the four elements are part of the relationship, either as agents or patients (Gell 1998, 51-54) – except for the prototype, which may or may not exist (ibid, 26). However, there tends to be a "primary" relationship between two of the terms and the other types of relations are "subordinate" (ibid, 51). In the following examples, I focus on analysing different kinds of primary relationships. For example, if I analyse the relationship between an artist and a recipient, that automatically means that in that example, the recipient's relationship with the index and the potential prototype is subordinate.

First, I would like to analyse the pieces that were tagged. Now, as I earlier wrote, I assume that taggers had attacked those original pieces from the jam that had been painted over by other artists. There was also one original piece there that had been tagged but not yet painted over. Now, according to Gell, the relationships he analyses in his theory come into being when 'an agent' acts on 'a patient' (1998, 22). If a tagger tags on the piece, a type of social relationship is born, in which the tagger acts as an agent towards the piece, which is the recipient. Now, this relationship differs depending on the tagger's reasons behind tagging the piece.

Gell writes that a situation where the recipient is in an agent position in relation to the prototype happens when the recipient engages in an "activity of defacing" the prototype (1998, 40). In this scenario, the tagger primarily dislikes whoever or whatever is portrayed in the image – or how they are portrayed. In London, most commonly a scenario where a tagger tags a piece because of the prototype happens because the piece features a person they do not like – for example, a political leader. Obviously, what matters even more is *how* the person is presented in the prototype – a paste-up made by Subdude that made fun of Donald Trump had been left alone for a long time. If the piece had been praising Trump, the situation might have been different.

A tag painted on top of a piece at Fleur De Lis Street.

Now, there are many competitive elements especially in graffiti and tagging scene (Macdonald 2001). Sometimes there can be "acrimony or animosity between artists" (Schacter 2008, 48). This can "lead to 'cross-out wars', the artists constantly defacing each other's" works, "'superimposing their names or tags on top of the others' designs" (ibid.). In those cases, the piece aka the index and whether the tagger finds it good or not does not really matter – the tagger tags, often in these cases bombs the piece out of personal dislike for the artist who made it.

Sometimes there is no personal connection to the artist in question, but rather what she or he is believed to represent. The commissioned, legally painted pieces are painted in the spots where there is a permission to paint. If there happens to be illegal pieces there already, they are painted over, no matter how good they are. Thus, the traditional social structures and codes present in the illegally made art – and in the legal graffiti areas – are in these cases often completely ignored. There are some artists who do not like this aspect of legal and commissioned pieces, and they do not like the artists who participate in this sort of activity. Thus, they tag those legal pieces. In all these cases, in which the tagger tags the piece mainly or fully out of dislike towards the artist or what they are believed to represent, the tagger, the recipient, is in an agent position, acting against the artist, who is in a patient position, via the artist's index: the piece on the wall.

As mentioned, in case of commissioned artworks, whoever commissioned the work can be viewed as a reason for the index to exist, at least to some extend (Gell 1998, 33). Thus, their agencies can be abducted from the index too (ibid.). Now, sometimes taggers attack pieces simply because they were done in a project or an event funded by some organisation, person or agency they dislike for some reason. In these cases, there is a relationship where one kind of recipients – the taggers – are acting as agents on the other type of recipient – the agency – that is then in a patient position. However, in relation to Fleur De Lis Street pieces this is probably not the case, because then all the pieces would have been tagged, not just some of them.

Quite often the case is that the tagger has nothing against the artist, the possible prototype or the possible other actors responsible for the piece – they simply do not like that particular piece in question. The reason can be for example the piece's style, the colours used, atmosphere of the piece or maybe genuinely everything about the piece – or, to use Gell's term, the index. In these cases, the relationship is a recipient acting as an agent on the index that is in a patient position. When Gell was discussing a sort of relationship in which the recipient is in an agent position in relation to index, he gave an example of critical viewers, who actively interpret the image in their own, individual way (1998, 34). But taggers do more than that. In the examples presented, I have referred to taggers as recipients if for no other reason, in order to separate them from the artists who made the original pieces. However, in these relations taggers shifts between recipient and artist positions. When they first view the piece, they act as recipients, but when they decide to tag, to concretely change the piece, they shift to the artist position. They add their agency, a part of their personhood on the image. And even if tags were considered as nothing but a form of destruction, excluded from their artistic features, Gell argues that "Iconoclasts" – people who damage or destroy artworks – "exercise a type of 'artistic agency" (1998, 64). Gell bases his argument by noting that in his opinion, "Art destruction is art-making in reverse" since "it has the same basic conceptual structure" (ibid.).

Now, as I have discussed earlier, where a tagger places his or her tag on the piece has an important meaning in the street art and graffiti scene (Macdonald 2001, 204-209). This can be analysed in relation to Gell's theory too. If the pieces and tags are considered as parts of the artists' personhoods, how the tag is placed can tell also about the relationships between the artists in real life – of how they would like it to be. A tag

placed in the middle of the piece could be seen as a mean to say that the tagger thinks that they are 'above' the other artist, since they place their work – a part of their agency – on top, thus covering the other person's work aka part of their agency. Actually, they do not just cover the agency: a tagged piece is viewed as damaged, destroyed – even the word "killed" is used (Macdonald 2001, 201).

## 4.4 Contributing elements in urban art

Instead of painting on top of the pieces, taggers sometimes paint their tags on the edges of the works, so that the tags do not really cover or damage the piece but rather appear as parts of the surroundings. As explained earlier, one of the reasons tags are placed this way is that the taggers are "ensuring [that] their artwork will be reproduced parasitically with any square-framed image of the ground-level piece below" (MacDowall & de Souza 2017, 8). Someone might view this as iconoclastic action, but in the context of street art and graffiti, artists do not usually view it like that. If someone tags his or her name on an empty space or on the edge of the piece, it does not destroy the work: it just changes it a bit. The main feature, whether it is a prototype, letter-styled graffiti, an abstract figure or whatever, is left untouched and only the background colour framing the main thing presented in the piece is affected. Tagging only on the edges of the images actually shows that the tagger liked the piece, because they did not tag over it. A street artist I interviewed told me that she was pleased with how taggers reacted to a collaboration piece she had made with her friend in Hackney Wick. "My friend went back a few weeks ago and they've spray painted around it so that means they're not touching the original artwork". As Mulcahy and Flessas note, "Replacing, transforming or contributing to existing exhibits is a commonly accepted convention in the field of street art" (2015, 9). The images on the walls were never meant to stay unchanged through time, but the alterations and additions to the works have always been a major part of the scene (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 11) – and one of the aspects that makes street art and graffiti so interactive and communicative urban practises.

This type of tagging was apparent in relation to the pieces at Fleur De Lis Street that during the two months between the jam and my second visit were only tagged on the edges or completely left untouched. I will use the same examples than from my first visit at Fleur De Lis Street: the abstract piece by Eoin and the *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* inspired cat piece by Stedhead. Eoin's piece represents an example of a piece that

could be labelled as either graffiti or street art and lacks a prototype, whereas Stedhead's piece, even though it is inspired by someone else's work, presents what Gell refers to as "imaginary" prototype (1998, 38-39).

So, why where these pieces left untouched or only tagged on the edges? Usually, a piece which is left alone by taggers (or any artist looking for a place to paint) is left untouched because the taggers like it and want it to stay – for one reason or another. If the tagger "allows his or her attention to be attracted to an index" and he or she "submits to its power, appeal or fascination", the index's agency is acting on the tagger, who as a recipient is in a relationship like this in a patient position (Gell 1998, 31). As Gell points out, the index's "agency may be physical, spiritual, political, etc." (Gell 1998, 31) – there are many reasons why it might fascinate taggers so much, that they submit in the relationship as patients, the agency of the index affecting them so much they remain as passive viewers.

