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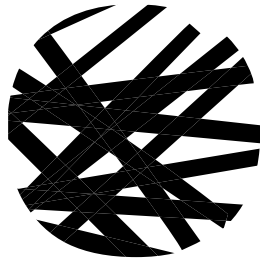
Graffiti,
Street Art &

**Urban Creativity
Scientific Journal**

Emergence of Studies

Vol. 6 / N° 2

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Pedro Soares Neves

Executive committee

SAUC Scientific Journal Editor

We place here in discussion the maturity of the academic and pedagogical field that graffiti, urban and street art, urban creativity constitute. It's in fact identified a consistency of knowledge and structure of thought in the several disciplinary areas.

As we are convinced that this trend will continue in multiple forms including experimental ones bridging theory and practice, here's the result of the invite for participation in this reflection.

Here is also combined the conference outcomes. There were two main results to achieve during the dialogues of the 2020 online conference.

One was to observe the maturity of the academic and pedagogical field that graffiti, urban and street art, well, urban creativity in general have. On the 2020 conference was in fact proven that the consistency of knowledge and structure of thought in the several disciplinary areas regarding the urban creativity topics, are giving way to multiple approaches to classes integrated in master courses, informing the teaching of art historians, the work of designers, and research of cognitive scientists and educators. It was evident that this trend will continue in multiple forms including experimental ones bridging theory and practice, sometimes inverting the role of researchers and authors, but always enlarging audiences, practitioners and studios.

The second main result was to observe how the relation evolved between UX and Urban Creativity topics, and the result was fantastic. This observations originated one article that will be published on the UXUC Journal.

Urban Creativity User Experience Online Conference 9, 10 and 11 July 2020, 31 presenters 99, participants per day average (full capacity).

Closing panel with Henry Chalfant, Jim Prigoff, Susan Farell and John Fekner.

With contributions from Australia, France, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Austria, USA, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, England, Spain, Japan, China, Russia and Portugal.

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Contact and information

info@urbancreativity.org
Urbancreativity.org

Why Can't Banksy Be a Woman? The Gendering of Graffiti and Street Art Studies

Sofia Pinto

PhD candidate, Universidade Católica Portuguesa - University of Copenhagen
email: sofiarodpinto@gmail.com

Abstract

In this article, the question 'Why Can't Banksy Be a Woman' is a point of departure to approach some of the pressing challenges regarding sex and gender in graffiti and street art studies, in order to contribute on the matter of the presence/absence of women graffiti and street artists in this epistemological field. To this aim, I summon feminist contributions on the invisibility of women in the established art world, namely from art historians Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock. I map important contributions on the question of women in graffiti, by referring to graffiti scholars Nancy MacDonald and Jessica Pábon-Cólon. As street art has been considered more gender inclusive in regards to conditions of production, I locate restrictions mainly in terms of reception. Finally, I suggest that the question of women in graffiti and street art studies is larger than sex and gender.

Keywords: Women, Feminism, Graffiti, Street Art, Production, Reception.

1. Introduction: Whose voice?

Graffiti and street art studies have focused on the transgressive and subversive potential of these urban expressions, which largely derive from their unsanctioned and self-authorized nature (Bengtson 2013; Blanché, 2015). By establishing their own authority in the city (Iveson, 2017), graffiti and street art reject established urban conventions and invent their own. In this disruptive process of normativity and urban regulations, graffiti and street art are able to generate new meanings, make power relations visible in the city, and give voice to the voiceless. Banksy once wrote: "Graffiti has been used to start revolutions, stop wars and generally is the voice of people who aren't listened to" (Banksy, 2001: n.p.).

However, less often present in graffiti and street art studies, is a reflection and/or investigation about whose voice is made audible, which, as I shall argue, is often presumed to be male-authored. Graffiti and street art may well be masculine dominated fields, but the perpetuation of such assumptions in research solidifies a male-centered

experience that is already a feature of these expressions. Therefore, this article is not about Banksy, or rather, this article extends well beyond Banksy's voice: it focuses on the myriad of ways women are silenced in research, in particular in graffiti and street art studies.

2. The Gendering of Graffiti

To begin with, I suggest to look at to how the [his]story goes: in the early days - invariably located in the late 1960s throughout the decade of 1970s first in Philadelphia but mainly in New York, USA - the ground-breaking graffiti subculture began to established itself as such by a legion of young boys eager to leave their mark in the urban landscape. In the competitive pursuit of fame, male game-changers such as Cornbread, Taki 183, Phase 2, or Futura, left their mark and are invariably mentioned among the names that generated the graffiti movement, as we know it (Stewart, 2009).

In terms of sex and gender, Jack Stewart, one of the first art historians interested in the documentation and historiography of graffiti, was able to map an impressive

number of 120 female writers in New York City during the golden age of graffiti in the 1970s (Stewart, 2009). But, as Jacob Kimvall points out, “considering the total amount of almost 3000 names and that the vast ungendered category seems to be male, Stewart is perhaps, contrary to his own intentions, more successful in pointing out an extreme domination of males than the contrary” (Kimvall, 2015: 67).

It follows that, in terms of historiography, when girls and women graffiti and street artists are mentioned, they are consistently considered an exception, as the following statements from graffiti and street art scholars illustrate: “Women have been involved in graffiti and street art from the beginning, but in fewer numbers than men” (Mattern, 2016: 84); “Although a minority, women have participated in writing culture since the beginning” (Snyder, 2016: 207); “Young women were always in the minority among [graffiti] writers, although several gained citywide fame during the early 1970s” (Austin, 2001: 59). Even when mentioned, women in graffiti are associated with an exceptional status or, as great graffiti artist Lady Pink one described, they are taken as tokens, which arguably further undermines their relevance (Lady Pink, 1992).

That the graffiti culture has been, since its burgeoning days, a male-dominated field is, whilst a well-established discourse, an oversimplification. More than a question of number, looking at the names that got inscribed for posterity, women are yet again missing from the picture. Indeed, according to American scholar Jessica Pábon-Cólon, women graffiti [and street] artists “are not absent from graffiti studies simply because there are ‘not as many women writers’ – the standard rationale – but because the lens, or the conventional way of seeing, renders them and their contribution illegible, invisible” (Pábon-Cólon, 2018: 9). Concomitantly in the fine arts, art historian Nanette Salomon contended that women artists are not simply omitted, they are dismissed and considered exceptions when present, which may contribute to a devaluation of their contributions (Salomon, 1991).

In this way, the male-centered perspective in research was also “reproduced throughout the graffiti studies canon” (Pábon-Cólon, 2018: 7). Regarding the academic field of subcultures, cultural theorists Angela McRobbie and Jenny

Garber were the first scholars to point out in 1977 that research on that field centred on the experience of men, neglecting the question of women. McRobbie and Garber raised four questions that are likewise relevant to the subculture of graffiti: 1) Are girls and women really absent from subcultures?; 2) Are girls and women present but invisible?; 3) When girls and women are visible, what are their roles and do these reflect the general subordination of women in culture?; and 4) Do girls and women have alternative ways of organising their cultural life (McRobbie & Garber, 2006) ?

Taking McRobbie and Garber’s cues, Pábon-Cólon has demonstrated that not only girls and women are not absent from the subculture of graffiti, they have been present from its inception. It may be true that women have been outnumbered by male peers, but female’s contribution has been undermined and made invisible over time (Pábon, 2014). On the remaining questions, Pábon-Cólon has investigated the alternative ways girls and women organize their graffiti subcultural life, namely by resorting to solidarity and unity in all-female groupings and crews and to other resources such as the Internet (Pábon, 2013; Pábon-Cólon, 2018).

The importance of the collective for girls and women graffiti writers contrasts with a reading of graffiti as an individualistic subculture when looked from an ungendered perspective. For instance, Ricardo Campos elaborates convincing arguments as to approach the graffiti writer as a superhero since, from his ethnographic findings, “these young people tend to fabricate a somewhat romantic representation of the archetypical graffiti writer (the ‘King’) as a sort of superhero, one with superhuman abilities” (Campos, 2012: 160). However, the notion of hero itself is socially filled with masculine overtones, which reflects the view of Campos’s informants in this particular study, mostly male graffiti writers. As a matter of fact, the very category of ‘king’ – which in the graffiti jargon designates a person who has proven her skills, talent, and mastery, being above ‘toys’, who are beginners or mediocre graffiti writers – reveals a hierarchical structure that does not necessarily encompass or serve the experience of girls and women in the graffiti subculture.

Furthermore, Pábon-Cólon has argued that girls and women in the graffiti subculture redefine the social roles of sex and gender, displaying a *feminist masculinity* – a femininity that is not [just] the opposite of masculinity, but rather expresses a more complex range of gender performativity (Pábon-Cólon, 2018). An expression of the latter is the reaffirmation of femininity markers – such as the subversion of the dress-code by using dresses – by women graffiti writers in their subcultural life, thus standing out, refusing to blend in, and dismissing the motto that graffiti is ‘something for the boys’, to paraphrase Nancy MacDonald’s 2016 article title.

In her seminal ethnographic work, Nancy MacDonald has inquired the gendered nature of graffiti. Her findings attest that this subculture has been used as a tool for the construction of masculinity and manhood, through the competitive interplay of peers in terms of risk and fame, ultimately proving one’s courage and strength. As a result, female participation is considered an intrusion and even a threat, and is regarded with hostility, being sexualized or underestimated (MacDonald, 2001). Therefore, in the graffiti world, “[c]onventional sex roles and the pressures of heterosexuality are not escaped, [...] they are reproduced and reinforced” (*ibidem*: 139). Indeed, while graffiti is known to reject conventional paradigms of urban authority and regulation, this subcultural practice paradoxically may render normative views on sex and gender.

3. The Gendering of Street Art

Whereas street art has largely escaped a gendered scrutiny so far, graffiti as a masculinist and heteronormative subculture has been investigated, albeit sporadically. Despite the lack of consensus on the debate on the boundaries between graffiti and street art, whose discursive formations overlap (Kimvall, 2015), street art has been considered a more gender-inclusive artistic expression. Reasons include the fact that street art is less related with the assertion of masculinity; that the diverse techniques (posters, stickers, stencils) may be prepared at home and easily disseminated without requiring a permanent presence in the streets; and that street art entertains a smoother relation with the authorities, being generally more accepted and considered less deviant.

Thus, the conditions of production of street art are considered more benevolent than those of graffiti – coinciding with a gendered experience of the urban space whereby women are more vulnerable, and with the perpetuation of patriarchal and heteronormative standards by misogynist peers. Since art making does not take place in a void, conditions of production do reflect social norms, values, and beliefs, that actively shape (or even constrain) artistic creation. Recently, Malin Fransberg has explored the unresolved distinction between graffiti and street art and its gendered implications, having concluded that it is “not adequate to study women in street art and graffiti as one *united* group, as they negotiate their structural positions and subvert and negotiate gender regimes through different strategies, and from different locations” (Fransberg, 2019: 501, emphasis in the original). The differentiation between graffiti and street art generates, accordingly, a different relation to sex and gender.

As street art is considered a more socially accepted expression, which has increasingly been more institutionalized in recent years, it can be argued that previous feminist perspectives from the established art world may shed light into the matter of gender bias in regard to the street art. To be sure, street art establishes itself from its system of production, distribution, and consumption – what can be named *the street art world* (Bengtson, 2014) – and the question of the invisibility of women has to be defined in its own terms. Nevertheless, the problem of the invisibility of women artists is not specific to street art studies. Rather, it has consistently permeated other fields of knowledge and practices, such as visual arts and the fine arts, for which feminist contributions have been pivotal, such as art historians Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock.

An intersecting challenge in the street art world and the established world of fine arts is the curation of artists. The curatorial practices of institutions, public and private, have long been a concern among feminist views in the art world. On the one hand, women artists still lack recognition, and, on the other, they are regarded with a problematic visibility such as the featuring of all-women exhibitions – a strategy that has been criticized as a way to pigeonhole the artistic production of women (Hayden & Skrubbe, 2010). As art historians Malin Hayden and Jessica S. Skrubbe argue:

If one considers the art world as a gender-biased system, hence an ideologically charged system, [...] discriminations of e.g. women artists are rather to be dismantled by analysis of cultural, aesthetic, political, economic, and social power structures and valuations rather than to think and argue from a position that claims that women, artists or not, are essentially different from men (artists) (Hayden & Skrubbe, 2010: 56-57).

Similarly, one may ask: Are women street artists represented as much as men in festivals and other similar street art events? Are they rewarded equally and have equal visibility? Social movements, such as AMMuRA² in Argentina, suggest that women street artists may be subjected to gender-bias from organizations, which namely assume that women are less able to achieve monumental murals due to prejudices about strength and physical height. As a result, women street artist end up, in such cases, being less invited, rewarded lower remunerations, and attributed smaller sites and surfaces than their male peers (AMMuRA, personal communication³, July 18, 2019).

One of AMMuRA's campaign image depicts a woman artist wearing a wolf mask on a yellow background next to a gender-gap revealing statistics⁴, clearly making a street art take on Guerrilla's Girls famous activist posters (AMMuRA, 2018, August 31). Fighting to make visible sexism and racism in the established art world since 1984, Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous collective that use pseudonyms (Guerrilla Girls, n.d.). This concealing of identity as an effective strategy to elude retaliations from the authorities is particularly useful in self-authorized practices in the urban landscape, such as unsanctioned graffiti and street art. In this vein, renowned street artist Banksy has made anonymity his/her face value. Propelled into fame, Banksy's name is currently a brand that draws on the contradictions of street art, on "its simultaneous reliance on both a kind of 'dangerous' street cred and its insistence on sustaining a 'legitimate' place in contemporary culture", gaining currency in galleries, auctions houses, (Banet-Weiser, 2011: 646), and Instagram followers.

Notwithstanding, anonymity can also be a disputed site of gender-bias from the point of view of audiences. Indeed, one challenge to the visibility of women graffiti and street artists at reception end is the fact that, without a clear identity marker, graffiti and street art works are assumed to result from men to the viewer (Pábon, 2016). As a result, women graffiti and street artists deploy different strategies when wanting to make their sex and gender acknowledged while maintaining anonymity, such as the use of pseudonyms, colors, or adornments socially associated with femininity in their works on the streets. Anonymity and pseudonymity acquire, then, different meanings according to gender.

On the opposite side of anonymity and pseudonymity lays fame and recognition, which access may also be restricted according to gendered systems of artistic valuation. Due to gender-based restrictions, the use of male-connoted pseudonyms was not uncommon for women to gain access literary world as authors in the nineteenth century. It may seem displaced to mention here the literary patriarchal canon that has excluded women authors and the strategies used by the latter but, as pointed out by Seán Burke, "[i]t would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the struggles of feminism has been primarily a struggle for authorship – understood in the widest sense as the arena in which culture attempts to define itself" (Burke, 1995: 145).

For this reason, and coming back to Banksy, it does not matter if s/he is a man or a woman – the latter hypothesis having been raised with dubious arguments, such as his/her work being "feminine", a very debatable notion based on the idea that women artists create differently than men⁵ (Capps, 2014). What matters are the immediate readings from the viewer that may assume an anonymous graffiti and street artwork to be produced by a male artist. If, as Linda Nochlin has long suggested, the 'Artist' is generally assumed to be male, upper-class, white, and heterosexual, such natural assumptions should be questioned and challenged in art history and, I would add, in any academic field in which I include graffiti and street art studies (Nochlin, 2015 [1971]).

4. Conclusions

The question of gender in graffiti and street art studies has been so far largely raised in terms of the identity of the producers and conditions of production in the urban landscape. Less present from the discussion are issues related with consumption and reception, which may be particularly relevant in terms of epistemological knowledge. Away from production, at the far end of reception, is the role not only of curators, critics, and audiences of graffiti and street art, but also academics, historians, and researchers. In terms of research, considering graffiti and street art as practices nuanced by sex and gender, several questions are yet to be answered: What are the challenges or gender-bias of the specific epistemological field of graffiti and street studies? How can we prevent the gender axis of research to be overlooked in graffiti and street art studies, and to minimize the risk of making women, yet again, invisible?

Taking into account that there is no neutral system, no neutral knowledge, and no neutral point of view, that conventions and assumptions are continuously building on each other, to challenge sex and gender in graffiti and street art studies is to open way to other questions, not only in terms of social categories, but also of the Western and/or Anglophone-centrality in knowledge production. As feminist art historian Griselda Pollock once argued:

Demanding that women be considered not only changes what is studied and what becomes relevant to investigate but it challenges the existing disciplines politically. Women have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structural sexism of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy (Pollock, 2003: 1).

In conclusion, the question of women in graffiti and street art studies – as the question of women in other fields of knowledge – goes therefore well beyond sex and gender.

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Footnotes

1. Her earlier works are signed as *Jessica Pábon* while more recent are authored as *Jessica Pábon-Cólon*.
2. AMMurA stands for *Agrupación Mujeres Muralistas de Argentina* (Association of Women Muralists in Argentina, my translation).
3. E-mail correspondence.
4. The statistics reveal that “90% of commissioned murals in festivals in Buenos Aires are made by male artists, also the only ones who are invited more than once. Moreover, they paint bigger murals and are better paid”, my translation from the original: “El 90% de los murales en festivales del GCBA fueron realizados por varones. Siendo los únicos que repitieron participación. Pintando los muros más grandes y, por lo tanto, mejor remunerados”.
5. This hypothesis is elaborated according to the following argument: “The savvy manipulation of media to make viral art, to make art about virality, makes Banksy an innovator breaking out of a familiar form. In contemporary art today, that’s a feminine trait: The best selfie artists are women, for example. So are the artists leading the Post-Internet art world” (Capps, 2014: n.p.).

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On Urban Creativity in Argentina Over Time: The Need for Locally Contextualized Studies

Laura dos Santos

Independent researcher - La Plata, Argentina

lalysds@gmail.com

Abstract

Argentinian academic research on urban creativity is not recent. Since the 1960s, the area has developed through a combination of different disciplines and perspectives. However, the arrival of the New York Style Graffiti Writing in the 1990s marked a shift in the field, in as much as it brought new artistic practices and, simultaneously, new research on them. These changes were fertile ground for generating new theoretical frameworks. Considering these facts altogether, the field is now in a complex juncture: on the one hand, several new artistic practices have proliferated and continue to do so, and on the other hand, perspectives through which these practices are studied also emerge. The result is a heterogeneous field of practices and frameworks.

In this piece, we examine the way in which studies on graffiti and urban art emerged in Argentina -reshaping frameworks that used to be prevalent in the study of urban creativity. We also show a thread that has continued over time, even though it has been reshaped and reconstructed as a result of the dialogues with different perspectives and practices from other geographies.

Keywords: graffiti, urban creativity, street art, pintadas, public writing

1. Mapping Traditions

If we visualize current research on urban creativity in Argentina as a line or thread over time, we find that research on street art is not recent, yet it is still relatively scarce and not systematized as of yet. Specifically, if we compare the Argentinean situation with that of other countries, several differences emerge. First, in Argentina there was a gradual onset of the Graffiti movement, as opposed to a sharp and fast development in other geographies (Figuroa-Saavedra, 2006). Second, the rapid course the Argentinian scene has experienced in only a few years (dos Santos, 2019) can be interpreted as part of a cross-generative set of relationships established during the 1990s and beyond, due to the fact that several different artist-collectives sustained their work over time and were able to make visible these new (at that point) practices. Taking these two issues into account, we mapped local practices as they are understood by several different authors in their cultural, economic, political and geographical context, that is in a g-local

perspective. We identified thus several different categories used over time by authors to describe what people did on city walls, mapping them by identifying the uses of the following terms: *pintadas*, political *pintadas*, signatures and self affirmative graffiti, political graffiti, clever inscription graffiti, football/ skaters / music bands graffiti and style writing. There is a mark in time, around the end of the 1960's and beginnings of the 1970's, where spray paint starts to be used. This technique introduces changes in the ways visuals, inscriptions and statements are made on the walls, and therefore it is taken as an important mark in time. In an earlier piece, we had identified and examined the different traditions that co-exist and influence each other (dos Santos, 2019).

A map that can explain some of those ongoing traditions since 1840, may look like this:

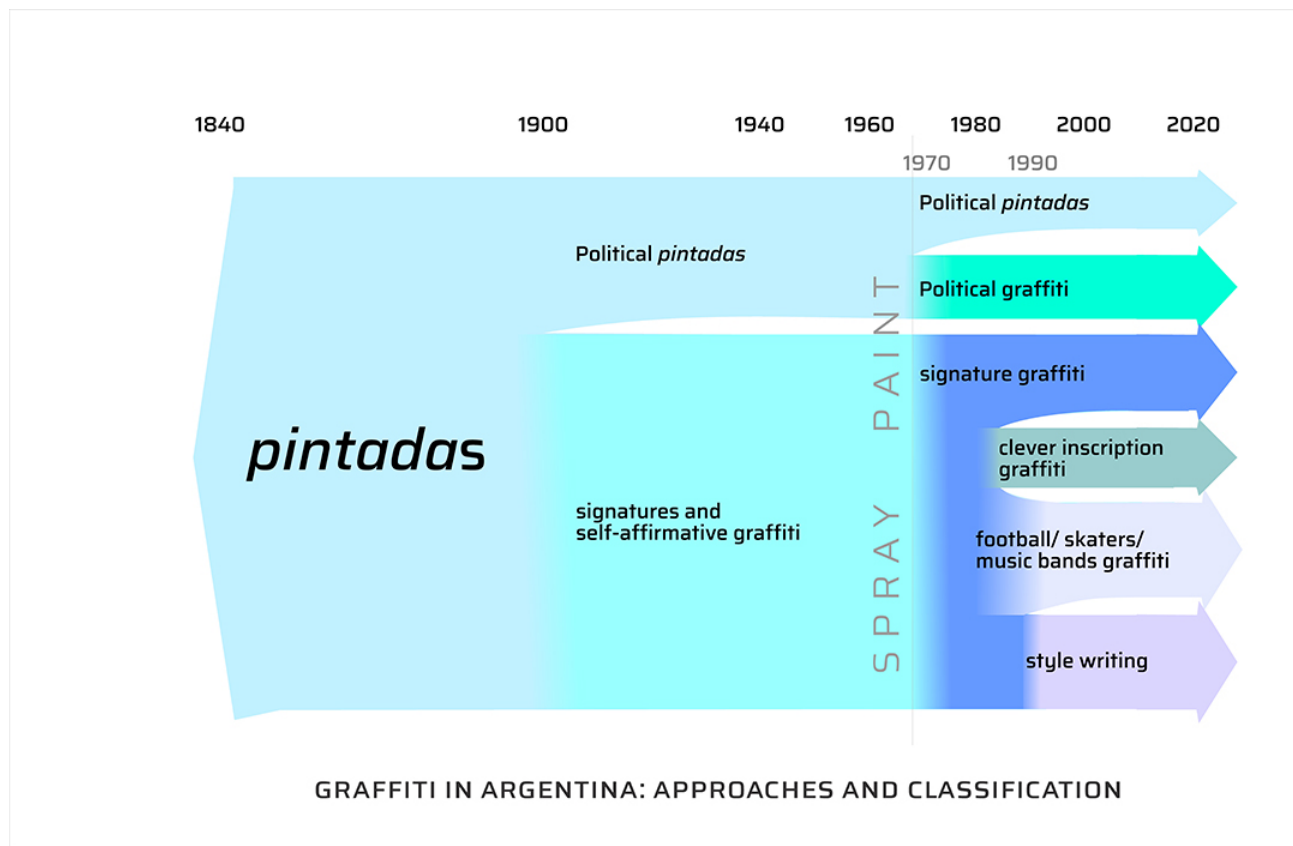


Fig. 1 – mapping traditions of public space inscriptions in Argentina since 1840

People made public space inscriptions -not only but especially- by hand and with paint. These forms of expression received the name *Pintadas* (literally, “painted”), and they’re political slogans or signatures on the wall.

2. Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Models before the Graffiti of the 1980s

2.1 The practice of graffiti before becoming “Graffiti”: Signatures and other records

We start by highlighting that different forms of signature graffiti have been present in our local context, at least since the 19th century. Such practices express a sense of belonging and a mark of identity, also related to self-affirmation and ties to the territories the artists inhabit, constructing them “as their own” through their signatures. Public writing has always taken place in our geography, as documented by Fernando Figueroa-Saavedra (2006) who has coined the expression of “native graffiti”.

For a long time in Argentina, writings and drawings on walls and other surfaces were considered deviant and obscene behavior, typical of children and/or uneducated people. Such testimonies, however, “claim(ed) for themselves a place in the world of the expressible” (Montero Cartelle, 1990) and over time interest in them as a cultural expression emerged. The interest of the local academy was informed by curiosity for popular/subaltern culture and what lies outside the social norm, and consequently, wall painting and proto-graffiti were chosen as objects of study, from a folkloric and anthropological perspective (Chicote and García, 2009). This field of study considered graffiti to be epigraphy or *latrinalia*. Inscriptions were made by carving, chalk, coal and especially with brush and paint (See Figure 2).

This line of research focused on wall writing as a type of statement, close to the point of view that linguists would take in studying what is being said. Their orientation was thus close to linguistics, and these perspectives emerge

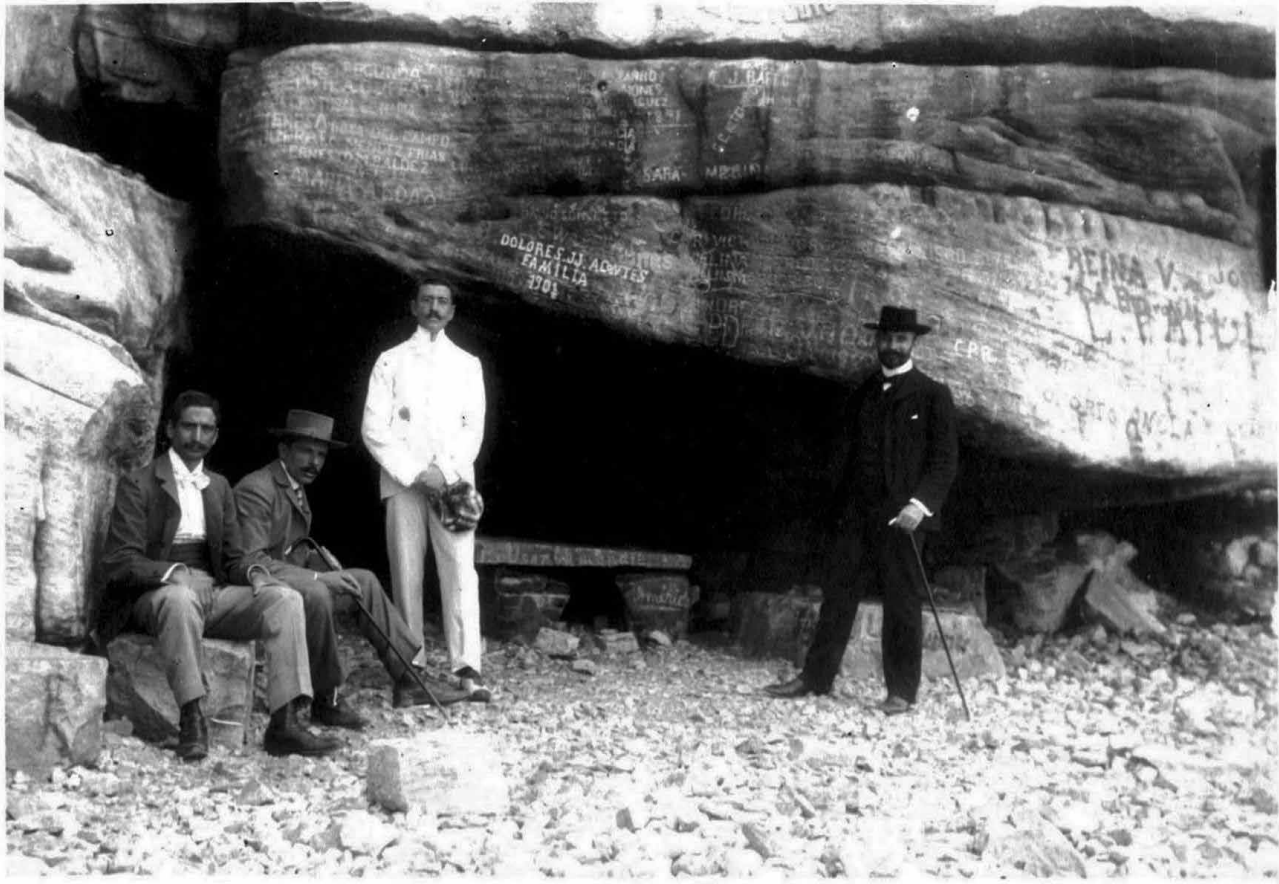


Fig.2- Signatures in landscapes, Egaña's grotto, 1910. Photocredit: Pablo Javier Junco. Source: <http://fotosviejasdemardelplata.blogspot.com/2018/05/la-gruta-de-egana.html>

in the first half of the 20th century in the area of el Río de la Plata. For example, the German anthropologist Robert Lehmann-Nitsche published in the 1920s a volume dedicated to erotic wall texts ("sicalípticos") that he collected in brothels and bars in the port area of La Plata, Buenos Aires province (Lehmann-Nitsche [1923] as cited by Víctor Borde 1981).

These early studies show that writing practices are rooted in the Argentine culture, and their most common traits are the signing of one's name on interior public spaces (bathrooms, schools, public buildings, and also prisons) and open spaces (for example, stones and trees on tourist sites), the writing of statements in regards to issues of the contemporary society, or the writing of jokes, puns and even sexual statements. These practices have survived as they were documented in some texts, both compiled and transcribed, or described, as parts of the urban landscape (Kozak, 2004).

However, and over time, political graffiti was also the best means to give voice to popular or dissident sectors that otherwise wouldn't have been heard. Argentina's political activity has always been intense, given the constant back and forth between democratic and authoritarian regimes in its history as a nation (Chaffee, 1993), and graffiti, wall painting and posters or signs are a tradition in our country.

2.2 From Political Writing to Self-affirmation

As documented by Chaffee (1993) and Kozak (2004), walls were arenas for conflict during the 19th century. Additionally, the signature graffiti (and its various subtypes) coexisted with another type of wall painting known as "pintada" (Gándara, 2002; Kozak, 2004 and 2009). *Pintada* soon turns to refer to explicit socio-political matters, and it is often combined with other practices such as painting murals or crafting signs and posters. Therefore, we find evidence that wall painting, signature graffiti, posters, and



Fig.3 - Historical *Pintadas* [political graffiti] from the Resistencia Peronista, circa 1974. Photo credit: Alfredo Alonso. Source: Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas (CeDInCI) <http://imagenes.cedinci.org/index.php/pintada-de-la-juventud-universitaria-peronista-2>

signs are all native, local traditions in Argentina, which have been labeled by the people who produce them: *pintadas*, *afiches*, *murales*. *This terms are deeply rooted in our political traditions and are still used in the present.*

During the proscription of Peronism and in late 1972 (when Juan Domingo Perón was preparing his return from exile), “pintadas” were widespread and considered of great importance. The inscriptions made by the “Peronist Resistance” survived through literature, almost as archetypes, reenacting events featured in the testimonies of those militants who, during the night, risked their lives for their ideals (Viale, 1973). Mythical slogans such as “Luche y Vuelve” [If we fight, he (our leader) will return] remain in the collective imagination through constant re-appropriation: “Painted on the walls as the most synthetic expression of the movement, the ‘VP’ became the foremost symbol of the resistance for more than twenty years” (Salas, 1994).