However, even though there can be incidents where a tagger is captivated by the work of art on the wall, quite often, especially after admiring the piece for a while, leaving the piece untouched is a conscious decision. The tagger *decides* not to tag the piece in question. Often this is after critical evaluation of the piece, which, according to Gell, places the recipient in an agent position in relation to the index (1998, 34). Thus, even in the cases where taggers leave a piece alone, they can be in an agent position. Though, as Gell stated, all the participants in the relationship are potential agents (1998, 22). Even if for a moment they are in a patient position, the positions might shift back and for multiple times between the same recipient and index (ibid.). For example, at first a tagger can be completely enthralled by a piece, and thus in a patient position in relation to index's agency. Then, a minute later, the tagger starts to interpret and evaluate the piece more critically, thus shifting to an agent position, and the index moves to a patient position, since the taggers action, interpretation, is acted on the index. After a while, the tagger might again find himself or herself passively submitting to the index's power – and again, the positions have shifted.

Therefore, one reason why Eoin's piece was left untouched might have been that all the taggers simply liked the piece so much. However, there is a notable chance that in relation to Eoin's piece, the artist's agency played a more dominant role than the index's – not that those two terms are not fundamentally linked (Gell 1998, 51-54).

Eoin is a known artist in the London street art and graffiti scene, because he has been actively painting in London for years. In context of street art and graffiti, if one has a long history in some area they have actively painted in, they tend to earn certain kind of respect (MacDonald 2001). When I was photographing at the Fleur De Lis Street jam, one of the graffiti writers I knew beforehand, Oust, pointed Eoin out to me, recommended that I get a picture of his work, and mentioned that he has been in the scene for such a long time that people in general respect him and his work. In addition, Eoin's style is unique and anyone familiar with his works probably draws connection to his other production, which is why they could also easily view the index not so much as a separate piece, but as an example of the artist's style. Therefore, it is quite possible, that it was primarily the artist's agency rather than the index's that affected the taggers' decision to leave the piece untouched. A relationship where an artist is in an agent position and a recipient in a patient "expresses the power of the artist as a social agent over the recipient as a social patient" (Gell 1998, 39).

In relation to Stedhead's work, it is possible that the piece was left alone for the reasons analysed above: the piece was left alone either because of the relationship primarily with the index or primarily with the artist. However, unlike with Eoin's piece, there is another possibility in relation to Stedhead's piece, since it features a clear prototype. Considering that the movie *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is often referred as a cult classic, there is a possibility that the taggers liked the connection the piece made to the original prototype. However, as mentioned before, the prototype was imaginary, which is why artist's agency was more than subordinately present. Even if the taggers cared very little who the artist behind the piece is, they still submitted to her agency, since the prototype was her imaginary version of the original piece – by not tagging it, the taggers showed that they liked *her* imaginary version of it, not just the original prototype.

The fact that further indicates to the prototype's more dominant position compared to the index's is that Stedhead's piece was tagged on the edges: only the prototype, the main feature in the piece was completely left untouched. Taggers had painted on the decorative patterns *next to* the cat, thus on the index. Nevertheless, if one compares a piece that is tagged all over to a piece that is tagged on the edges or on one edge, the situation is quite different. When tagging over someone's piece, the original work is covered and damaged – through destroying the piece, in a way, taggers *replace* their agency with their own. However, in the cases where a tagger respectively to the original

piece adds their tags in a manner, which does not affect the main elements of the piece, it could be argued that they *contribute* their agency to the image, and it coexists there with the original artist's agency.



The tags are placed on the "empty space" of the piece, next to the prototype, which is left untouched.

## 4.5 Tools of destruction and revival

There is one more reason why taggers paint on top of street art and graffiti works. That sort of tagging was not visible yet at Fleur De Lis Street, but it happens in general. With street art and graffiti, the element of ephemerality often missing from traditional forms of art is always present (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015). Moreover, it is "expected", it is viewed as a fundamental part of street art and graffiti practise (Schacter 2008, 49). Gell describes iconoclashes as "acts of extreme deviance" (1998, 64). This might be true in relation to institutionalised art, but in context of street art and graffiti scene, iconoclashes in one form or another are best described as acts of extreme ordinariness. Sometimes taggers tag a piece not because they do not like the artist, the index or the prototype – they simply tag it because it has been there in their opinion long enough and they think it is time for someone else to paint on that spot.

Someone might wonder why they do this, why would they destroy a piece for no other reason than that it has simply been there long enough. Bruno Latour's ideas about iconoclash and iconoclasts – people who commit iconoclashes – can be used to explain

motivations behind these seemingly destructive elements of tagging. Latour defines iconoclash as "an action for which there is no way to know, without further enquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive" (2002, 12). As I have argued earlier in this chapter, there are social codes and structures in relation to all graffiti, including tagging (Schacter 2008, 44), it is not just "mindless vandalism" (Macdonald 2001). Even though the destructive elements of tagging bothers even street artists and graffiti artists themselves, I would like to discuss, based on Latour's ideas, whether the act of tagging on top of other works could be seen not just as an act of destruction but also, as an act of renewal.

It is easy to argue that tagging on top of someone's piece is a destructive act: it destroys the image; thus, it is a destructive action. End of story. However, if one analyses motivations behind destroying images, there is more to the story. Latour determines "five types of iconoclastic gestures" (2002, 26). These types are separated based on the intended goals of iconoclasts; how they view the destroyed artworks in question; the reactions of people who liked the original works; how iconoclasts perceive those reactions; and how the destruction affects the feelings of the iconoclasts themselves (ibid.). Out of those five types, I would say one type suits taggers extremely aptly.

Latour refers to this type of iconoclasts as "the B people" (2002, 27). These type of iconoclasts act against "freeze-framing, that is, extracting an image out of the flow, and becoming fascinated by it, as if it were sufficient, as if all movement had stopped" (Latour 2002, 27). The iconoclasts of this type do not want to live in a world without images – in comparison to some other types of iconoclasts, who do – they wish to live in a world that is full of "active images, moving mediators" (ibid.). The reason they commit iconoclashes is not to stop people producing images (ibid.). On the contrary, they aim to encourage and incite people to produce images more actively: "they want it [image production] to resume as fast and as fresh as possible" (Latour 2002, 27). This type of iconoclasts does not "stand fixed images" and for them "The damage done… is always a charitable injunction to redirect their attention towards other, newer, fresher, more sacred images: not to do without image" (Latour 2002, 28). In the contexts of street art and graffiti, the destruction of the images – whether it is done by taggers, authorities or simply weather – does not decrease the motivation to paint on the streets (Schacter 2008, 47). On the contrary, it can "act as a stimulus to 'get up', an additional incentive and motivation to put more… images on the walls and the streets" (ibid.).

It is very possible that even though the taggers had before my second visit left few of the pieces either untouched or had contributed to them in a respective manner, even the same people might later tag one or all the pieces that had been left untouched before. Not because they did not like them: because it is time for new pieces to emerge. As mentioned earlier, an artist should only paint on top of an untouched piece if they believe they can paint a better piece. However, this rule does not apply if the piece has been tagged. Taggers might destroy pieces, but at the same time they create fresh canvases for any artist to paint in. Another reason why it could be argued that the taggers belong to the B type of iconoclasts by Latour was the humoristic text that had appeared on the alley. I argue it is fair to assume it was done by a tagger, since it was written by someone familiar with using a spray-can to write letters and in a similar style than how tags are written. I also argue that it is fair to assume they saw the pieces, the colourful artworks as a positive change in the urban environment.
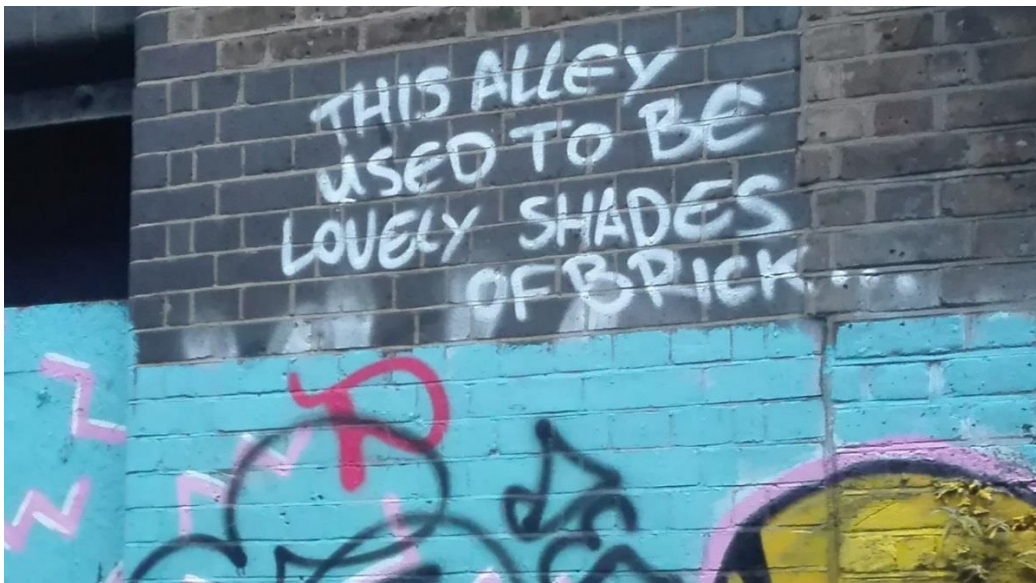


"This alley used to be lovely shades of brick…" text had appeared after the jam, before my second visit.

Not all the artists involved in street art and graffiti neither have nor will ever tag. However, this does not change the fact that tagging still has interesting, visible and in the renewal aspect of the scene, even quite operative role in concurrent street art and graffiti in London. Tags affect all the artists involved in the scene – whether they themselves tag or not. However, for the taggers themselves, tags can be seen functioning "both as a subjective experience in its creation providing self-discovery, and as a type of communal identity" (Brown et al. 2016, 8). When analysed in relation to Gell (1998), a wall full of tags done by different people ends up representing multiple

agencies, each writing individual yet all of them interacting with each other on the wall. Every tagger places a part of themselves on the wall – and at the same time, as part of the city. Their actions might be viewed as destroying artworks, or they might be seen as creating clean spots for anyone to paint on – in this manner, tagging cannot be positively labelled either as "destructive or constructive" (Latour 2002, 16). Through their acts, they are one the most visible iconoclasts in London.

# 5. Against or for Creative City

## 5.1. Street art and graffiti in Creative City

In this chapter, I present and analyse various reasons why illegal street art is increasingly accepted – or to phrase better, why *certain* illegal works are accepted, celebrated and sometimes even protected. And, the other side of the same phenomenon: why at the same time some other urban art works are punished even more heavily than before. After I have elaborated the changes in street art and graffiti and analysed their different social natures, I move on to discuss the social elements and relationships of different types of street art and graffiti pieces. I analyse the relations those works have with the artists who create them, in relation to the urban spaces and places they are made and are a part of, and how this all connects to the relationship the public has with different kinds of works painted on the city's walls.

The new, partial acceptance of street art connects fundamentally to a dominant cultural policy not just apparent in London, but globally: Creative City. As mentioned earlier, Creative City is a term Richard Florida came up with to describe the urban policies in which creativity is used as the main force to advance cities' economic (Florida 2012, vii). Florida himself argues that this new appreciation of creativity should aim "to build a society that acknowledges and nurtures the creativity of each and every human being" (Florida 2012, xi). Unfortunately, when it comes to Creative City policies, this is not the case. In relation to street artists and graffiti artists, what happens is that a typical city council practising Creative City policies "nurtures the creativity" of those few individuals, whose works are believed to bring economical profit and benefit to the city. That is to say, the type of pieces that the council views as suitable and fitting in relation to "the desires and objectives of urban planning policy" are accepted (Schacter 2014, 164). However, those works that do not fit those requirements are usually labelled as illegal vandalism and they are often removed from the city landscape, their makers punished if they are caught. This is far away from the idea of nurturing "the creativity of *each and every human being*". Florida realises these problems himself: "Yet as I write these words, all is far from well: the great promise of the Creative Age is not being met" (2012, xi).

At the same time when acceptance towards certain kind of urban art has grown, more strict policies have emerged against those works on the streets that are viewed as illegal vandalism or "other minor misdemeanours" instead of art (Molnár 2017, 385-386). The partial acceptance of street art has led to the city councils and metropolitan agencies in different cities trying to simultaneously "embrace" the pieces viewed as art while there is "increasing criminalization" when it comes to works that are viewed as vandalism (McAuliffe 2012, 190). Lee Bofkin mentioned how the more subculture connected type of "graffiti on the trains is punished much more harshly by the law than painting a pretty picture on a building without asking a permission. [That] just isn't punished in London in the same way". In this example, it is quite easy to understand why said graffiti would be punished more harshly: there is the aspect of trespassing involved, which ties the works more firmly into the category of crime instead of art. However, most of the illegal works in London are not done in this manner.

The city council's aim to accept some illegal street art and yet prevent and work against the other types of it has led to "sometimes arbitrary separation" between different works (McAuliffe 2012, 190). Street artist Sophie Gresswell's experiences tell a similar story: "I've been working with counsels and things… it's really interesting to find out what they think is art and what they think is graffiti.[5] It's a really thin line". Molnár describes this separation as "rebranding": the word 'graffiti' is "overwhelmingly mentioned in the media in the context of vandalism, crime, and urban decay" whereas the term 'street art' "appears in relation to discussions about art and design" (Molnár 2017, 389). However, as discussed earlier, everyone seems to separate and determine the terms 'graffiti' and 'street art' slightly differently, so this further demonstrates the arbitrariness of the separations between what is seen as art and what is not. "The modern view of graffiti is thus polarised around the two views" – on the one hand, street art graffiti are seen as being in fashion and as a relevant art form (Daniell 2011, 457). On the other hand, they are viewed as "illegal, defacing, costly and a sign of urban decay" (ibid.). As McAuliffe argues, "New efforts to criminalize graffiti and graffiti writers intersect with processes of recognition" that has led to "profound ambivalences" (2012, 190). A street artist or a graffiti writer could end up even in prison for painting on the streets. However, at the same time – "with the opportunities afforded by the valorization of creativity"

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[5]In this context she does not use the term 'graffiti' in relation to the lettering style but rather to pieces viewed more as vandalism.

(McAuliffe 2012, 190) – there is a chance to make a career out of it, since even illegally painting is less and less frowned upon and increasingly celebrated.

One of the main issues in relation to street art and new urban policies in the context of Creative City is the possibility that "arts are reduced to a mere instrumental cog in the 'creative', 'regenerative' wheel" (Schacter 2014, 162). Another problem with Creative City policies is that that they focus on aiming to make the city more attractive mainly for tourists, upper class people and commercial actors (see Schacter 2014). The policies and projects lead to gentrification and privatisation of places as well as increase in property prices, which usually has negative consequences for the local and poorer people, who no longer can afford to live in or visit places like this (ibid.). Schacter argues that instead of using art to support local communities, nowadays city councils aim to "commodify the arts and cultural resources… suturing them as putative economic assets to evolving regimes of urban competition'" (2014, 163).

However, usually illegally made urban art, even if it is the kind that city councils approve of, is not the main problem. Actually, Schacter says that he does not view "the more 'community' focused Street Art" – as in local artists painting illegally in the city for no monetary profit – as part of the problem (2014, 164). Rather the main issue lies in the cases, when a certain urban place or area is intentionally transformed by specific kinds of street art projects (Schacter 2014). Often councils or private actors do not just wait for the 'right kind' of street art to emerge and attract visitors, but "this has now doubled-backed to the point in which desire is factitiously created through these images" (ibid, 165). We are talking about the type of street art events and urban projects, which Jonathan Vickery (2012, 3) describes like this: "'artists are called in, at some appointed stage in the proceedings, and asked to deposit an object or other contribution to a larger strategic process of urban change'" (Schacter 2014, 164). In some cases, the main point of street art event is rooted in future economic benefits: the (often international) artists are "brought" there to "make our city desirable (to the very few who can afford it)" (ibid, 166). Practically, that kind of urban art ends up being a "part and parcel of a wider bureaucratic process, art at the service of professional political policy" (ibid, 164).