These historical *pintadas* are interesting because their format became a model for the “inscription” graffiti (“graffiti de leyenda”) of the 1980s (Kozak, 2004), that parodies and recovers it as a discursive form: although inscription graffiti can include political themes, it stands apart from “pintada” because it lacks partisan ideological support and is not carried out spontaneously. In any case, we agree with Kozak when she states that graffiti is always a “political language”, but one outside of political-party institutions.

These productions have been studied as manifestations of popular ideas and thoughts, records of times of political and social effervescence, on the one hand, and on the other hand, as records of daily thoughts, snippets of reality and humorous comments on daily matters. More recently, fields other than anthropology and folklore-studies have started to pay attention to these phenomena (Armando Silva, [1992] 2006; from a sociological framework or Lelia Gandara, 2002; from a semiotic perspective, for instance).



Fig.4 - Contemporary political *Pintada*. Candidate's name in big letters, with the TWC Crew tag [a local crew] painted over. We can read "Guille ESCUDERO" candidate for City Major (La Plata, 2020). Photo: Laura dos Santos

2.3 Contemporary *pintadas* and political graffiti

Contemporary political graffiti coexists with other types of inscriptions and wall painting, as we already stated. However, it is often considered to be no different from the *pintadas*. In taking a closer look, we can identify characteristics that will allow us to establish a distinct category. For example, the "*pintadas*" are in support of a partisan political praxis, they are structured in specific ways, they are produced by organized brigades, supported by the political party who is stating a message, the materials are bought by these parties, and they may be also a part of a larger political action, for example, a mobilization, a march, a rally or a street-boycott. In other occasions, *pintadas* are used to dispute a geographical point with other parties or with the armed forces or the police. They are furtive actions, done mostly at night, to make a statement and leave a trace in a specific territory.

Political graffiti is used by several different people to express their personal beliefs. They may or may not be linked to a political party (usually they are not, at least not explicitly), and they are related to issues being discussed

in society. For example, matters as legalizing abortion, the cruelty of poverty for certain sectors of the population, or themes related to social justice, are some of the topics displayed.

The political graffiti practices are also related to what we have called the "clever" inscription typology, in as much as these may refer to similar topics. The difference is that "clever" inscriptions usually make a pun on words, and use humor, many a time sarcastic humor, to call the readers' and viewers' attention.

Both the *pintada* and the political graffiti involve painting the names of public office candidates, so as to advertise them and also to *mark* territories, as land marks and limits wherein parties are constructing a political communicative strategy. Both the *pintada* and political graffiti were originally made by activists (so called *militantes* in Argentina) in order to establish their ideological presence within the city. Today, "professionals" carry out this work, and are even hired by political parties (Caminos, 2015; Sued, and Rodríguez Niell, 2011).

There is a special form of *pintada* which is made with brushes and lime-based paints and pigments, in large print letters filled with the colors of the political group. They generally have great dimensions and are accompanied by political and partisan posters on the walls, another common political practice. It is usually signed by a group that identifies multiple individuals, and frequently involves the use of nicknames such as “Patita” (little foot), “Tu trosko favorito” (“your favorite Trotskyist”), which signal the faction that is “positioning” the candidate, or the group that has completed “the job”.

In addition to this type of “pintada”, we can still find political-themed writings. They tend to be promoted by political parties that have organized themselves into brigades and spread their messages throughout different neighborhoods in an organized way, but they transcend the contemporary

format of the slogan and giant letter mural. Depending on the socio-political situation, the use of “pintadas” is another way of installing dissent in the public spheres, emphasizing the political situation. Political groups carry out these actions, and they are also traditionally associated with libertarian groups. Anarchism as an ideology is made visible through alternative means of communication, among which graffiti is one of the most important ones. This type of libertarian [anarchist] graffiti is in tune with counterculture and counter-information ideas, so we regard it as a political *praxis* because of both its themes and its methodology.

Following is an example of political graffiti which we do not consider a “pintada”. In this case, we can see the positioning the author is making about their (political) view, but they are not linking their statement to a political party *per se*, nor are they using a political party signature.



Fig. 4 – Anarchist graffiti. We can read “There is a time for everything... Anarchy is now”. There is a signature graffiti also [LECO] (La Plata, 2019). Photo: Laura dos Santos

3. Native graffiti

The term *Graffiti* has appeared in local scientific literature from the beginning of the 20th century, as it was stated above, and originated in the field of paleography. Over time, new practices emerged and thus new perspectives were needed in order to understand and explain them. As practices evolved and proliferated, the term “graffiti” became semantically un-stable insofar as it encompassed divergent types of inscription.

Interest in graffiti throughout different time periods is evident from the variety of approaches to the subject: it is viewed as a means of communication, as an identity and self-expression phenomenon, and more recently, its artistic condition has begun to be acknowledged. As we said, the term was used for a long time in Argentina during the beginning and mid-twentieth century, as a way of referring to testimonial writing. The term “Graffiti”, however, bloomed in the 1980s. In Argentina, at that point in time, the term graffiti started to be used to refer to mural inscriptions made by spray paint. These forms came after the censorship and the repression imposed by the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983, and graffiti was a new practice took up by the youngsters. Walls were the scenario for clever sentences, proverbs, signatures and poetry.

Finally, with the arrival of style writing in 1992, a new global imaginary of Argentinian cities will be configured. Since this practice was transposed from other regions of the world, style writing is spreading in our territory following a globalized model, but it has nonetheless acquired distinctive features (dos Santos, 2019).

Saying “graffiti” in Argentina does not denote the same that it denotes in other countries, which is why tracing a local, native history of the term and its application to creative activities, becomes crucial. This piece is an attempt to stabilize these local aspects and characterize them. We argue that this is one of the reasons why we can speak about “native” and “local” Argentinean graffiti.

3.1 Is it possible to speak of a “native” Latin American graffiti model?

We have pointed out the political nature of graffiti; local theoretical models ascribe it to a combination of two long-standing traditions and practices: the writing of dissident

messages on the walls and partisan political advertising. Silva, the Colombian semiologist, has been studying graffiti and he is an unavoidable reference (Silva, 1987; [1992] 2006). His interpretation for Latin American graffiti is that locally it is marked by a legacy of protest and dissent from abroad, and also deeply rooted in local practices, in as much as his work lies in situating the studies of graffiti on a broad semiotic analysis, and thus he is careful in understanding the situated nature of the communicative network in which these texts are produced, circulated, are read and interpreted. A pioneer in the study of graffiti in the region, he proposed an intermediate option between the two other great models or paradigms: the Parisian graffiti of May 68 (or European model) and New York/style writing (or American model). For Latin American, Silva considers graffiti as a literary genre that draws from both high literature and popular orality, as a result of a middle-class well educated young generation that claims the streets in post- dictatorship (Silva, 2006). Hence, he states that although pictorial murals could be found Latin America, a tradition similar to New York graffiti did not exist, at least in terms of *style writing*.

It should be noted that in his research, developed outside folk or literary studies standards, questions regarding context become important because graffiti are placed within the socio-historical context. The statement that “we are living through the third great moment of Latin American graffiti” applies to Argentina, where such practices boomed after the last dictatorship. Latin America’s political activism and social movements have always been characterized by visibility, and graffiti contributes to these as an important medium for expressing advocacy and spreading of ideas. Silva aimed to study graffiti within literary structures, and even though style writing is writing, he regarded it as distinct from texts (Silva, 1989).

It can be agreed that Argentina is part of the aforementioned third great moment yet it is necessary to understand that differences in graffiti writing practices call for specific, local studies. In accordance, our country has witnessed the rise of what has been called “graffiti de leyenda (ingeniosa)” [clever inscription graffiti], in which humorous statements as well as artistic forms are key elements and stand apart of the model of political, Parisian- like graffiti . In order to interpret these inscriptions, one must know the local

interpretative keys, because otherwise the meaning is lost. This is another reason why the study of local graffiti and *pintada* practices is needed, because it entails not only the study of what is said, or how the image is crafted, but what is the context for interpreting the messages and what are the range of keys for making sense of them.

3.2 Native “clever inscription” graffiti and signature

In the mid-1980s, a specific type of mural writing was gaining importance and differed widely from militant practices: it was called graffiti (plural ‘graffitis’) and became popular in Argentina (Kozak, 2004). They were mural interventions that shared some features with New York graffiti writing, such as the use of spray paint, anonymity (due to their illegal roots), and a sense of playfulness and identity/self-affirmation regarding young people.

It should be noted that signature graffiti was also practiced in our territory, although it did not display stylistic issues or generate competitive games like it did in North American graffiti of the time. This activity was deemed to take place outside of political communication, which is why it was referred to as graffiti, reserving the term “*pintada*” for partisan mural writing (Kozak, 2009), and it was associated with the use of spray paint. This was confusing given that many political slogans were done in spray paint and anonymously (Rodríguez, 2017). The difference is, overall, semantic and sometimes its limits are very much blurred. Again, this is another important reason why local, native forms of graffiti and *pintadas*, murales and posters, should be carefully identified, documented, studied and interpreted. Given the relevance of all these different practices, the term graffiti possibly emerged in a time of academic interest on the subject-matter, trying to establish an overall concept



Fig. 6 - Native graffiti. “Clever sayings” [“Dying is not the issue; what is sad is to live in Argentina”] circa 1980. Source: <http://r2003graffiti.blogspot.com/2008/10/borrador-1-de-historia-nacional.html>

that would allow the building of a theoretical framework, emergent at the time. The profusion of this activity made a trend out of signature graffiti and clever sayings, which is why it is possible that, as with New York style writing, the media used scholarly terminology to refer to practices that differed from the old political 'pintadas' (dos Santos, 2019).

During the post-dictatorship period, the public sphere recovered freedom of speech. In this context, graffiti became a symptom of the need (and right) for expression that previously repressed sectors (mainly young people and teenagers) re-claimed for themselves. Painting, alongside with signing, became widespread as a means for reinforcing singular subjectivity and identifying personal spaces. Punk/rock movements were very involved in this practice (Vila, 1985) for example, and they mostly marked young people's socializing places, such as bedrooms, neighborhood corners, or skateboard parks, which were fully spray painted with personal names or band names. This practice was applied to personal school supplies, and afterwards schools became areas of intense graffiti activity (generally in bathrooms and other places outside the realm of adult control). Signatures (names and music bands) were predominant in Argentinian graffiti for a long time, rooted in our urban imaginary as the inscriptions that allowed a youthful and rebellious universe to circulate before the arrival of New York writing. It expanded the culture of the young population, who implemented advertising strategies in order to spread their counter-message. The genre had very close ties to literary modes, such as aphorism, quotes and rock poetry (Kozak, 2004).

The interest in the matter is evident from the translation of graffiti compilations edited by American historian Robert Reisner. This material came from his fieldwork (1967-1974) and it was translated into Spanish and published in 1971 and 1972. Its circulation was wide, even though grasping all the meanings was difficult due to translation mishaps. This compilation created an important precedent: later on, many collections of transcribed graffiti were published. All of them list clever sayings; unfortunately, they show no visual documentation. Such materials were created for a non-specialized public. Wall-less graffiti is reduced to mere phrases and aphorisms from popular and local humorous literature.

Some years after Armando Silva developed his theory about graffiti, specialists Claudia Kozak and Lelia Gándara began to do it in the Argentinian context. Kozak thought of different "ways of reading the city" in terms of "expanded literature" and edited a compilation of graffiti that included visual evidence. Kozak understands that graffiti is mostly a youth practice that exposes the symbolic spheres of interest of the young: rock, soccer, television, games, and consumption habits. She also characterized it as an activity of self-affirmation, bonding, and anonymous expression that enables the subversion of certain social codes. Ultimately, and unlike political 'pintadas', graffiti is a personal way of expressing dissent and placing a direct message, delimiting territories of identity, and of course, making use of word play.

Signature graffiti is contextualized as "youth culture", overlapping with the end of the dictatorship and the return of the democracy that began in 1983, in line with what Armando Silva views as a historical moment of recovery of public space. Although all these spheres of activity are not limited to an age-defined segment of the population, it should be noted that for Kozak the concept of "youth" is not established by biological criteria but rather by cultural ones (Kozak, 2004; Kozak and Martyniuk, 2005).

This practice has become so relevant that both Kozak and Gándara have proposed a new typology that contributes to the field (given its degree of development and its insertion in the popular imagination, and because its practitioners are organized into groups): Kozak calls it "graffiti de leyenda (ingeniosa)" [(clever) inscription graffiti]; it had its "golden age" in the mid-1980s.

The emergence of important groups of graffiti artists such as *Los Vergara*, *Fife y Autogestión*, *Bolo Alimenticio*, *La yilé en el Tobogán* and *Secuestro* imposed a new type of graffiti, clever inscription graffiti. Produced by these groups (and sometimes others), it shared several features: they were clever and playful phrases, normally based on facts of public knowledge or in intertextual relation with popular sayings, advertising discourse, or propaganda and political slogans. These phrases ranged from the overtly funny to acidic ironic as a way of political intervention (Kozak, 2004).



Fig. 7 – Style writing. Piece and tags (La Plata, 2018). Photo: Laura dos Santos

Although the quotes of clever inscription graffiti have reached such a level of popularity that they ended up building an autochthonous model of Argentine graffiti, there are intimate or introspective signatures and messages that contrast with gang and soccer graffiti (Ferraresi and Randrup, 2009). That is the case of ‘tumbero’ graffiti (‘tumbero’ is slang for delinquent), which coexists in different neighborhoods and whose presence is a trace of marginality.

In Argentina, the apparition of a New York-style graffiti was already evident in the late 1990s, and researchers began to consider it on the basis of existing theoretical models. As these pieces were hard to read signatures, they tended to be interpreted from a pictorial or artistic point of view. At the intersection of this problem, Gándara proposes: “graffiti may or may not contain written material, as well as it may or may not contain iconic material, but from a semiotic point of view it preserves the traces of that dual expressive quality: that of the verbally written and that of the pictorial, the drawing, the color, and the form” (Gándara, 2002).

4. Some final considerations

Taking into account that our collective imagination has produced models for testimonial writing that precede the practice of style writing, we agree with Figueroa Saavedra (2006) that it is improper to circumscribe and limit the use of the term graffiti to a single subtype. On the other hand, although the word *pintada* was used at the beginning to designate these practices, it was due to the way in which they were carried out: brush by brush, generally with tar. Further, although some inscriptions were also made with coal, chalk and s-graffito, paint prevailed.

In summarizing, the first model for native graffiti is made up of “pintadas”, mostly political but also self-affirmative. The term “graffiti” was specifically introduced in the 1980s after censorship practically eradicated such activities, especially militant ones. The emergence of new forms of mural intervention in spray paint gave rise to a scene with unique characteristics, which received the name “clever inscription graffiti”. Finally, in the mid-1990s, style writing was imported, but it began to cause some friction against the theoretical frameworks that had provided conceptualizations for graffiti practices up until that point. When style writing became widespread, access to a specific bibliography was very limited. Furthermore, seminal texts on the history of New York graffiti could not be consulted until very recently: in an exhaustive examination of the bibliographies of reference works, their absence is felt. This absence is still evident in most academic papers on the subject.

The purpose so far was to link Argentinian style writing with native writing traditions in public spaces, so as to overthrow the preconception of an “isolated”, spontaneous, or local origin of “New York Style” graffiti writing. In parallel, we also traced academic research on current native graffiti scenes, and the need to continue building an interdisciplinary framework to do so.

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Methodological Proposals and Critical Responses for the Study of Graffiti and Street Art: The project StreetArtCEI

Clara Sarmento

Centre for Intercultural Studies

ISCAP – Polytechnic of Porto

clarasarmiento@gmail.com

Abstract

This article describes a on-going research project that blurs the frontiers between dominant and marginal cultures, their social practices, visual symbologies, and aesthetic manifestations, in the unstable space of the city, by discovering, collecting and preserving graffiti and street art works in middle range cities of Northern Portugal. Using the conceptual tools of intercultural studies, StreetArtCEI awakens tourists and inhabitants alike to the symbolic power of self- and hetero-marginalized aesthetical stances, organized by routes that reflect the social-cultural geography of the city. The methodology of the project includes the collection and study of both illegal art works in marginal sites; and of art works ratified and commissioned by private and public institutions, in tourist spots and high-end streets. The article analyses critically the feedback obtained from local authorities, the media and the community, and proposes several topics for further consideration.

StreetartCEI thrives inside of a paradox built by itself, as a public institution led project that, at same time, collects, preserves and legitimizes cultural products which damage public and private property. We highlight the media's interest for the economic potential of the project, as well as for the aesthetic appeal of the artists' techniques, readily transformed into recognized canonical authors. Concerning the reception by local powers, we emphasise their swift investment in the creation of tailor-made local routes of graffiti and street art, that is, in artworks whose deletion those authorities are sponsoring at the same time. This apparent paradox by local institutions reproduces the common need for domestication of irreverence and commodification of the illegal, a paradox that all intervenient actors are aware of. StreetArtCEI's intercultural action takes place in a borderzone between the legal and the illegal, where researchers play the role of mediating agents, creating new discursive fields in permanent intersection.

Introduction

In the fall of 2017, the Centre for Intercultural Studies of the Polytechnic of Porto (CEI, P.PORTO) launched the project StreetArtCEI – Routes of Graffiti and Street Art in Porto and Northern Portugal. Initially, fieldwork in the streets of Porto and other cities and villages of Northern Portugal intended simply to create routes inspired by canonical literary authors who had lived or located their narratives in these territories, currently undergoing a blooming tourism demand. This research was undertaken as part of the project "TheRoute – Tourism and Heritage Routes including Ambient Intelligence with Visitants' Profile Adaptation and Context Awareness", headed by P.PORTO. However, and at the same time, researchers in the field gradually awoke to other visual and polychromous narratives, also inscribed in

the city. As a consequence, the Centre embarked on a parallel project motivated by the unexpected and anonymous art on the city walls. Resorting to the conceptual tools of cultural and intercultural studies, the StreetArtCEI project started to blur the already tenuous frontiers between dominant and marginal cultures, their practices, symbols and aesthetic manifestations, as expressions of site-specific dynamics, in the open, unstable and always ephemeral space of the city. Aware that the concept of intercultural is synonym with movement, communication, and encounter between cultures (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Ibanez & Saenz, 2006; Sarmento, 2010, 2014, 2016; Dervin, Gajardo & Lavanchy, 2011; Holliday, 2011, 2013; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Imbert, 2014), StreetArtCEI was established as a project that awakens visitors and inhabitants to the self-

and hetero-marginalized cultures of graffiti and street art, thus building bridges between communities, scientists, artists and economic agents. In this context, “self- and hetero-marginalized” refers to the label of marginality that both artists and public alike assign to graffiti and street art, deliberately cultivating this identity for different reasons, that range from a conservative attitude towards visual aesthetics and public order to the awareness of how what is seen as irreverent and non-conformist may become profitable and trendy.

StreetArtCEI interacts with artists, authorities and communities, to research under a critical standpoint the experience of the urban territory they inhabit and manage, tackling the effects of urban commodification and gentrification. In fact, in contemporary urban Northern Portugal, tourism is a main factor of socio-economic empowerment, decentralization and development, provided it does not become another factor of gentrification and social segregation, as responses to changing urban identities must be democratic and inclusive. Albeit peripheral, Porto and Northern Portugal are thriving geographical spaces, populated by medium-sized cities,

which epitomize a rich variety of distinct urban narratives. The polysemic visual narratives of graffiti and street art display valuable information about the citizen’s socio-spatial practices, perceptions and concerns. The project’s work methodology, therefore, involves photographing, categorizing and extracting recurrent patterns of graffiti and street art, from which urban routes emerge, not only for the delight of tourists but also – and especially – for the use and development of local communities.

The contemporary intercultural encounter is global and powered by the speed of new technologies; therefore the first output of StreetArtCEI was the construction of an open access database displaying the diversity of graffiti and street art works in Porto, satellite cities and other urban centres of Northern Portugal, organized by routes and Points of Interest (POIs). The website allows for both researchers and the public to observe and understand the messages, characteristics and representations of graffiti and street art, in their perpetual movement, free from the constraints of time, space and power.

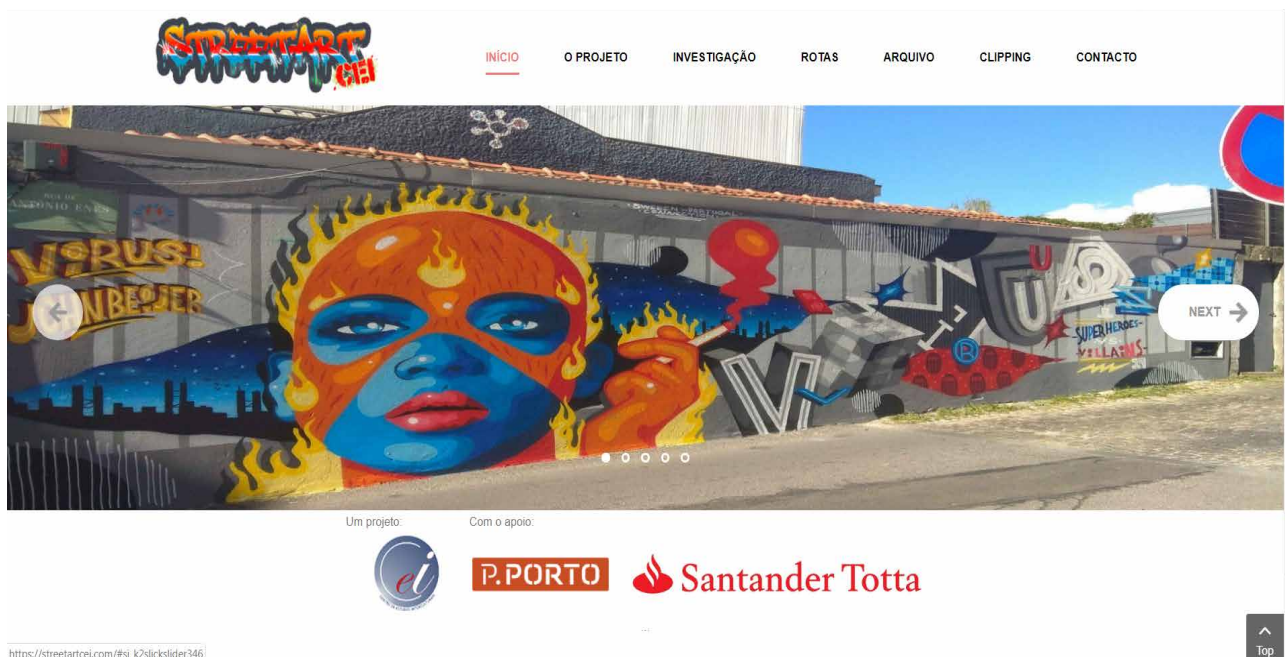


Image 1 – Homepage of the StreetArtCEI project website.

Along the routes displayed at the StreetArtCEI project website – www.streetartcei.com – works are selected according to their aesthetic quality and inclusion in a pattern of geographical recurrence, regardless of the public recognition or, conversely, of the anonymity of the author. Thus, works become accessible to the public, whether they are irreverent and unapproved by authorities, or ratified and commissioned by institutions; whether they stand in high visibility tourist spots or in remote alleys of the outskirts. StreetArtCEI proposes a search for the art hidden in urban labyrinths and sets a race against time that washes away the ink and against populism that censors free creation. StreetArtCEI offers the privilege of knowing how to find, in the course of everyday life, the art created where and when the elusive artist decided to do so.

A Conceptual Approach to Graffiti and Street Art.

Street art develops, to a large extent, from the commonly used expression “graffiti” that emerged half a century ago in the United States, first in Philadelphia and then flourished in New York City. The practice of graffiti was developed by young people, who created an original way of expressing their identities, claiming a space for free communication in the city. For a comprehensive conceptual introduction to graffiti and street art see: Campos, 2010, 2011, 2013; Campos and Sarmiento, 2014; Stahl, 2014; Silva, 2018. American graffiti consisted of a cultural and aesthetic movement based on very particular rules, actions and techniques. The first objective of this practice was a quest for status among peers, a condition that resulted from a regular investment in the quantity and quality of street actions. Creating a pseudonym (the tag), spreading the signature and developing a stylistically complex work were the main stages in the process. The most popular examples were the New York subway trains, spray-painted by graffiti crews, which left a trace of the names and works of these young people, while circulating throughout the city (Stewart, 1989).

Graffiti and street art are often confused as both are movements of contemporary art viewed as subversive, displayed in public spaces and closely related. In general, graffiti displays the name and the territory of the author, it is a codified communicative instance that is intended to communicate with other graffitiers, regardless of public recognition. Street art is more informative and its authors

want the public to see, communicate with, and relate to their artworks. Street artists work in a very similar way to canonical artists, with aesthetical purposes, creating conceptual or stylistically disturbing works. However, they display their works outside of the private territories of galleries, thus producing free, open public exhibitions. Graffiti communicates between crews, it is an internal, secrete language, among those who are able to decipher codified signatures and appreciate writing styles. The public in general is not even able to read most graffiti, because they are contained inside the culture that produces and (de)codifies them. Street art is much more open in its communicative intentions, it communicates at a conceptual and open level with the public in general, using humour, irony, aesthetics, and the absurd.

From the onset, graffiti was oppressed by authorities, who considered it as a form of vandalism that needed to be eradicated. The attempt to identify graffiti with visual pollution and violence has accompanied the history of this urban art form, a fact that did not prevent it from gaining more and more relevance, as a highly resilient manifestation, that resisted multiple modes of control and annihilation. Soon graffiti evolved from a somewhat rudimentary language, based on the simple signature or ‘tag’, towards complex murals, rich in iconography and visual narrative. In the course of this process, authors gradually became aware of the quality and uniqueness of this language, criticized the discourse of vandalism, and chose a conceptual approach using the tools of sociology, anthropology and the visual arts. One of the pioneering books on this phenomenon, marked by an impressive photographic record, was *Subway Art*, by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (1984), describing the works painted on New York subway trains during the 1970s and 80s. Ironically, the authorities of this seemingly multicultural metropolis turned the eradication of graffiti from the subway into a costly moral campaign, while other social emergencies kept widely ignored (Ferrel, 1996; Austin, 2001; Dickinson, 2008; Iveson, 2009, 2010). Soon gallery owners and critics were looking upon these expressions with interest, calling graffiti writers and street artists to the galleries. This ambivalence has since then accompanied the history of the movement, fuelling an old debate as well as an identity dispute: is it art or vandalism? All things considered, graffiti and street art are forms of counter-hegemonic discourse, which question

the narratives of authorities and mainstream media, serving as strongholds of resistance. Ricardo Campos pinpoints that painting or writing in the streets, a gesture that can be quite rudimentary from the technical point of view, has the potential to become extremely meaningful from the symbolic perspective. As a communicational phenomenon, graffiti and street art are very effective: with very little means and basic grammatical formulas, it is possible to convey a symbolically powerful message. And to a great extent, they are powerful because they are illegal, unexpected and manage to elude different kinds of control and censorship (Campos, 2018: 213-14). Conversely, and following this line of reasoning, graffiti and street art lose their distinctive power when controlled by authorities, embedded in political and commercial structures, and traded with economic institutions; when they are produced to be passively seen and consumed, instead of being actively discovered and decoded.

The history of graffiti and street art is invariably linked to names such as American artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who have used the streets as creative spaces, alongside their more conventional artwork. John Fekner, as well, is a multimedia artist and street artist who produced a series of stencil works of political nature in the 1970s and 80s, in the United States and beyond. In Europe, we find a group of creators who pioneered the use of aerosol as a tool for artistic activity. Gérard Zlotykamien is sometimes described as the precursor of this art in Europe. During the 1960s and 70s, this French artist produced on the streets what he called *éphémères*, simple figures inspired by the tragedy of Hiroshima. In turn, Harald Naegeli, who was a classically-trained artist, became known as the “sprayer of Zurich” for illegally painting this city with aerosol, in the 1970s and 80s. Still before the success achieved by Banksy, who would use stencil as a major technique of street art, we have the fundamental work carried out in Paris by Blek le Rat, who inspired future generations of street artists. Blek le Rat began his career in the early 80s by painting mice on the walls of Paris, using stencil techniques, before evolving into more complex images and productions.

In Portugal, graffiti and street art emerged due to the contact with a youth media culture that, in the 1980s and 90s, brought to the country practices and representations

of hip-hop culture under multiple perspectives, such as rap music, breakdance, skateboarding and, of course, graffiti and street art. This movement triggered a set of creative processes, as expressed by the first crews of break-dancers and the first examples of graffiti and street art in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. In Portugal, graffiti and street art have also been understood as illegal and transgressive practices, although public authorities have shown a fairly tolerant attitude when compared to the situation in other countries. The relative tolerance of the authorities allowed graffiti and street art to flourish and multiply, especially in large urban centres. At the dawn of the first decade of the millennium, Lisbon witnessed a ‘boom’ in graffiti and street art, which became a central element in the urban landscape, led to a wide public debate, and reversed former measures for eradication. Former harsh policies by public authorities gave way to a very favourable context for the development of the works of a young generation of artists (Campos 2010, 2018; Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011). Nowadays, the public is frequently faced with news about the international recognition of a considerable number of Portuguese urban artists, such as Vhils, Hazul, Bordalo II, Mr.Dheo, and The Caver, with high-visibility street art interventions flourishing all over the country.

Municipalities understood the central role that these expressions played in the revitalization and international promotion of public spaces (Sequeira, 2015). The Lisbon City Council was a pioneer in this strategy when they created the Urban Art Gallery at the beginning of the second decade of the millennium, in order to promote graffiti and street art under an organized, official approach (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2012). Results became evident in the city’s urban landscape and international promotion, as Lisbon has been recognized as one of the most relevant cities in the world as far as urban art is concerned. Other cities immediately followed the example of the capital and started promoting this artistic expression as an example of contemporaneity, cosmopolitanism and creativity. Urban art festivals and street art interventions succeeded across the country, alongside other cultural and artistic ventures that drove urban artists from the streets to art galleries and high end venues. In 2010, the Cultural Centre of Belém, in Lisbon, hosted an exhibition by Brazilian artists OSGEMEOS. In 2014, Portuguese artist Vhils exhibited his

work at the Museum of Electricity of the EDP Foundation. Between 2018 and 2019, both Porto and Lisbon hosted massively advertised exhibitions of works by Banksy, at conventional imposing venues. In 2019 and 2020, public and private institutions increasingly commission high-paid street art works for the historical centre of Porto, classified as Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 1996, in a rapidly escalating legitimization of an art form indelibly related to the streets (Silva, 2018, 2019).

The material dimension of the city is intimately related to the actual, physical production of graffiti and street art works, as they establish a dynamic and skillful dialogue with the edified and material urban environment. Urban surfaces – walls, facades, doors, sidings, outdoors, panels, showcases, street furniture, among endless other possibilities – are the resources used by artists. Therefore, works are composed not only of graphic contents, but also of the physical characteristics and textures of their supports. The urban materiality is an integral and irremovable element of the work, which must be taken into account by the observer and, crucially, by the artist. And yet, this is, at the same time, the reason for graffiti and street art's most unusual characteristic: ephemerality. The transitory character of these works is associated to their incorporation into the urban matter and to their consequent desacralization. Even time itself becomes part of the structural dimension artists confer to their aesthetic exercises. While painting a subway train, when sticking a poster, the artist is fully aware that the walls will deteriorate, that the inscriptions will be torn, erased, destroyed, and buried under other layers of the city. Graffiti and street art are short-cycle art forms, produced without expectations of eternalization and longstanding duration. They might survive for minutes, hours, days or years, because their merging into the city entails a continuous change, as the urban landscape lives in constant motion and evolution.