## 5.2. Reclaiming the public space

Even if these kind of urban art projects and events are increasingly popular, most street art and graffiti works are done illegally (McAuliffe 2012, 190). Also, street art and graffiti have a long history acting as counter-cultural practises that criticise the dominant role of commercials in the urban landscapes (Molnár 2017, 386) and as practises that aim to raise questions about people's rights to act and affect in the public space in the cities. Schacter writes that the artists he interviewed "felt that their work was an overt tactic to reclaim parts of the city, to regain possession of the metropolis which they believed had been sequestered from them by big business and private property" (2008, 50). Daniell also argues that street art and graffiti has its roots in illegal marking of places and thus, in a way, claiming (or reclaiming) of urban space (2011, 455). Mccormick and Jarman connect the aspect of domination to the discussion: "The murals... are expressions of power and they are attempts to demonstrate control over space and place" (2005, 50).

Moreover, the question is not just about the artists reclaiming the public space for themselves. Urban art does more than grants a possibility for the artists to change their urban environment. As Molnár notes, street art and graffiti's "disruptive effect is more subtle: it lies in creating situations that question people's taken-for-granted ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling" (2017, 394). People often take it for granted "that advertising hoardings and posters are a 'normal', acceptable use of public space" (Schacter 2008, 49). However, illegal street art and graffiti question "this 'rational' conception of space… the very sight of the images thus turns the whole issue on its head" (ibid.). Street art and graffiti can cause "a brief stirring inside us, letting us become aware of this normally hidden social regulation" (Schacter 2008, 49). Street artists and graffiti artists provoke questions "about visual culture and the effects of controlled visibility in the lived environment of the city" (Irvine 2012, 4). A famous street artist Shepard Fairey has repeatedly noted that one of the reasons behind creating street art was that his pieces "challenged the corporate-government monopoly of visible expression" (Irvine 2012, 4).

In addition, Mulcahy and Flessas argue that graffiti and street art raise themes such as "ideas of community, spectatorship, participation, and audience that have been much neglected in existing legal accounts of practice" (2015, 12). Street art and graffiti provoke everyone to question the fact that "collective activity is increasingly restricted to shopping centers, gated communities, entertainment complexes, and private sports clubs" while the urban environment is "increasingly managed" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 12-14). This sort of critical thinking and actively being involved in transforming city's spaces is common amongst street artists and graffiti artists. Sophie Gresswell mentioned how she aims to "change perceptions through art in public spaces" and that she wants to "connect local people to their urban environment". Another street artist I interviewed, Orbit, described his pieces as "universal places" and emphasized that "anybody is allowed there". Artist Milan Paa speaks in a similar matter: "I want to enforce the idea of public space as a meeting place, which helps people feeling better. (Paa, Milan)" (Borghini et al. 2010, 116). Also, as Subdude noted, urban art is "very democratic, anybody can do it, anybody can just design something and stick it up on the wall" or pick up a spray-can. In addition, even if you would rather just admire art made by other people, street art is a free for anyone to see. As Orbit said, people "can literally walk up to it, pay not a penny, and see it for free".

Even though legal and commissioned art is not connected to 'reclaiming of the public places' discussions as often as illegal urban art, sometimes also legal projects are linked to reclaiming urban space back to the local people and communities. Lee Bofkin mentioned how in London "there are efforts to take more art into places like housing states or low-income areas and that's more renovation… but not gentrification in a negative context". A street art or a graffiti work "changes the physical context and the social nature of the environment in which they are painted" (Mccormick & Jarman 2005, 50). If you compare a regular building, street or wall in many residential areas in London, without urban art they remain "as anonymous as any other, just another version of the red brick or grey concrete walls that dominate working-class residential areas throughout Britain and Ireland" (ibid.). But an urban art work, especially more public friendly street art, "creates a sense of distinctiveness, a sense of place that distinguishes" that place – a building, a street, some small area even – making that specific place different and unique "from comparable locations in other towns near and far" (ibid.). A great example on this is a legal project Sophie Gresswell told she was working on. She

told me how "it's all about urbanisation and gentrification and how a lot of buildings go up and the local people don't know what they are for and have no connections to the buildings". New urban regimes can lead to extensive and prominent changes in certain areas and neighbourhoods, and the local people might feel "insecure" and that they have no control over the changes happening around them (Moore & Woodcraft 2019, 11). Sophie Gresswell told me that the aim of her project is "to connect… building in the area with local people". She told me that she is "trying to create spatial art but also to connect people to the developments sites and buildings… in the local space".

A recent research done by Henrietta Moore and Saffron Woodcraf had interesting findings relating to this: in Hackney Wick, the "creative communities" in the area emphasized the importance of "community life and civic and democratic participation" in relation to feeling able to express themselves in the area they lived in (2019, 12). As mentioned earlier, Hackney Wick is famous for its enormous amounts of street art and graffiti that cover most of the surfaces in the area (Ross & Ferrell 2016, 272), and Hackney Wick's 'creative communities' include numerous artists so it is fair to assume that this 'democratic participation' could easily include painting street art and graffiti in the area. Interestingly, the persons belonging in these creative communities "expressed a degree of optimism about their place in future changes" but "People living in other areas of Hackney Wick did not share this optimism or the same sense of identity and belonging to the neighbourhood" and they felt excluded in relation to what is happening in the area (Moore & Woodcraft 2019, 12). Active and "democratic participation" – of which a street art and graffiti are great examples, and extremely visible ones when discussing Hackney Wick – made the people who were part of those creative communities feel more optimistic and also made them feel that they belong in the area (Moore & Woodcraft 2019, 12). Based on those results, it is no wonder legal street art projects are done in order to help people to connect with their urban environment.

So, nowadays street art and graffiti can be connected to very different kind of conversations and aspects considering the public space and different urban policies. On the one hand, street art and graffiti's visual styles are increasingly accepted and even borrowed in commercial contexts: "Companies... have borrowed the aesthetic of street art in order to give their products an urban and artistic aura" (Borghini et al. 2010, 115-116). When it comes to hand-painted advertisements, Cronin notes that what outdoor advertising and street art and graffiti have in common is that they "act to make and re-

make urban space" (2008, 2). But outdoors advertising – including hand-painted advertising by street artists – or the commissioned pieces discussed earlier made for economic benefit are both something deeply connected and originated in the realm of consumerism and they primarily aim for economic benefits. They are meant to promote the neoliberal regime, which is according to Molnár all about "increasing privatization" in urban areas (2017, 385- 386). However, as Crovara notes, graffiti and street art "can be considered as a form of culture embedded in the everyday life practices and identity of the residents" instead of working as "a cultural marketing tool for city branding" (2014, 30). Sophie Gresswell argues as well that "art can be used to help the local people rather than just... to attract tourism and people to come".

Thus, illegal street art and graffiti have very conflicting and contradictory positions in relation to city space and place. On the one hand, especially street art is used as a tool for Creative City, so that it may advance processes such as gentrification and thus play a part of increased privatisation of public spaces and higher rental prices – as in making the spaces more exclusive in nature (Schacter 2014). On the other hand, street art and graffiti "deliberately position itself in contrast to or as a critique of the "bleak uniformity" of late capitalist aesthetics" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 12). People are used to the commercial actors controlling the public places of the city, that the city's surfaces are used as billboards for advertisements, but street and graffiti question this. In addition to provoking people to question the commercial actors' dominative position in relation to use of public surfaces, street art is sometimes used to create sense of belonging for local people in the low income areas – not to forget the majority of urban art that is meant for literally anyone to enjoy for free. This kind of street art and graffiti links to the ideas of right to the city, to the idea of reclaiming the city back to its original residents – and due to its interactive and engaging nature, to inclusiveness.