We are, nowadays, far from the original context of graffiti and street art. The term 'street art' leaves no room for doubt: we speak of 'art', socially recognized in its cultural and aesthetic potential by the media, municipalities, investors, academia, and institutions. Former 'vandals' have now been elevated to the category of artists. And we are also dealing with a broader expression, street art, which involves a set of plastic manifestations and techniques that go far beyond

conventional graffiti. Works that involve stencil and collage techniques, stickers, posters or aerosol murals coexist in the same space within blurred boundaries. Street art is a vast and comprehensive category that involves both informal or transgressive manifestations and commissioned or institutional works. However, this ambiguity provides an unexpected and singular character in the panorama of contemporary visual arts. The public urban space becomes the space of artistic creation or the artist's own studio. The street artist uses the paraphernalia of artistic creation and appropriates the urban territory for as long as the creative process lasts, from the few seconds of sticking a paste-up to the long hours of spray painting a mural. The city becomes a workshop open to the public, where everyone can witness the process and/or the outcome of the artistic activity, depending on the individual work processes of each artist. But even more than an open space for creation, the city also becomes an open, free exhibition space, hence, a democratic art gallery. As such, there occurs the deconstruction of the traditional role played by studios, galleries and museums in the conventional art world, within delimited, surveilled spaces. Graffiti and street art works are accessible to everybody, day and night, they become part of the city's daily routine and their audience consists of urban residents, passersby, and visitors. There is also an increasing remote audience, whose access to such messages is made through weblogs and social networks (MacDowall, 2019; Glaser, 2017). Thus, the field of visibility of graffiti and street art expands towards a more complex phenomenon from the moment that the local arena becomes a global arena with the help of multiple types of media (Campos, 2018: 215). And this turns out to be even more complex when that global ground evolves into a tourist asset for commercial consumption. At the same time, these art forms are clearly assumed as being non-canonical, desacralized, and popular: they form an aesthetical language that does not require the mastery of elitist cultural codes, nor does it follow the artistic canons perpetuated by institutions, though it does require the mastery of very specific cultural codes. This democratic side of graffiti and street art is related to the memory of cultural and artistic street movements, to former youth (counter) cultures, as well as to social and political causes, that stood at their origin.

The Project StreetArtCEI: Methodologies and results.

StreetArtCEI was born as a spin-off of the Polytechnic of Porto's SAICT/23447 project "TheRoute – Tourism and Heritage Routes including Ambient Intelligence with Visitants' Profile Adaptation and Context Awareness", funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT); the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education; and Portugal 2020. Initially, fieldwork in the streets of Porto and other locations of Northern Portugal aimed at the creation and testing of routes inspired by literary works set or written in the region. But, at the same time, research staff embarked on a parallel project triggered by the discovery of the anonymous art on the city walls. Therefore, the StreetArtCEI project emerged, with the purpose of studying the aesthetic manifestations that pervade the open, shifting and ephemeral space of the city. Ignorance admires the whitewashed innocuous wall, because public, anonymous art intimidates those who have to resort to censorship to impose their power. By contrast, knowledge – as created and shared by StreetArtCEI – democratizes the power of discovering art in the itineraries of everyday life. StreetArtCEI collects, registers, preserves and offers, both to tourists and to the community, the irony and the beauty of graffiti and street art, in a social, cultural and scientific mission of high economic potential. Furthermore, the project complies with the mission of the Portuguese polytechnic, which revolves around education, research and dissemination of culture and knowledge, under a practical, entrepreneurial, hands-on strategy.

All over the country, graffiti and street art have become thriving assets in the creation of routes for cultural tourism, whose social and economic potential for decentralization and development has been perceived by both local authorities and tourism agencies. Porto and the region of Northern Portugal are no exception to this rule. Therefore, StreetArtCEI, albeit a scientific project, merges the collection and categorization of graffiti and street art works with the design of maps displaying access roads, public transports and general urban infrastructures, in order to create alternative, viable and widely accessible routes of cultural tourism. In brief, the project combines scientific research – disseminated through journal articles, books, dissertations, essays, and conferences – with tourist-appealing user-friendly routes. However, one must

bear in mind that the routes proposed by StreetArtCEI are non-binding, are to be experimented at will by anyone interested, whether a tourist, visitor or local. At its current stage, the project does not provide guides nor tourist packages; routes are supported by downloadable maps, and are to be followed, truncated, reinvented, subverted or forgotten by the user. The difficulties created by the impermanence of street art, however, do not invalidate the possibility of future outcomes on entrepreneurship in cultural tourism. The results of StreetArtCEI attest so, by proving the existence of areas densely and regularly populated by graffiti and street art works, likely to generate routes and attract visitors.

StreetArtCEI's website displays graffiti and street art works of high visual impact, isolated or associated by recurrence in space, both illegal and endorsed by authorities, in normally accessible streets of city centres and surrounding areas. Works are selected for their visibility and for their inclusion in a pattern of geographical recurrence along pre-existing maps, regardless of the public recognition or anonymity of the author. Specifically, in order to be included in the routes of the project, works must: a) have been captured by the project staff after October 2017, when StreetArtCEI started; b) be visible, during their variable and unpredictable life spans, to anyone with ordinary mobility, in easily accessible and generally safe places; c) integrate a pattern of geographical recurrence that justifies the creation of and/or the inclusion in a POI – Point Of Interest, of the route. The permanence of the work is not assured by the very essence of street art, however the staff tries to select supports that guarantee a minimum of stability (e.g. works painted over automobile vehicles are not included).

StreetArtCEI does not include monochromatic graffiti tags, as they are mere signatures for the demarcation of a territory, without communicative purposes beyond the restricted circle of the crew. Conversely, the project includes those signatures that combine colours, perspectives, dimensions and/or textures, i.e., that also display the evident purpose of communicating an aesthetic message to the community, decipherable by non-members of the crew, alongside the codified demarcation of the territory. StreetArtCEI's fieldwork methodology considers legal and illegal, marginal and commissioned graffiti and



Image 2 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

street art works in equal terms, as the main purpose of the project is the creation of a significant corpus to enable further research and reflection.

By stepping out of the city centres, conducting research in peripheral outer areas, and contradicting the centripetal power of the capital, Lisbon, in the South, the project tackles the urgent issue of decentralization, while fostering the connection with local communities and municipal institutions. The cultural identity of peripheral communities is thus sanctioned through the recognition of their aesthetic, economic and tourist value by authorities and academics, as well as by their own actors and authors alike. Ultimately, these goals work in tune with the guidelines of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, celebrated in 2018, as they encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, natural and digital, and reinforce the sense of belonging to the common European space.

The research methods of StreetArtCEI involve photographing, categorizing and extracting patterns of geographical recurrence, as well as patterns of recurrence by author and by subject, from which routes of graffiti and street art emerge, for the use of visitors and local communities, as resources for education, and as an open-access database for scientific research. StreetArtCEI follows Malcolm Collier's (2001) methodological framework, when the author suggests a basic model of analysis built by steps. In the first stage, the author advises a random drift, free from rigid methodological constraints. At this stage, what is sought is to 'feel' the material, to be aware of its subtleties and standards. Researchers are aware of the first impressions stimulated by the visual material, take notes, photograph, and record emerging questions. In a second phase, more detail and systematization are required, as images are inventoried and classified into analytical categories. In a third stage, a more structured scrutiny is carried out, aiming at comparing and quantifying the material, through statistical processes that will serve to produce exact descriptions. Finally, and according to Collier, there is an interpretative search for meaning, which forces researchers to return to the image, in a denser approach supported by previously elaborated analytical grids.

Campos (2013) reminds us that visual content analysis is a method with explicit rules and generally works with a substantial number of images, systematically and rigorously (Rose, 2001; Ball and Smith, 1992). In its simplest form, StreetArtCEI apparently produces mere tables of frequency, but this type of methodology allows the researcher to explore the interrelationship between the various codes in presence (Campos, 2013: 137). As Banks (2001) points out, the meanings carried by images are highly context-dependent and often transient. Moreover, reading and decoding images presupposes the existence of meaning embedded in those same images. According to Banks, meaning is found in the processes of social construction of images, which provide them with symbolic and metaphorical characteristics. Therefore, there are two possible layers of meaning in a graffiti and street art image: the internal narrative (the story told) and the external narrative, i.e., the social context that produces the image and sustains the framework of its interpretation, when visualized. Campos (2013: 138) alludes to the semiotic resources that are a consequence of cultural history and of the cognitive resources mobilized in the creation of visual messages. The author evokes Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and their concern with social semiotics as a useful epistemological methodology for the study of images in their social context.

These approaches were applied to the process of creating the routes currently available, after a period of fieldwork in the city of Porto, satellite areas of greater Porto (Matosinhos, Vila Nova de Gaia, Vila do Conde, Senhora da Hora, Leça da Palmeira, S. Mamede Infesta, Leça do Balio, and Maia) and the nearby city of Aveiro, located 50 kms south of Porto. Collected images were later selected and georeferenced, thus generating maps that reveal patterns of spatial recurrence of graffiti and street art works. These maps were then compared with existing street maps, as well as with maps of urban transports and other public infrastructures, in order to build a set of possible pedestrian and road paths. Subsequently sections organized around an easily recognizable and widely accessible spatial axis (hence the designations of the different routes: Bolhão, Marquês, Trindade, etc) were extracted. This stage of the process generated routes that a regular visitor may walk or drive along within a period of time of less than 12 hours, under

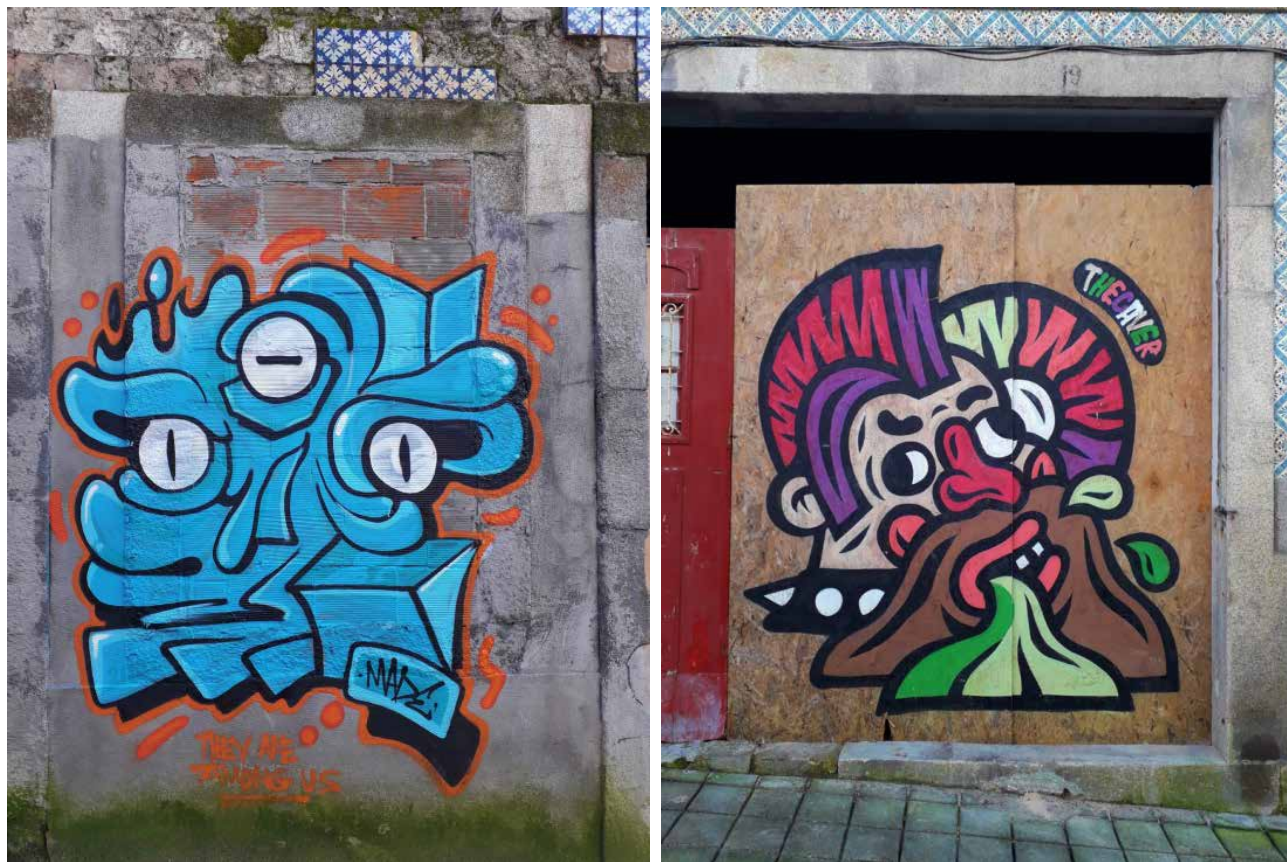


Image 3 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

standard access conditions. Selected POIs include all sorts of urban canvas, from a football stadium to trendy streets of the historical city centre; from murals commissioned for hiding the building site of a luxury hotel to abandoned factories; from illegal houses about to be demolished to central train and bus stations.

In some geographical routes, major streets were split between two different areas in the map and/or appear in more than one route, given the length of the street. Likewise, two streets may be grouped into a single POI when the artwork is located at their intersection and equally accessible from either street, or when those streets are so close and indistinguishable they may be said to form one single area. When necessary, the project employs commonly recognized toponyms alongside official designations for a better localization. Some pieces are registered in more than one image due to their dimensions and/or aesthetical complexity that require them to be

captured under several angles. As far as the database is concerned, data are organized in visual catalogs, specifically in the form of photo galleries, which allow the recording and preview of the artworks located along the identified POIs. Data are presented in the form of previously cataloged visual galleries, with the photographs collected by project members. The system allows a quick viewing of all the routes created, as well as the navigation throughout the photographic records, and does not require authentication. Users are offered the convenience of pre-established itineraries that rationalize their mobility along the geographical space, organized and displayed according to the most relevant POIs. Access to data is grounded on a free web-based portal optimized for desktop and mobile devices.

The project website (www.streetartcei.com) provides more than 3250 images collected up to the autumn of 2020, distributed along 13 geographical routes, organized in 30 maps and 272 POIs, as follows:

Routes in the city of Porto:

- Route of Bolhão;
- Route of Boavista;
- Route of Constituição;
- Route of the Dragon¹ – Eastside Porto;
- Route of Marquês;
- Route of S. Bento;
- Route of Trindade.

Routes in Greater Porto:

- Route of Vila do Conde;
- Route of Senhora da Hora;
- Route of Matosinhos – Leça da Palmeira;
- Route of S. Mamede Infesta – Leça do Balio;
- Route of Maia.

Route of Aveiro.

Routes by author – ‘authors’ are those artists who practice a style and a signature recognized by the community – were then organized over the existing trajectories of geographical routes, following a similar method as far as the design of maps and organization of POIs are concerned. Works by a single author are scattered along several geographical routes, maps and POIs. Therefore, geographical designations were kept, while POIs were rearranged in the new maps designed for the routes by author. The result generated 16 routes, 220 POIs and 485 images, organized as follows:

- Route of Mr.Dheo
- Route of Costah
- Route of Hazul
- Route of CheiKrew
- Route of Godmess
- Route of MyNamelsNotSem
- Route of AIEM
- Route of YouthOne
- Route of Coletivo Rua²:
 - FEDOR
 - DRAW
 - CONTRA
 - THIRD

- Route of PTKS
- Route of Rafi
- Route of TARS8TWO
- Route of Oker
- Route of Mesk
- Route of The Caver
- Route of Virus

A smaller number of artworks by an author does not imply lesser value and recognition. Renowned artists like Hazul, Mr.Dheo, YouthOne, Rafi and Vhils produce high impact artworks of considerable dimensions and technical difficulty, thereby they produce in lesser quantity while providing high-demand POIs to the respective routes. Actually, Hazul is a very special case, as he both authors commissioned, large-scale murals and small illegal artworks all over the city of Porto, as well as in other locations of Portugal and abroad, with a special presence in Paris. Conversely, authors like Costah practice the collage technique alongside classical spray-painting, therefore generating a higher number of interventions.

The website also displays articles and books authored by the research team and a clipping section containing the archives of the project’s presence on national television, radio and the printed press. Working on an easily perishable art form, StreetArtCEI functions as a virtual archive, as well. At its present stage, the website includes a digital museum reserve under the option “Archive”, with collections of works organized by location and date, all captured prior to the calendar year when the project started, donated by voluntary professionals and amateurs.

StreetArtCEI’s website and existing routes undergo constant updates and technical corrections. The next stages of the project will cover other geographical routes, such as Porto’s inner ring road area (Estrada da Circunvalação) and the nearby cities of Vila Nova de Gaia, Braga, Guimarães, Ovar, Valongo, Estarreja, Espinho and Águeda. Further authors whose routes are to be incorporated in the project are, among others, Bordalo II and Vhils. Thematic routes, yet to be completed, will include works that focus on topics like literature, the sea, social-political causes, tributes to the city, among other patterns to be recognized, extracted and analysed. Other future outputs include additional

actions of communication and dissemination, MA and PhD dissertations, educational courses in entrepreneurship for cultural tourism, professionally organized tours, the creation of an app, and an already on-going project on routes of Street Music.

To tackle the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic,

StreetArtCEI is currently developing an award-winning³ spin-off project – Street Art Against Covid – that registers the artworks that have popped up in the city of Porto whilst on lockdown. This new fieldwork campaign also compiles artworks that openly reflect on the pandemic, produced after the lockdown was lifted, such as the mural art that Vhils offered to St. John’s Hospital in Porto, in homage to

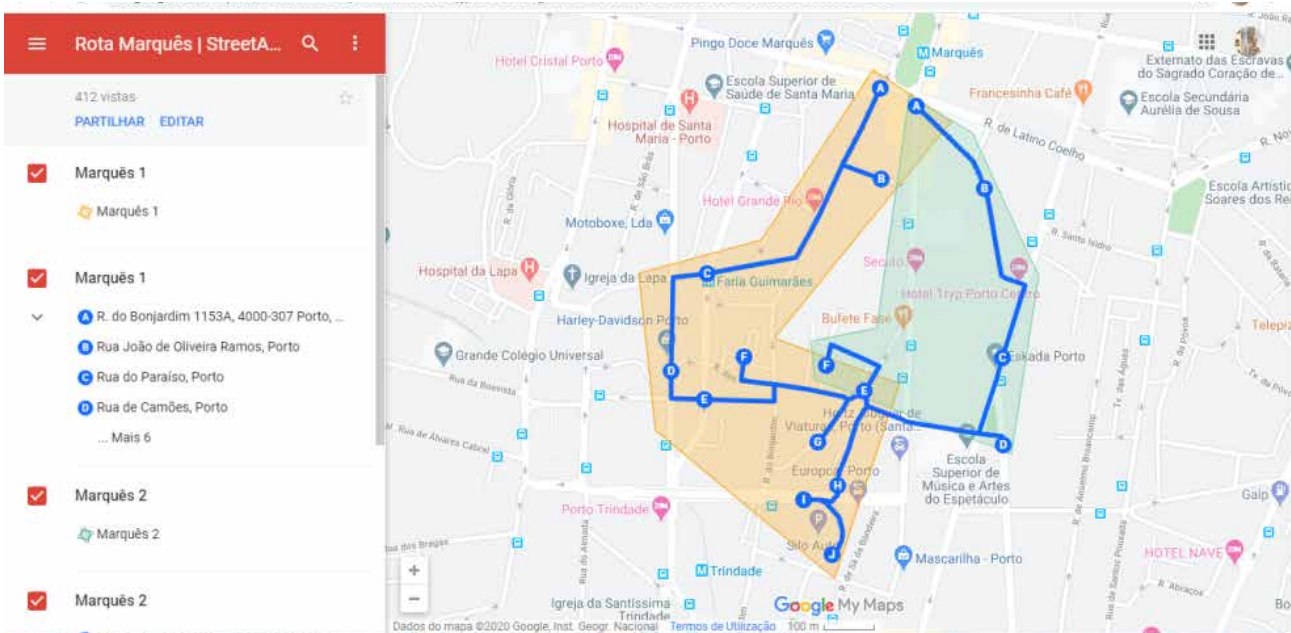


Image 4 – Route of Marquês, Porto: Map and POIs “Rua da Fábrica Social” and “Rua das Carvalheiras”.

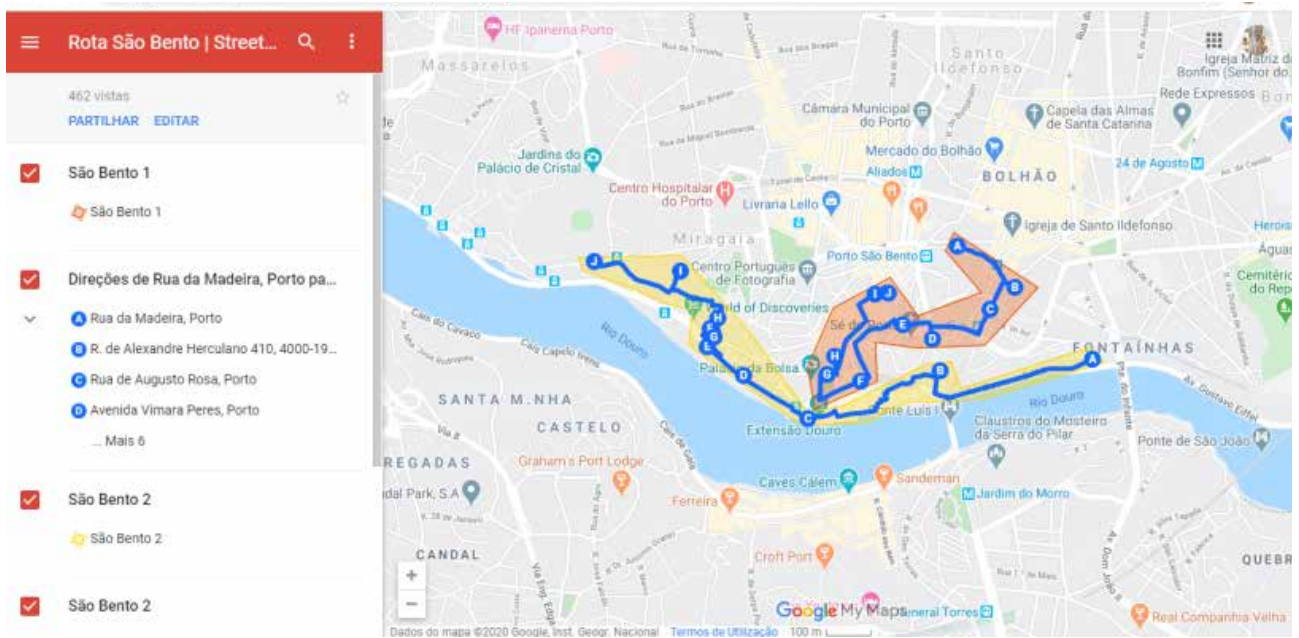


Image 5 – Route of S. Bento, Porto: Map and POI “Rua da Madeira”.



Image 6 – Route of Senhora da Hora, Greater Porto, POI “Rua Augusto Fuschini” and Route of S. Mamede de Infesta/Leça do Balio, Greater Porto, POI “Rua Padre Costa”.

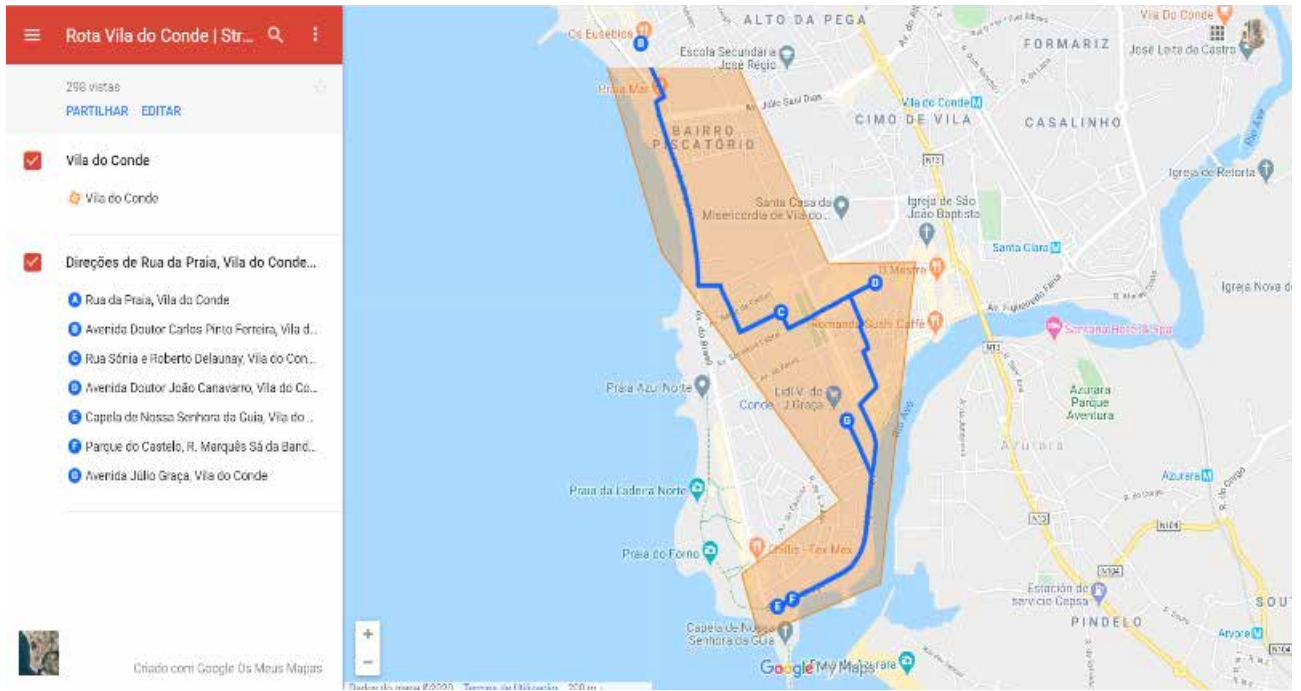


Image 7 – Route of Vila do Conde, Greater Porto: Map and POI “Mercado Municipal”.

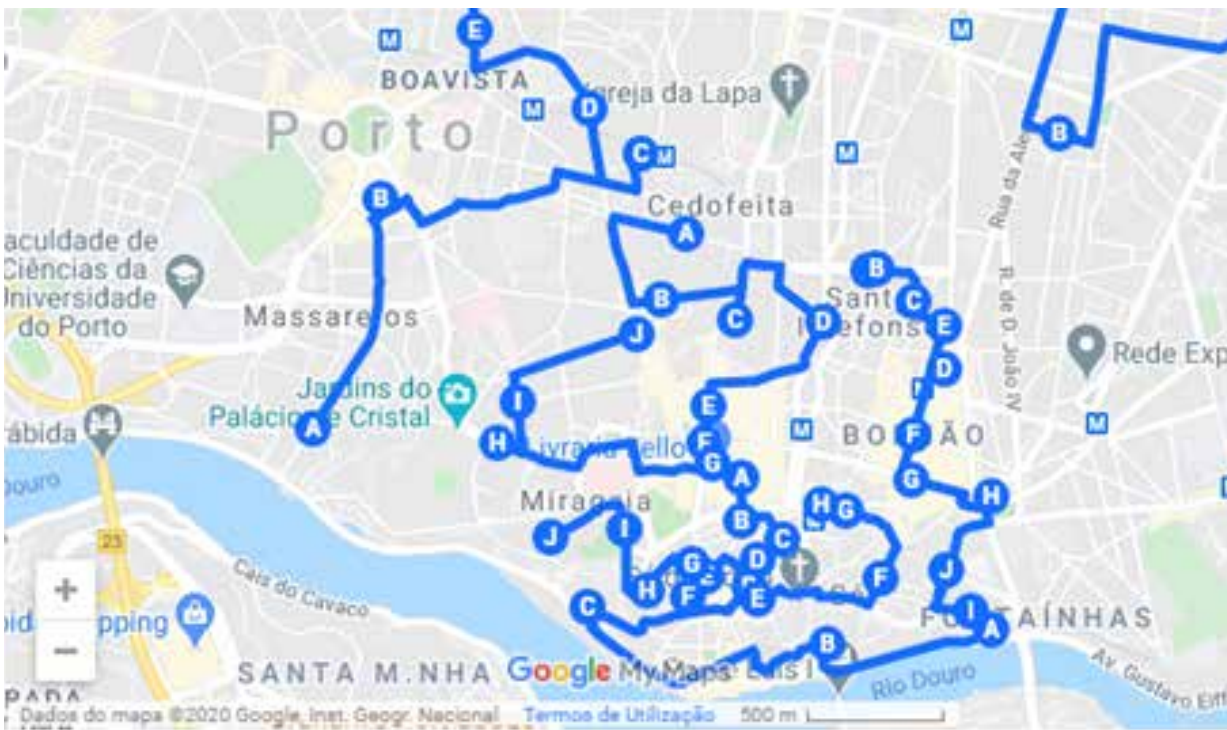


Image 8 – Route of artist Hazul: Map and POI “Miradouro da Vitória”.

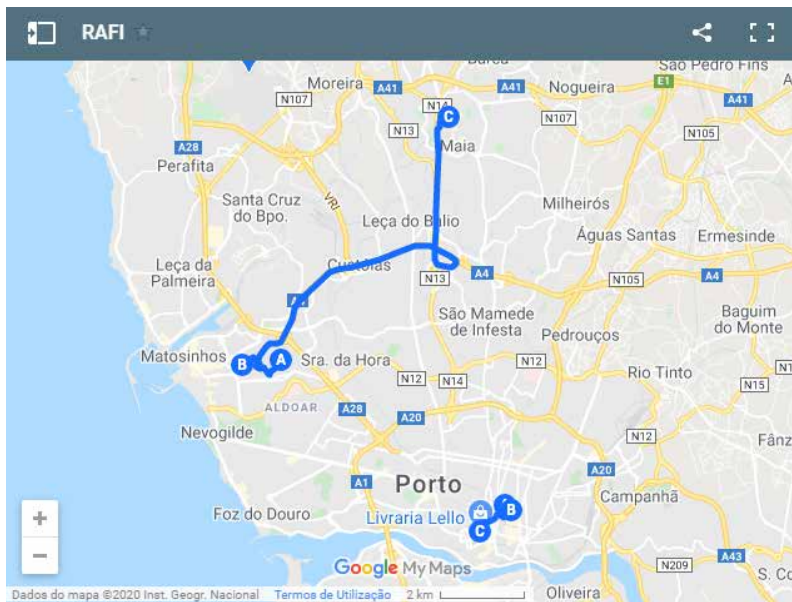


Image 9 - Route of artist Rafi: Map and POIs "Silo Auto" and "Escola Secundária Augusto Gomes".

front-line health professionals, or the nurse smashing the virus with a club, painted by Mr.Dheo on a derelict wall in Arcozelo. The 7 routes of Street Art Against Covid are: Uptown, Boavista, Historical Centre, Eastern Porto, Douro River, Matosinhos, and NHS (in Portuguese “SNS”), this one with the artworks that pay tribute to health workers. Street Art Against Covid displays nearly 70 POIs and 260 images, in permanent update.

Critical considerations, responses and other paradoxes.