In this subchapter, I focused on street art and graffiti's relation to certain urban regimes, policies and protects in more general level. In the next subchapter, I return to the focus of this thesis – the social relationships in relation to or in the vicinity of different street art and graffiti works in London. I aim to discuss how the social relationships differ between urban art made for fun or for the community – illegally or legally – compared to the kind of urban art that is made for livelihood and thus is often connected to commercialism and/or Creative City policies.

## 5.3 Commercial work versus illegally made urban art

*"My favourite work isn't in the commercial work. I'm very pleased with a lot of my commercial work, but my favourite is when I've executed a piece."* (Tom Blackford Art)

When it comes to artists themselves, it is not so much a question of certain artists working on the commercial side and the others making only illegal pieces. On the contrary, a clear majority of the artists I interviewed and met balance on both sides, doing both illegal and legal pieces. Cronin points out that nowadays many street artists and "graffiti writers are firmly embedded in a commercial culture" (2008, 9). However, as Mulcahy and Flessas note, despite this "the majority of them continue to return to the street and embellish its surfaces for free" (2015, 13). This artists' engagement to private markets might sound like a shift towards commercialisation of street art, and Borghini et.al. actually claim that street art "as an illicit practice is losing its ideological primacy, giving way to perspectives that encourage a coexistence with institutional force" (2010, 115). However, even though the practises have changed, the situation does not seem to be as Borghini et.al. argue. Molnár notes that as a rule, the artists make sharp distinctions when it comes to differences between the works they make for fun and their commercial work (2017, 404-405). I can agree with Molnár's argument based on my interviews and conversations with different artists: how the artists view the pieces they make for work and the pieces they make for fun have very different meanings for them, and they have very different relationships to these different works.

The hand-painted advertisements as well as some of the commissioned works still give a great reference point in order to illustrate the different relations illegal street art and graffiti create because of certain similarities. The hand-painted advertisements look similar to illegal street art and graffiti, they appear on the same sites and they are – more or less – meant for the public in general (Borghini et al, 2010, 116). Borghini et.al even go so far that they argue that nowadays, there is "a symbiotic relationship" between street art and outdoor advertisements, because "no matter the ideological differences in surface structure" they appear on the same places for the same audiences (Borghini et al. 2010, 125). However, there are fundamental differences when it comes to how on the one hand, the hand-painted advertisements and some of the commissioned works, and on the other hand, the illegal pieces form relationships with everything – the place, the public, the other works nearby – around them.

The artists I interviewed or had discussions with talk in a very different manner about the works they do for living compared to if they were painting for fun. When it was about making a hand-painted advertisement or a commissioned piece, artist Tom Blackford commented that "I do it for living. I do it to pay the bills". It was clear that in relation to his commissioned pieces, there is not so much value or deeper meanings between the artist and the work in question. The comparison became apparent when the artist continued "But then, when I paint for myself, it's like therapy... I need to release something and do something creative". Oust also made a clear separation between painting for work and for fun: "With me and painting I kind of categorise it into three categories: commercial painting, which is what I do for work. Then there's like my fun, painting with friends… And then there's like my more illegal graffiti which I do by myself or with only a couple of people". He emphasised how "the three are all very different and they all have different meanings" for him. In his job, he did legal, commissioned murals as well as hand-painted advertisements and he stated clearly that he does like his job, he called it his "dream job". One reason for this was that when he was younger, he never even imagined that he could paint for living. But he made a very sharp distinction between his job and between painting on his free time: those were two clearly separate parts in his life. As mentioned above, the commercial painting is what he does "for work".

It was also interesting to see how Oust focused on very different aspects around making a piece depending on whether we were discussing the pieces he made in work compared to the ones he made for fun. With his illegal work, when he went painting alone, he talked about finding new places, getting to know your neighbourhood and painting as a stress-relive mechanism, as discussed in more detail in the earlier chapter. In case of going to a legal wall with friends, the focus was on socialising. However, whenever we talked about the pieces he made as part of his job, all the emphasis was on the final piece: how well he had succeeded in technical manner, how visually pleasing and skilfully made the piece looked like. The place did not really have any value or meaning, except in a very practical sense – for example, whether a place is good in a sense that the advertisement is in a very visible intersection and thus seen by numerous people. Also compared to his other paintings, the process of making was clearly in an insignificant role. The focus was on the final piece itself.

When it comes to the relation with the public, illegal street art and outdoor advertising have a very different approach. Illegal street art aims to provoke people, to make them question things taken for granted and/or to invite people to participate – in general, it aims to activate people as well as to "stretch audiences' capability of perceiving invisible places and lifetimes" (Borghini et al. 2010, 117). Advertisements on the other hand hope that the passive public will take their message as it is given: "advertising tries mainly to reduce consumers' perceptual scope (mostly, by focusing attention on a given consumption option)" (Borghini et al. 2010, 117). Within spaces that are dominated by markets, there are "inequalities of power" and "multiple dimensions of dominance and influence" apparent in relation with the public (Massey 2005, 100).

Street artist Subdude told me that especially in the beginning of his street art career he used to make very experimental pieces, in which the audience participation was a fundamental part of the piece. For example, he and his fellow artist "would write on the floor with some chalk phrases like 'the world would be better if…' …and we would let people fill in the blanks". He also did a project in which he put up a poster and left it out somewhere in London. The poster said on the back of it "If you found this, put it someplace new, and send me a picture through social media". Subdude told me that the project was a huge success: "It was incredible 'cos I got like a thousand pictures back, people took it to India and New Zealand, America". The "bidirectionality of communication, fostered by incomplete or challenging message" is one of the elements often present in urban art (Borghini et.al. 2010, 121).

Even if the participation is not always as concrete and straightforward as in Subdude's projects, it is very common that "street art… explicitly invites and needs audience participation" (Mulcahy & Flessas note 2015, 11). Mulcahy and Flessas describe street art "as a dynamic, ever-changing group project in which anyone can be involved" (2015, 11). A street art or a graffiti piece is rarely just a singular piece, which the audience is supposed to passively admire: "It is a collaborative undertaking between artists and artist, or artist(s) and audience, many of whom are often strangers" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 13).

If we analyse the relationship between audience and a piece that is made for fun (illegally or legally) and between audience and outdoor advertisements in relation to Gell's theory, there are interesting differences. In chapter 3, I analysed the different

types of relationships between artist, index, prototype and recipients – the audience – in more detail. However, in this context, only "the main relationship" comes into focus. In Gell's theory, "the main relationship" is always between an artist and a recipient, the two "primary agents" (Gell 1998, 37-38) – the index just "reveals, and potentiates, agency exercised and patient-hood suffered on either side of it" (ibid, 38). After all, the index just "channels and reflects artist's agency" (ibid, 20), it is not intentional and thus not a primary agent, and thus not included in the main relationship. To summarise this briefly, practically what happens is that a viewer as a recipient enters a different kind or kinds of relationships with the artist via artist's work.

With outdoor advertisements, the situation is more complicated. Let us take a street art or a graffiti styled hand-painted advertisement for an example. Gell points out how "'artists' are normally 'primary' agents" – even if they were hired to make the work of art in question, it is still because of them the work ever came into being (1998, 36). The artist is just in a "subordinate" position (ibid.). Therefore, the artist's agency still affects and is present in the relationship, even if the work is a commissioned one. However, when Gell describes commissioned artworks in his text, in all the examples he presents there is always some artistic freedom left: for example, in cases of commissioned portraits. When it comes to hand-painted advertisements, the artists often do almost or completely literally what the company asks them to paint. A hired artist is practically just a tool, someone, who could have been replaced by any other artist with the same technical spray-painting skills. Sure, it is that particular artist who is the reason of that advertisement physically existing – but if they just mindlessly painted exactly what they were told to paint, how much does the final piece really mirror the agency of that artist? In those cases, it could be suggested that the work in question rather reflects the agencies of the project group that planned it in the first place. The artist's agency should be added there too, since they made the work into a concrete, material thing, but the final work does not really connect to a singular individual's agency. The relationship could be somehow linked to a group or advertisements planners, who were following their administrators, investors or financiers' instructions – so not just their own individual creativity – combined with the artist's in this scenario very submissive agency. Basically, the index does not reflect any singular agency – it connects the recipient to no-one specific. With art made for fun, when the piece is reflecting the artist's agency, the relationship with a recipient is very different in nature.