Within the specific space and timeframes of the project StreetArtCEI, the response of public authorities to graffiti and street art largely obeys a principle of inclusion, of educating the margins, overcoming chaos and minimizing disturbance. Thus, graffiti and street art are both the target of silencing mechanisms, because they are uncomfortable voices in the city, and the object of domestication strategies, sponsored by public authorities. Between silencing and domestication, these authorities manage a dubious, often contradictory attitude, acting, on the one hand, against what allegedly vandalizes the public and private space of the city and, on the other hand, trying to lead graffiti and street art into disciplined territories, framed by municipal galleries and spaces reserved inside the logic of urban planning. Such official spaces provide persecution-free territories while depriving artists of the power to use their voices and art freely in the city. The essence of graffiti and street art is a totally unsanctioned freedom of action over space. Transgression is a fundamental part of their practice and intention, a factor that is abolished by the domestication carried out by official instances. The promotion of graffiti and street art for the sake of the public cause – through contests, exhibitions, workshops, among other more or less hybrid initiatives – conveys the image of the ‘good savage’, of the artist converted to legally and socially accepted actions, producing healthy and aseptic graffiti and street art for an all-purpose consumption (Campos, 2010: 140-1).

This ambiguous compromise between many artists and a political-bureaucratic system allegedly hostile to urban subcultures has a pragmatic purpose that constitutes a challenging topic for further consideration. Artists do not convert to instituted powers, but instead employ them to their advantage, while promoting their activity and culture in general. Both parties hide this underlying conflict in a momentary relationship of mutual benefit: public

authorities forget vandalism and the persecution of illegal graffiti and street art, advocating domesticated art forms; artists omit their involvement in illegality, seeking symbolic and material dividends (Campos, 2010: 142-3). Therefore, the analysis of the legal perception of graffiti and street art under Portuguese law eventually became part of the critical reflection undertaken by the project StreetArtCEI.

Graffiti and street art are characterized by marginality in its broadest sense, as they are visual invasions of occupied or unoccupied spaces, either central or remote, by creative agents. This marginality corresponds, on the one hand, to the latent illegality of the act (criminalized or unlawful for the defense of property rights), but also to the manifestation of sociocultural elements which, as a rule, stand outside of the social mainstream, typically portraying communities with little voice in traditional media. Moreover, it is not the characterization as ‘vandalism’ or the content of the expression itself that defines the illegality of graffiti and street art, as there is legal graffiti and street art in urban planning. The establishment of a rigid concept may be an impossible task, but it cannot be ignored in this project, since it is the starting point to delimit legal consequences and to protect artworks under the fundamental freedoms of expression.

If, on the one hand, graffiti and street art are often considered a crime, an illicit act, it is also true that they are also considered a global art movement. Several street artists have come to be regarded by society as canonic artists, receiving such recognition in reputation and funding. Much through the rising economic value of works by artists such as Banksy, paintings once considered marginal and criminal began to be sold at art auctions by millions. Artists who once practiced graffiti and street art quietly, furtively, without permission, began to open studios, to sell their works on mobile supports (such as canvases and panels), and to be hired for authorized illustration of private and public properties.

Given this transitory nature between the marginal and the institutional, the legal regime and effects of graffiti and street art should be analysed under four perspectives: the artist as agent; the owner; society; and public authorities. In the light of Portuguese law, the following topics are currently being analysed by the StreetArtCEI project, in

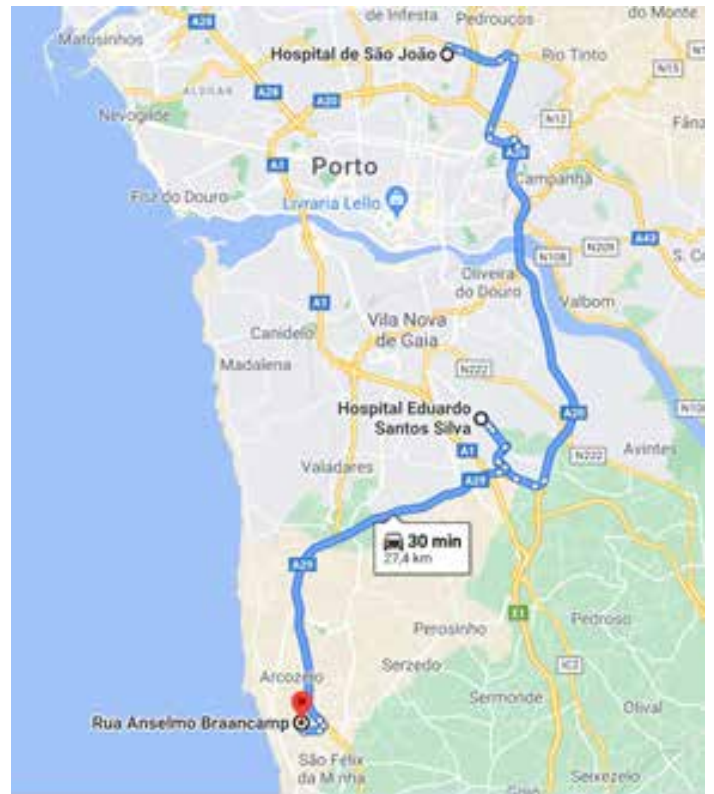


Image 10 – Route of the NHS: Map and POI “Rua Anselmo Braancamp, Arcozelo”.



Image 11 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

collaboration with the research group of CIJE, the Centre for Legal and Economic Research at the Faculty of Law of the University of Porto (www.cije.up.pt): the legal concept of graffiti and street art, their various manifestations and agents; cultural criminology and transgressive art; penal treatment in the light of contemporary social reality; benefits for the city as compared to the severity of the transgression against protected public property; the owner's perspective, especially when there is an increase in the value of property due to graffiti and street art; the social, cultural, and economic value of artworks in public spaces and in private properties; graffiti and street art as manifestations of the right to use public space; collective experiences for the preservation of graffiti and street art in reserved places and its public protection, as part of society's cultural heritage; the preservation of graffiti and street art as a form of annihilating legal consequences; the relevance of the artist's intentions when (not) considering graffiti and street art as actual art forms; the recognition of graffiti and street art as results of the social function of property; the right to destroy or clean graffiti and street art or, conversely, the right to preserve those artworks; legal protection for artists and works, namely in terms of compensation when the work is destroyed, under intellectual property and copyright laws; appropriation of graffiti and street art by the media and advertising campaigns; the legal regime of lawful commissioned graffiti and street art on temporary and permanent supports; the regulation of official graffiti and street art sites, financed by the state or by collaborative civil funding; the preservation of artworks in their original location or their displacement to protected, legal sites.

Concerning the response to StreetArtCEI by the media and local authorities, there are some challenging paradoxes worth mentioning. As soon as the project was launched, StreetArtCEI caught the attention of the mainstream media in Portugal. The Portuguese national broadcasting corporation featured a total of six segments – one on the overall project, and five on each of the routes then available – where the reporters followed the researchers along the routes, filmed with high aesthetic quality, alternating interviews with the researchers and the best known artists on each route. The segments were broadcast on prime time television, with an audience reach of nearly half a million viewers, a significant number in Portugal. However, these

fifteen minutes of fame are worthy of reflection. The public television channel focused its reports on StreetArtCEI as a scientific research project, as much as on the artworks and street artists themselves. Rival private television channels immediately noticed the high audience share and featured segments on the same topic, by visiting and filming the same routes. However, StreetArtCEI project was never mentioned by any of them. As the project conducts research on artworks available in the public space, the outputs of StreetArtCEI have also become public, freely available for consumption, and likely to be appropriated by any group or individual. The object and its representation, as well as the artist's and the researcher's identity, have merged to a point that, in the eyes of the public, they can barely be distinguished from one another. This metonymical interpretation is fostered by StreetArtCEI's option for a free immersion into the territories under analysis and for sharing results in open access, privileging the visual media.

Once StreetArtCEI's routes started to be produced outside the main urban and tourist centres, the interest of major media groups immediately waned. Concomitantly, municipal authorities from satellite small/medium-sized cities of Greater Porto – halfway between the agglutinant urban centre and more distant towns in the countryside – began fostering contacts with the research team in order to create tailor-made routes for promoting local tourism, with the purpose of emulating the main tourist centres. However, although the initial agreement was established in order to produce routes of graffiti and street art, all these municipalities simultaneously commissioned the creation of local literature, architecture, music, gastronomy and heritage routes, among others, in addition to the aforementioned graffiti and street art routes. Eventually, the time and resources invested on those routes ended up taking precedence over graffiti and street art, as the investment in the research of mainstream art manifestations seems to be more legitimate under the eyes of local powers.

Concerning the international response to the project, access data supplied by Google Analytics show that the project's website is accessed on a daily basis by viewers not only nationwide but also across the five continents. Australia, New Zealand, the US, Brazil, Canada, India, Japan, the UK, Germany, and The Netherlands are some of the countries

appearing regularly on the project's website traffic stats. The consistent access by users based in China (including the SAR of Hong Kong and Macao), Russia, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Indonesia, grants StreetArtCEI an unforeseen political character, due to these countries' political and religious constraints to the actual practice and unmediated visualization of uncensored graffiti and street art.

All those involved in StreetArtCEI are aware that the data collected and shared might be used for law enforcement purposes. However, researchers are also aware that persecution by police forces against graffiti and street art is greatly reduced in the territories covered by the project and is much more related to educational and dissuasive actions. In fact, urban authorities understand more and more the importance of these artworks in attracting visitors to Porto and other cities in Northern Portugal, whose economies rely heavily on tourism. However, while this article is being written, Portugal is suffering the tragic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and tourist activities have ceased on a nationwide scale, carrying with it threats of an unprecedented economic and social crisis.

In this adverse context, StreetArtCEI's paralel project Street Art Against Covid is registering and mapping the artworks that have been created all over the city of Porto during lockdown and/or about the pandemic. In theory, these artworks have a doubly transgressive nature, as they are not only testimonies to the alleged vandalism of property but also to lockdown breaches by artists. However, as previously mentioned, graffiti and street art are relatively tolerated by police forces and, furthermore, lockdown practices in Portugal were the stage for many exceptions to the law. Hence, in this current "new normal", StreetArtCEI and Street Art Against Covid demonstrate, through the international reach of their digital channels – currently safer in terms of health concerns – that the tourist potential of the region has survived and reflects the contingencies of history in the making.

Conclusions.

The object of study of StreetArtCEI is an art form created by illegal practices, and yet this project instantly attracted the attention of local authorities and of high-audience media, such as the national radio and television, the printed press, glossy magazines, tourist handouts, and news websites. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that StreetartCEI thrives inside of a paradox built by the project itself, as the Centre for Intercultural Studies of the Polytechnic of Porto is a public research and higher education institution that, at same time, collects, preserves and legitimizes cultural products which damage public and private property. As far as the reception by the media is concerned, we highlight their interest for the economic potential of the project's online routes, as well as for the aesthetic appeal of the artists' techniques, which are readily transformed into recognized signatures of canonical authors. Concerning the reception by local authorities in Porto and Northern Portugal, emphasis must be put on their swift investment in the creation of tailor-made local routes of graffiti and street art, that is, in artworks whose deletion those authorities are sponsoring at the same time. This apparent paradox by local institutions reproduces the common social need for domestication of irreverence and for commodification of the illegal, which is rooted in the silencing and/or annihilation of all that does not fit into expected models, a paradox that all intervenient actors are aware of.

Therefore, StreetArtCEI's intercultural action takes place at a threshold (Davcheva, Byram & Fay, 2011), in a borderzone (Bruner, 1996) halfway through the legal and the illegal, where researchers play the role of mediating agents between the marginal and the institutional, creating new discursive fields in permanent intersection (Tsing, 1993). Tourism and the commodification of graffiti and street art also imply the intercultural transit of this art form from the margins to the centre, from a culture of irreverence to the reverence for institutions. This transit builds another threshold in the contemporary context of gentrification of the city, as a living canvas and mutable territory (Mendes, 2018). In this emerging territory, street artists assume the role of rising stars, of well-paid managers of merchandising and personal branding. They now produce private art as a response to the commercial demand for the public artworks they once created (though they often do so in addition to unsanctioned public artworks).

This assumption might be related to the generational – hence, intercultural – alternation of left-wing, right-wing political cycles. One might even speculate that, in the future, the irreverent new marginality will be anti-graffiti and anti-street art, militating along with the most conservative sectors for the punishment of those who are now millionaire artists, believing (correctly?) to be fighting capitalism and the commodification of once marginal aesthetics. Although we respect the current methodological criteria that guide the StreetArtCEI project, we argue that, eventually, the ethical and aesthetical criteria for inclusion or exclusion in the concept of graffiti and street art should be the absence of recognition of the artwork by public, private, political, economic, and/or commercial institutions, including here the obligation of non-remuneration of the author for her/his artwork. We are however aware of how unrealistic conducting such a categorization would be in practical terms, as it would mean uncovering in each specific case whether an artist received permission, payment and/or recognition (a rather abstract concept) for the artwork.

Indeed, the aesthetics of everyday life are often associated to cities (re)built according to the capitalist logic of mass consumption (Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011: 19). Urban territories clearly became spectacular displays of the urban fabric (Highmore, 2005), commanded by commercial and political interests that transform goods into objects of visual consumption. However, graffiti and street art are not simple aesthetic performances, but performances of resistance to normative stances, a temporary disorder in the instituted structures of meaning (Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011: 26). It is therefore pertinent to conclude this article by evoking Brighenti (2007) and the notion of a social-cultural territory that combines aesthetics and politics side by side, as decisive elements for the critical conceptualization and scientific research of graffiti and street art, as inherent phenomena of contemporary urban landscapes.

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Notes

- 1 - The name derives from the designation of the stadium – Stadium of the Dragon – of the local football team – Football Club of Porto – which is the spatial axis of this route, due to the interface of high traffic main roads and public transports located close to the stadium.
- 2 - Group of artists with a distinctive style who work together, as a single entity, in the area covered by the project StreetArtCEI. Within the route of this "Collective Street" (translation of the Portuguese "Coletivo Rua") we will discriminate the works of four individual identifiable artists that compose the group.
- 3 - "Santander Universitário UNI-COVID19" Award, June 2020.

The Dawn of the 3D Spray: Creating Street Art Using Polyurethane Foam

Paris Xyntarianos - Tsiropinas

University of the Aegean, Department of Product and Systems, Design and Engineering, Greece
parisxt@syros.aegean.gr

Abstract

The diversity of techniques, methods and tools in creating Graffiti and Street Art allows artists to constantly evolve and discover new ways to express their ideas and implement their work. At the same time, a large number of researchers study and observe artists and their work, in an attempt to experiment with the emergence and spread of the phenomenon of urban art in combination with other scientific environments, such as engineering, robotics, programming and more. In this article, after the introduction to the power and importance of spray paint as a tool and symbol for the evolution of urban art, a first glimpse on the street artist - designer follows. This new type of creator can intervene radically in shaping the urban landscape by properly utilizing the designers' toolbox to help innovative ideas come to fruition. One of these ideas is to use polyurethane foam as a "three-dimensional spray". Using it, the artist can create embossed or three-dimensional works on a large scale, taking existing practices one step further. A case study illustrated by a variety of images is presented before the conclusion of this paper, describing the creation of a lion's head directly on the wall using polyurethane foam spray and then painting it with graffiti spray paint.

Keywords: 3D art, mural, spray paint, design

Introduction - Power of the spray can

The spray is now a widespread tool used in a variety of applications and comes in many different forms. It is an invention that has been around for almost a century and is an integral part of the equipment of different professionals, from carpenters to painters. It is also used in the automotive industry, in construction, in modeling, in furniture making and elsewhere. A much more "famous" kind of spray than the rest is the graffiti spray paint. A tool almost exclusively used by graffiti writers in the beginning, now also widely used by street artists, the spray can has acquired a symbolic status and characterizes the street culture itself.