Thus, no matter how similar graffiti or street art and a hand-painted advertisement might look like at the first glimpse, the relationship with the audience, with the place and with the city differ fundamentally from the relationships connected with street art and graffiti made for fun. I would like to make a counterargument against Borghini et.al – the huge "ideological differences" are not something that do not "matter" – they ensure that street art and outdoors advertisements will truly never form any kind of "symbiosis" (see Borghini et.al 2010, 125). Advertisement business does and probably increasingly will in the future take influences from street art and graffiti, but the only way they can truly have a 'flourishing' "symbiotic relationship" is if street art and graffiti will seize to be an art form and become just a new branch of marketing technique.

## 5.4 The meaning of place

How about the commissioned street art pieces made as part of Creative City projects? In those cases, the artist's individual agency remains visible and clear, thus the relationship with the public can argued to be similar. However, the very different type of relationship with place differentiates pieces made as part of Creative City projects from the pieces made for fun. With illegal street art and graffiti, the place has a specific relation with the piece. Many artists form or "begin with a deep identification and empathy with the city: they are compelled to state something in and with the city" (Irvine 2012, 3). The urban environment is not just a canvas, a location for the piece but the space functions "as an idea, an aesthetic, and a potential" (Cronin 2008, 9). As Tom Blackford noted, places affect "the artwork and mentality of the artwork... You want an atmosphere that your graffiti can go against". In addition to place affecting the atmosphere, instead of "just being a backdrop for street art, the street is viewed as a critical part of what is being exhibited" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 10). A street art or a graffiti work and the wall are inseparable and "fused" – it is impossible to define where one ends and another one begins (Schacter 2008, 39). A street, a wall, any specific place can "become an inspiration for, and integral to, the art produced" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 10).

Gell introduces in relation to his anthropological theory of art the type of art where surroundings have strongly influenced, inspired and remain integral in the outcome of the final artwork. In this particular relationship the artwork – or to use Gell's term, the

index – is in an agent position acting on the artist, who is in a patient position in relation to the index. This kind of relationships occurs when "The index is the material thing which motivates abductions of an art-related kind" (Gell 1998, 28). This refers to a situation "in which the material index dictates to the artist, who responds as 'patient' to its inherent agency" (Gell 1998, 28). In these cases, "it is the index which inherently possesses the characteristics which motivate its selection by the artist as an art object" (1998, 30). Gell names different cases that may lead to an index dictating an artist, and one of these is that instead of making the index, the artist "recognize[s]" it (1998, 30). Gell says that for example carving can be seen as "liberating forms which where inhere in the uncut stone or wood" (ibid.).

In relation to street art or graffiti, this recognition of an agency might happen when something in the urban environment might because of its pattern, shapes and decorations inspire artist to paint in a specific way. For example, sometimes a house, a boat or a specific part of a wall could look like having specific features: for example, it might appear to have a face or to be shaped like an animal. An artist 'recognizes' this, and paints according to it. The artist does not create these patterns or characteristics – they were already evident. The artist just emphasizes those features for everyone else by painting so that they become very apparent. The pieces are often connected not just to the location they are painted in, but the "artists anchor their work in the locality by incorporating features of walls, floors, and fittings into the images produced" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 10). The wall or an object is not treated "as a blank canvas", but rather "as imbuing the work with a particular character" (ibid.). A great example of a piece where the place, or in this case, an object "dictate[s] the form of the work displayed" (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 10) and where the agency of the index has inspired and influenced the outcome of the artwork, is a piece by street artists Sweet toof.

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The agency of the index affected the outcome of the piece. The photo has been taken at the Regent's Canal in Hackney.

Now, obviously the artist's agency is also strongly apparent in these pieces: it was their imagination that led them to recognize or imagine the agency of the index. Nonetheless, how the index, in case of Sweet toof's piece, a boat, is build and the characteristics of it defined how the piece turned out. In context of street art, the pieces that demonstrate some hidden agencies of walls and objects are quite common. However, along with 'realizing' hidden or imagined agencies and making them visible, artists often in creative ways illustrate and celebrate the very apparent agencies of everyday objects such as rubbish cans as well as specific urban places (Borghini et. al. 2010, 122). In this cases, the aim of artists is not to change these objects or places to something else – they make them "visible as they are and appreciated for their original meanings" (Borghini et. al. 2010, 122). Even if an artist does change how the object looks like, they do that in a way, which does not affect the original agency of the object. Rather, they emphasize that agency, which then becomes more visible for everyone.

To compare, hand-painted advertisements and most of the commissioned pieces are separate works that are not in any way connected to their surroundings (Borghini et al. 2010, 120). Obviously, the fact that those works are made legally affects this: the pieces go where the actors responsible get the permission to place them. But unlike with illegal street art and graffiti, there is rarely any deeper connection to the place, not to mention

to specific features of an object or a part of a wall painted. There is also no connection to possible other works in the area, which is very visible aspect of illegal urban art. As discussed in the earlier chapter, especially in context of tagging there are often very visible connections between different works on the wall. The hand-painted advertisements and commissioned pieces are just separate works, not really connected to anything (Borghini et al. 2010, 120).

When it comes to how the artists relate with the places they paint in, in context of illegal art there are different kinds of connections. Sometimes artists go painting to a place, which is somehow meaningful for them. Orbit told me how when he once had had a bad day, he had decided to go to paint in a familiar place with positive memories: he picked a place with childhood memories. He mentioned how he went to paint "in a place that was close to my childhoods, and a place that was very important to us" – to him and his friends. For Subdude, Shoreditch represents a nostalgic place: "I literally started like here". There is also the aspect of familiarity: "I worked over here, so I know the area… I know all the little side streets" (Subdude). In addition of creating connection to places with former memories, artists also use their art to create connection to new places: "Many of the artists felt they were consciously attempting to permeate their surroundings with their self-identity and personhood, to 'make a personal presence'" in their urban environment (Schacter 2008, 38).

But, if there is a street art project in which some artists are just "brought" to a specific place they have neither chose nor often have any connection with (Schacter 2014, 164), the relationships to those places is very different. The notion that artists "are called in at some appointed stage in the proceedings" in these street art projects (Schacter 2014, 164) illustrates extremely well the nature of the connection artists usually have to the places in these cases – predestined and timeboxed. The artists in these instances do not choose the place – a specific spot is beforehand issued to each artist. The artists may be from another city or another country. In these cases, those artists rarely connect with the place the same way than artists painting illegally; in these instances, the wall and its physical features play no role in the often predetermined piece the artist paints. The wall works usually just as a neutral canvas, instead of being fundamentally part of the final work. Compared to people who paint illegally or put up their artwork illegally: they go and look around for new spots, and they often decide the place spontaneously, so that the place works with their work and possibly as an inspiration for it (see for example

Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 10). Even if the specific features of the wall or objects were not the main inspiration, the atmosphere or other pieces in the area often determine where artists paint or place their works. As Massey notes, "It is the practices and relations which construct" spaces (2005, 99). The "practises and relations" vary fundamentally between commercially made urban art and illegally made works, which thus creates very different kind of spaces.

The kind of commissioned street art and graffiti that is brought to areas in order to commodify a place and to artificially make it more attractive (see Schacter 2014) thus differs in fundamental ways compared street art and graffiti that is painted in order to connect with the environment and/or is made for the local people. The atmosphere, the connection with the urban surroundings, the relationship with other pieces – everything is different. Pieces made as part of Creative City projects and even hand-painted advertisements might at first *look* similar due to the same techniques used (Borghini et al. 2010, 116) – but there are significant differences. As Florida notes, "the commercialization of experience can empty it of its original creative content" (2012, 153).

And indeed, it is quite contradictory and even absurd that city councils or agencies aim to bring "authenticity" to some areas (Schacter 2014, 164-165) by artificially and deliberately changing the place to look a certain way. The pieces created in those projects do not interact with the places or objects the same way than the illegal street art and graffiti, since the artists working in those projects do not get their inspiration there or have a possibility to choose where they paint. And unlike in illegal street art and graffiti, the commissioned pieces rarely interact with each other; they are just separate works which connect with their surroundings as much as an outdoors advertisement – usually not in the least. Creative City aims to brand places via street art and then sell them as a commodity (Schacter 2014, 163-164) – but the problem is, as Florida points out, that "Commodified experience is often perceived to be— and often is— inauthentic" (2012, 153).

Also, the street art pieces used in these Creative City projects are similar in a fashion that only the pieces which are tame enough, the works that are "pretty and 'nice'", are chosen (Schacter 2014, 169). This is not to say that none of the illegal urban art pieces could not be described as nice and pretty – but those are just one type of urban art in the

heterogeneous scene. The very point why street art and graffiti is connected to right to the city discussions is the aspect that anyone could paint – or if analysed in context of Gell's (1998) theory, that anyone could attach their agency, a part of themselves to the city (see Schacter 2008). Discriminating most of the street art in order to only promote the works that are economically beneficial for the area strips this aspect away and makes street art very exclusive in nature in already exclusive and increasingly privatised areas in the city.

However, many aspects and issues ensure that street art and graffiti are not becoming practises that are nothing but tools in Creative City policies. First, as noted multiple times in this chapter, illegal street art and graffiti have not lost their appeal even though legal options have arisen on their side. And when it comes to potential threat of illegally created street art becoming a tool for Creative City, the discriminating aspects of the policy ensure that this will not happen. Even though in contemporary cities there have been attempts to validate certain existing illegal murals (McAuliffe 2012, 197) – the ones seen suitable for the cities' policies – there are sometimes "costs" and definitely in context of London, "restrictions" involved there, and those "appear to have been an effective barrier to successful incorporation of legal aerosol art practiced by graffiti writers" (McAuliffe 2012, 197). McAuliffe notes that even though "graffiti and street art are reinscribed as productive creative practice" in some platforms, "the practise remains tied to its transgressive character" (2012, 203). The reason behind this is that even though Creative City policies allow opportunities for street artists and graffiti artists "to produce "good work,"", the restricting nature of those policies and "negation" of majority of the pieces keeps the urban art in general as transgressive in nature (McAuliffe 2012, 203). Thus, the very "Attempts to mobilize creativity, to capture and deploy creativity" are the reasons why the illegal street art and graffiti will not disappear – because most of it is not accepted (ibid, 192). As McAuliffe notes, it is precisely "in the threads of transgression" where the truly "productive sites of creativity and innovation" appear (2012, 203). The negation of (the majority of) urban art only provokes the artists to produce more (Schacter 2008). Thus, the exclusive aspects of Creative city policies in relation to street art and graffiti actually enable and uphold street art and graffiti to *not* become principally a tool for Creative City but rather remain as transgressive practises that remain mainly uncontrolled.

Thus, it seems evident that the old "illicit practise" is *not* disappearing, unlike Borghini et.al (2010, 115) claimed: it seems like the legal and commercial side has just arose on its side. Even though street art and graffiti are nowadays to some extend linked with commercial aspects, the case does not seem to be about a steady shift from illegal practise to something completely in the realm of commercialism. There is no denying that street art and graffiti are not anymore plain illegal practises completely against or unrelated to commercialism or neoliberal urban policies. Nevertheless, at the same time, there are so many fundamental differences between urban art and outdoors advertisements that it is more than far-fetched to talk about "symbiosis" between them (see Borghini et.al 2010, 125). The fundamentally different relationships to the place, with the public and between the artists and their pieces showcase the differences between urban art made for fun and the commercial works. Those relationships reveal not only the crucially different natures of these works, but also how they appear in the urban environment; whether the urban artwork is a separate object, or a part of the city.

# 6. Conclusions

In this thesis, I analysed street art and graffiti in London both in relation to Gell's anthropological theory of art and in relation to urban studies discussions concerning public space and place. The reason I wanted to analyse an urban phenomenon is growing importance of the cities and urban environments (Florida, 2012), which links directly to increasing need for anthropological research to focus more on urban phenomena and issues (see for example Toulson 2015). London's role as one of the main centres of street art in the world connected with the fact that the Creative City policies are exceptionally dominant in the city made it an extremely interesting and fruitful place for my research.

My fieldwork in London was quite successful on many accounts. I believe that the fact that I approached the potential interviewees through my personal social media profile affected positively on the interview situations and helped me to get more interviews: the artists had the possibility to find out a little about me before me met. People tend to be more comfortable meeting a person they know at least something about beforehand. The profile also proved that I am who I say I am, since fake profiles are relatively easy to spot. I also think that the fact that I was about the same age – I was 25 during the time of my research – than most of the artists I interviewed worked in my advantage; the same aspect that Nancy Macdonald noticed in relation to her research (2001, 58-59). Though some of the artist who were a bit older and usually also more experienced, in their 30s or 40s, sometimes clearly looked at me as someone "younger" and thus less experienced in life, but that did not bother me. I think the only consequence was that they gave me more advices regarding my fieldwork, which is nothing but a positive aspect.

The fact that I was studying principally illegal practises affected my interviews. I had realised this beforehand, and for this reason, I had chosen semi-structured interviews as one of my main methods for collecting data. In addition to choosing an interview method that allows for more conversational type of interviews, I usually interviewed the artists in places with casual and relaxed atmosphere: cafeterias or pubs. The casual atmosphere was usually easily attained: the interviews often slipped to fluently ongoing

conversations. This had its downside though: sometimes the conversations stretched too far from the main topic. I handled those instances relatively well, but occasionally I should have abandoned some of the questions or somehow in a more casual way led the interview where I wanted it to proceed. The abrupt changes of topic caused pauses or even mild confusion with the interviewees, especially if we had approached quite deep level and conversational atmosphere in relation to the earlier topic. However, obviously my job was also to not let the conversation slide for too long or too deep to side tracks so in some instances, even if changing the topic felt very forced, it was necessary.

The most interesting comments I heard during the interviews usually came after we had talked about a certain topic for a while and reached a conversational atmosphere, so it was occasionally a difficult task to try and keep the interview conversational enough, yet not to get side tracked or waste too much time on issues not relevant for my research. In some instances, when the interviewee found it difficult to answer the question either because it was too broad or because there were various ways to understand the question, I helped by opening a little bit what an artist could potentially answer. Those situations were sometimes challenging, since I tried my best at all times to avoid leading the interviewee in any way in order to not get biased answers and it was slightly difficult, especially once when one artist asked me directly: "I don't know, what have the others artists said to that?". However, despite certain challenges, semi-structured interviews proved to be a great method for acquiring and later analysing data for my thesis.

Another challenge I faced in relation to the artists was that even though when approaching artists I introduced myself primarily as an university student making a research for her thesis, it usually came up that I was at the same time working as an intern in a street art agency. On one hand, that may have affected how people viewed me and answered my questions, since the agencies do also commercial works and some artists are strongly against that. It could have also easily been a reason why few of the artists were especially in the beginning of the interviews very careful not to mention any illegal art they had done, and they only discussed the legal projects they had done. On the other hand, my internship position gave me a great position to find out about upcoming urban art events that I could have easily otherwise missed, and it helped me with finding potential interviewees. Due to my internship place, I also gained a different kind of insight about legal street art and its position in London. It also helped me to

create first contacts: I met my first interviewees in the agency headquarters. Nevertheless, I am very happy with my decision to contact artists also through other channels. By approaching artists from different circles, I got a more diverse picture of London's diverse street art and graffiti circles and met different types of artists practising various styles of urban art.

Even though interviewing various artists from different circles proved to be a great idea in the end, the amount of information I had gained during my fieldwork seemed both massive and quite unattached at first when I had returned from the field. It was hard to see from the countless details the common features that united most of the research data, and thus I had at first minor problems with how I should proceed with analysing the data. Interestingly, even though Alfred Gell's anthropological theory of art was published in 1998, it suited, cultivated and helped me to determinate a clear course for my thesis. Gell's focus on the social relationships combined with including all the elements of the art objects – not just art-related ones – rendered me perfect frames for this thesis and helped me to realise the common elements present in the data that at first had seen mainly random and often conflicting.

That said, it is unfortunate that Gell did not analyse any other social aspects of art than agencies; he never discussed the connection between artworks and "the physical environments" people live in (Bowden 2004, 320). In relation to Western countries, the art has before the emerge of graffiti and street art mainly remained indoors, which partially explains this. However, in my thesis I wanted to connect the relationships with the urban environment, place and space to the analysis. In order to do this, I took Gell's theoretical points of views and brought them from the indoor galleries he discusses to the busy streets of London, connecting the social relationships to urban surroundings and analysing how they appear in that kind of environment. Connecting those ideas with urban studies discussions concerning right to the city and Creative City issues allowed me to approach the topic from a different point of view, to really embrace the 'urban' in urban art. Thus, in addition to analysing the social relations connected to art in urban environment from anthropological point of view, my thesis connects to the discussions concerning the cultural policies and changes happening in contemporary cities from the point of view of street art and graffiti, which reflects different issues connected to these practises via their ambivalent position. Street art and graffiti may promote gentrification and increased privatisation of areas – or they can help local communities connect with

their urban environment. Hand-painted advertisements increase the number of commercial elements in the urban landscape – but illegal urban artworks question how urban public space could be used. At the same time when creativity and authenticity are more celebrated than ever, the means to increase control and uniformity in the urban areas have been enforced. Urban art in its various forms acts in contradictory ways, but it might be just its unique and transgressive nature that reveals the ambivalences and conflicting elements of urban policies and phenomena in London.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I told about my experience at legal street art and graffiti jam in Shoreditch. In relation to Gell's theory, I discussed how street art and graffiti pieces enable multiple social relations between different kind of agents, the main relationship being between the two primary agents, an artist and a recipient. I analysed different aspects, terms and agencies that influence the nature of these relationships. I also discussed the reasons why some people dislike or are against all or some street art and graffiti. The different reasons reflected on the insecure feelings people feel in the contemporary cities where they often have very little if any possibilities to affect their urban surroundings and how this might reflect in need for the kind of safety that uniformity and sameness in the appearances of the urban areas is believed to bring.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I discussed how some people have a different mean to connect with their urban environment: tagging. In that chapter, I focused on the aspects and the interesting role of that specific form of graffiti. In addition to artists creating relations and memories to places though painting their tags there, I discussed how tags are used in order to communicate with other artists. I also discussed the iconoclastic aspects of tagging in relation to Bruno Latour's ideas and how this all connects to the ephemeral nature of street art and graffiti. The street art and graffiti phenomena have never been about artworks that are supposed to stay untouched through time; every new piece is just the first part of a collective artwork, where different artists contribute together and create unique, constantly changing artworks, which are evidently replaced by new ones. Tagging has its destructive elements, but simultaneously it ensures and provokes constant production of new images in the city.

In the fifth chapter, I connected anthropology and urban studies when I analysed street art and graffiti's relation to commercialism and Creative City policies. I discussed how the hand-painted advertisements and street art pieces that are done solely for Creative

City projects that aim for economic benefits have fundamentally different relationships with the public and especially in relation to the urban places that they are painted in in comparison with the urban art made for fun. I also analysed how the artists themselves differentiate the art they make for fun and the often commercially linked art they make at work and how differently they value and view the different kinds of works that they do. I also joined the discussion of whether Creative City policies could change street art and graffiti practises in a way that they would in the future only be used as tools for cities' policies to boost economies (Schacter 2014; McAuliffe 2012).

To conclude, street art and graffiti are diversified urban practises that enable various social relationships in urban environment. Street art, graffiti and their effects can easily be described as "complex and at times contradictory" (Molnár 2017, 408). Urban art in all its forms is neither a simple nor a stable urban phenomenon. Paintings on the streets connect the artists and the public to each other and to places through different relationships in increasingly privatised cities. There are fewer and fewer public spaces and possibilities for people to interact and to co-create their urban environments, and there are areas in which people no longer feel they belong due to rapid changes in urban space. Street art and graffiti have enabled a new sense of belonging in the cities especially to the artists, who interact in the city in a very "physical" manner (Schacter 2008, 41). When the artists paint in the cities, they attach their agencies on different parts of the city, and via that, they do not just *act* in the city: their agencies also become *part* of the city.

The increasing audience that follows street art and graffiti can interact and enter various relationships with and through the pieces, which can create sense of belonging in and with the urban environment they live in. The interactive elements and different possible relationships between artworks and the public are emphasized in comparison to the outdoor advertisements, which only aim to convince a passive and uncritical viewer to purchase their product (Borghini et.al. 2010, 117). The street art and graffiti works do not just enable the interactive relationships. By simply existing in the public space, they provoke people to question people's rights to act on and affect the public spaces in the cities.

Despite their increasing popularity – and partially because of that – as well as because of their transgressive nature, street art and graffiti have a unique and conflicting position

in contemporary London. The iconoclastic elements of tagging compared to how city councils and other official actors wish to deal with street art and graffiti demonstrate how certain actors do often not understand the unique nature of street art and graffiti. The ephemerality as an essential part of street art and graffiti scene is generally not recognised: different actors wish to either fossilise or remove the works (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 13). This demonstrates "the fundamental inability of contemporary law to comprehend, much less regulate or protect" urban art (ibid.). Keeping the pieces artificially protected does not fit the spirit of the urban art practises. Tagging and taggers actively fight against said fossilisation: not because they are the type of iconoclast who want to remove the images, but because they want to encourage people to keep on making them more (Latour 2002, 27).

In addition to not comprehending the nature of urban art, neither diversity nor inclusion are apparent in how the city councils in London or other Creative Cities aim to regulate and use street art and graffiti. Only one type of art is celebrated, and the rest is discriminated and not recognised as art. Now, if artworks are indeed, as Gell argues, part of the artist's agency and personhood (1998), the city councils are then actually discriminating the artists, not just their art. There is another issue linked to this. The current official policies allow only one kind of street art: the kind that is pleasing to the most, the type that will not provoke anyone too much (Schacter 2014). The problem with this is that when people try to employ creativity this way, when the aim is to sell a packaged experience that pleases the most and is "safe, secure, and predictable" the unique elements and originality are lost and we are left with "the same generic experience night after night" (Florida 2012, 155). If urban art is restricted this way, it will lose its original allure and the very reason it has become so popular in the first place.

However, even though innovation and creativity may be profitable resources in some instances, they also represent "the excessive, unpredictable, ungovernable elements of urban life" (Cronin 2008, 13). Street art and graffiti appear in and consist of "complex constellation of ever-shifting factors", which laws and policies are unable to grasp (Mulcahy & Flessas 2015, 13). Thus, even though Creative City policies and economic actors have infiltrated into street and graffiti practises, creativity cannot be restricted in a way that street art would turn into nothing but a mere tool for cities' economic growth. By trying to restrict something that is ungovernable by its nature, it is assured that urban

art can remain as a transgressive practise. Illegal but sometimes allowed, increasingly popular yet discriminated, street art and graffiti are ambivalent urban phenomena that can create various relationships and sense of belonging in increasingly privatised cities.

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