The widespread production of industrial spray and its use by writers as the only means for the creation of their tags and pieces was a crucial factor in the promotion and evolution of Graffiti art. Robert Weide claims that the spray is one of the items that were created without anyone having imagined what it will generate: "*What it created was*

the modern Graffiti subculture". The importance of the aerosol paint, the spray can, in the modern Graffiti movement and the symbiotic relationship between the object and the subculture are important concepts that have not been ignored by scholars of the latter. However, the depth of the description and analysis of this relationship to date, Weide argues (2006), was at best concise.

Regarding the spray, Schacter points out that while its' use is a form of material violence, it is in fact a "manifest violence", a type of violence that draws attention to arguments rather than violence and vandalism in the traditional sense of the word. Like the newly spatial structures and infrastructure that enabled the development of the modern urban public sphere, the mass availability of the spray as a tool can be understood that it functioned like the printing presses of the 18th century (or the emerging availability of tea, coffee and chocolate), the city walls themselves are used as clubs or cafes where people openly exchange thoughts and ideas,

creating a set of practices aimed at resisting 'public authority', against the growing passivity caused by the aforementioned transformation of the public sphere (Schacter , 2014: 69).

Speaking of the past, a similar case of movement evolution based on a tool is that of the Impressionism. From 1841 onwards, painters could buy paints on metal tubes that had the highest portability of any other container until then. The ability to use colors outdoors, enable painters to render artworks that represented scenes of the environment, nature and the world, in a way that had never happened before. Bell (2017: 129) refers to Renoir's claim: "*Without tubes of paint, there would have been no Impressionism.*"

The availability of a new technology, either in the form of a tool or in the form of a system, can bring about a critical change in an artistic field, or even in an entire art form. Just as the example of the use of metal tubes to transport paint inspired the artistic movement of Impressionism, so did the transfer of paint to metallic aerosol containers, spray cans, which inspired the Graffiti movement, closely followed by Street Art. This shows how powerful a change can occur by an artifact, either when simply evolves from the idea of one or more people, or carefully designed. However, design intent, both in the first and in the second case, either by chance or intentionally, is always present.

Nevertheless, the spray can is an integral part of the development of Graffiti and Street Art, not only in the field of application and the restrictions it imposes as a color rendering system, but also as a tool for measurement. When writers traveled to trains and stations, they did not have measuring instruments and protractors with them. They used the spray cans as guides for the correctness of their lines. The straight edges of the bottle were also a tool for determining lines, contours and borders between letters and colors. Over the years, the bottle and the valve have acquired mythical dimensions: the knowledge about the valves and the various spray effects they produce is encyclopedic and is zealously guarded by the artists. Finding and handling the right valve, to create a certain type of line or shape, is a skill in itself [Blackshaw , Farrely , 2008: 66].

Other features that make aerosol paint a popular tool are portability, ease of storage, low price (in standard size bot-

tles), but also its small size and weight. In stores and shops with graffiti items, one can now look for many different products that operate with the same basic principle of spraying. Now, all kinds of paints appear in spray bottles: acrylic paints or water paints, textured paint that mimics tar, granite, marble and more. Last but not least, a vital part of street culture and a very productive relationship, of course, is the one between the spray and the stencil.

A new type of street artist

This kind of technological leaps allow artists to experiment constantly, inventing new painting methods and techniques (just as they did in the beginning of the Graffiti movement with the modification of caps). But beyond the advanced techniques, the artists themselves are evolving on multiple levels. They are no longer just creators on the street but experienced professionals whose skills are called upon by public and private entities. Street artists are the painters of today and many of them acquire celebrity status or notoriety. They even go so far as to work with other professionals - designers, graphic designers, architects - and even themselves often come from similar backgrounds and use their knowledge in combination, shaping the urban and not only, landscape. They are commissioned to work for large companies and businesses, municipalities or communities that assign them small and large scale projects. They present their works in galleries and events called graffiti and street art festivals.

In the doctoral research carried out at the Department of Product and Systems Design Engineering in the University of the Aegean, the main research question revolves around the quantitative and qualitative criteria of the relation between Street Art and Design. Advocating for this relation, a new type of street artist is emerging. It is a kind of artist - designer, who, paralleled with the Homo Universalis of the Renaissance, is distinguished by his/her ingenuity and increased skills in the use of a wide variety of material and immaterial means, for whom the methods and techniques of controlling are borrowed from various and diverse environments. As by nature a capable problem solver, being a human, this character is selected to cope with the globalized environment in which he/she lives and works, while managing to compete with other artists and professionals, but also to promote his work ethic and beliefs through his/her labor and his/her life.

This artist-designer is the main exponent of the relationship between Street Art and Design and the doctoral study captures how this happens, through bibliographic and field research, through applications, experiments and case studies, but also through the personal engagement of the author as a reflective practitioner; a street artist and a graduate products and systems designer and engineer.

From this point of view, while street artworks function not only as spontaneous artistic expressions or symbolic acts of resistance to various kinds of regimes and frameworks (political, social, financial, etc.), but also as means of promoting or supporting them, the way artists and the various types of professionals around them act, is an issue worth exploring extensively. Especially when the backers and admirers of this global art movement make extensive use of new technological means to prepare, create, store and communicate works, ideas and knowledge related to Street Art, it is then that the role of Design begins to dominate most, if not all, stages and levels of this process.

The artists of today create large scale artworks with the support of machinery and construction equipment, handle technological tools and colors with complex chemical properties and functions, they are turning to the use of digital equipment for the organization and preparation of projects, but also for their photographic survey and internet circulation. And while in the past the art world consisted exclusively of artists, critics, curators, agents, collectors and audiences, today a wide range of professions benefit from or is influenced by Street Art, such as photographers, bloggers, tour guides, travel agents, advertisers, hoteliers, entrepreneurs of various kinds, writers, researchers, professors, activists, criminologists, public officials and many more. Also, Urban Art contributes to other major industries beyond the "Art industry" (if it could be called so), as the game industry, the tourism industry, the advertising industry, the fashion industry and so on.

In a nutshell, the concept and science of Design, whether indirectly or directly, either at an amateur - fundamental level, or in a professional - organized context, affects Street Art in a lot of ways. The artistic work itself is full of design functions - techniques and methods - dictated by the designer that each artist hides inside, whether in an embryon-

ic or in an awakened state. Street artists are invited through their work, not only to communicate their thinking and inner self, but at the same time to solve dozens of technical problems. This is because Street Art differs a lot from canvas painting. Large scale painting in the urban landscape is filled with constraints and risks that can only be addressed by experienced artists and their design skills. In order to be one step ahead of their predecessors, they need to be faster, better organized, better protected, better informed, work with ingenuity and innovation, and build their own equipment. For all this to happen, even if sometimes they don't do it intentionally, the artists are guided by the power of Design.

While parthenogenesis does not exist in art, the differentiated use of one or more techniques and objects can bring innovation in Design. The idea of the following case study is considered as such an example.

Polyurethane foam spray as a tool for creating art

In an effort to define the early street artist - designer and document his practice, researchers at the University of the Aegean along with the author of this article have already presented work on the subject. The design fields where the street artist - designer operates can be many. However, what has been studied so far concerns the field of service design and the field of system design (y Artem & Photon Painter System respectively). However, the connection of the street artist - designer to the field of product design, which stands as one of the most popular and fundamental Design disciplines, has not yet been studied. This paper introduces the concept of 3D spray for the first time. The main purpose is to create a product that serves the creation of large scale three -dimensional or relief works of graffiti and street art in the outdoors, (like how 3D pens and 3D printers work for small scale).

3D Street Art already is already being created by many artists, some of whom work subtractively, like Vhills, who breaks the wall using jackhammers in order to create relief patterns, or additively, like Bordallo II, who constructs three dimensional animals, usually using rubbish, which he sticks or screws onto the surfaces where he wants to create his work. To date, however, the existence and use of a handheld volume drawing tool has not yet been observed. While materials that have such properties exist, as, for exam-

ple, puff ink or polyurethane, which is used in the case study of this paper, there is no commercial product whose use is specifically aimed at creating 3D artworks on the street, as is the case with the “two - dimensional” graffiti spray paint. For polyurethane in particular, it is worth noting that it is used as a basic material for the creation of artworks which can be found in gallery exhibitions. What is certain is that it is a material with very interesting properties, the possibilities of which have not yet been explored thoroughly and that have also inspired the writing of this paper.

Basic information about polyurethane states that it was invented in the mid-1930s and can be produced in many variations, including as a hard or soft foam material for various uses. In the 1970s, it became possible to fill polyurethane foams in pressure vessels, thus laying the groundwork for the use of products by craftsmen and technicians. Polyurethane foams are available in one - or two - component versions in containers with propellant gas or in two - component versions in a container without propellant gas. While the one - component foams containing propellant gas can be applied with an angle adapter or a pistol, various propulsion systems are also used for propellant - free PU foams. Polyurethane foams are designed as a bonding agent around windows and construction joints, partition walls, ceilings, floors, or for masonry holes for installing piping through walls and floors. In general, the foam has good adhesion to various materials, such as: concrete, bricks, stones, gypsum, wood, metal and many plastics such as polystyrene, fixed PU foam and uPVC.

From the above it is easy to conclude that the use of polyurethane foam is not suitable for the creation of works of art - or at least not in the way that the 3D pen works in the physical world or 3D brushes work in digital modeling environments (e.g. Zbrush, mudbox etc.). More about the technical characteristics and details of the use of foam follow in the next part of this paper, where the case study is also presented, in which an attempt to draw a realistic representation of a three - dimensional (relief) lion's head is made.

Case study - PU foam lion head

It should first be mentioned that the author of the article is an experienced street artist with activity in various cities in Greece and abroad, from 2008 onwards. He is also familiar with digital environments of three-dimensional design such as those mentioned in the previous section of the paper. So, starting with the logic of using polyurethane foam as a three-dimensional spray, it quickly became clear that it was going to be a demanding process. Trying to create a 3D artwork with PU foam is the equivalent of creating a mural with spray paint like the ones used in 1970 to paint furniture or other everyday objects. It has many similarities to the beginning of the graffiti movement, where sprays were a first-time tool, unsuitable for tags and pieces, without the ability to change caps and the use of which required special skill and patience to avoid dripping and to succeed in creating straight and consistent lines.



Figure 1. The tools of the criminal mischief: the cans II by Roger Gatsman



Figure 2. Lion head drawing

A wall about 9 square meters (three meters high and three meters long) was chosen to create the lion. The wall was initially painted with the background color to erase previous tags and sketches. The image (outlines) of the lion was found on google. The lion was chosen as the artist's personal preference, but also because he wanted to be able to portray the resemblance to the animal, thus examining how well the PU foam can function as a design/drawing tool. At first there the idea was to create a portrait of a famous personality, but since this was the first attempt in using PU foam, such a plan seemed even more grandiose and demanding. The outlines of the lion's head were painted with a marker on the surface.

The overall project took 3 days to be completed, with a total of approximately 20 hours of work. Two different commercially available foam brands, YTONG and Den Braven were used. These PU foams have common properties and almost the same drying time. A total of twelve 750 ml bottles were needed to complete the project.



Figure 3. Brands of PU foam used

On the first day of using the foam, two or three ours were devoted to become familiar with the tool. It should be noted that polyurethane foam spray does not work like the spray paint, with the valve on the top of the bottle, but upside down. It was then found that the foam could not easily stick to the wall when the surface was smooth. Because of this, there was a lot of waste of material falling to the floor which was impossible to use again. While the foam did not stick easily to the smooth surface, it was particularly sticky on clothes and protective gloves. Especially when the gloves came in contact with a large amount of foam, then they were immediately useless. The use of foam requires even greater protection from the use of spray paint, because if it comes in contact with the skin, in addition to the discomfort it creates, it is extremely difficult to clean, especially on areas of the skin with a lot of hair, such as in the scalp.

After 2 hours of experimenting with the foam on the first day, it was found that by spraying with less pressure, the foam came out in a smaller amount and there was a greater chance of sticking to the surface. This way and by waiting



Figure 4. The lion at the end of the first day and at the beginning of the second - 15 days later



Figure 5. The lion head at the end of the second day

10 to 15 minutes for the first lines to dry on the wall, the lion's mane began to form. Having created a first layer of foam lines, it was easier for the new foam to stick and so, little by little, larger pieces began to be added, until by the end of the first day most of the lion's mane, mouth and nose had already been made. By that time, six 750 ml bottles had already been used.

Due to the emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic, two weeks passed from the first to the second day of work. During this time, the first layer of foam had changed color due to its exposure to the sun, but had retained its volume unchanged, and was still hard and firmly attached to the wall. Note that the foam can be detached from the wall, no matter how hard it is. Of course, this does not diminish its value as a creative tool, since even spray paint can also be cleaned or altered on most surfaces using the appropriate technique.

On the second day, after about eight hours of work, the mane, mouth, and entire nose of the lion, as well as the eyebrows, were completed. The original intention was for the entire face of the lion to become three-dimensional and protrude in front of the wall, so that it would look like an oversized lion had passed through it. By that time, however, six more PU foam cans had already been spent. To create

such a big 3D head as it was first intended, it was obvious that a lot more cans would be needed. For reasons of material economy, but also because no one could guarantee the success of the result up to that stage, even in the scenario that an unlimited amount of foam was available, the decision was to stop adding volume to the artwork and the project to proceed to the third and final stage, that is, coloring. The coloring of the polyurethane foam would reflect the special features of the lion, a process reminiscent of texturing, the corresponding texture rendering in 3D digital models on various computer applications.

On the third day, 15 spray paint cans of the necessary colors were used in order to create the details of the lion's face. These details include capturing the eyes, nose, mouth and ears, but also coloring the fur and mane so that it matches to the real look of a lion. It took approximately four hours to complete the coloring. All stages of the procedure were of particular interest, but this step was a little more interesting, since the project gradually began to take shape. The colorless shape of the foam, although it looked like a lion's face, resembled more to a mockup or to a project that was not properly completed. The colors accentuated the texture and rendered the structural elements of the face, giving meaning and substance to the original design idea. It is fact that in this case, the texture of the



Figure 6. Different views of the finished artwork

polyurethane foam itself worked usefully, because its final form somehow mimics the texture of the hair and the lion's mane. If the subject was different, such as a human face, for example, the foam might not have had the right effect.

With the lion completed, the most part of the artwork was done and the result came close enough to the original idea - to create a 3D / relief lion's head with the use of expanding foam. The rest of the wall around the lion's face was painted decoratively and finally, with the placement of the signature, the project was finalized. An important observation is that in its contact with the spray paint, the polyurethane foam hardens a little more. Moreover, when the foam has been painted, even after several days have elapsed since its' exposure to the weather (sun, rain, etc.), there is no alteration of the color or volume of the object.

A comparative table with the characteristics and properties between spray paint and polyurethane foam follows. It should be noted that the two tools are judged on the basis of their functionality as design tools and whether they correspond to the creation of street art.

Comparative table between spray paint and PU foam as drawing / design tools

Conclusions and future research

With the use of PU foam and spray paint the lion head of the case study was managed to be completed. The result was satisfactory, since in the final work the characteristics of the animal were captured as realistically as possible and, to some extent, the sense of a three-dimensional representation was achieved. Another helpful characteristic of the polyurethane foam is that it can be modified in various ways (cut, poked, trimmed) and before it dries completely, it is still malleable. Another positive element is that even after its hardening, its weight remains small. On the other hand, the process was not entirely successful, as the lion's head looks more as a relief than a three-dimensional artwork. A large amount of the material was lost in the process due to little expertise in the tools' operation. Also because it is a tool not specialized for artistic use. In any case, these complications further stimulate the desire for even more experimentation, rather than limit it.

Although the use of polyurethane foam to create works of art cannot be considered as the production of an innovative product, it certainly lays the groundwork for further experimentation and study with the ultimate goal of creating a new tool. If such a tool is developed, it may be prudent to follow the spray paint evolution trajectory, but also that of the three-dimensional design tools of the natural world. Creating such a tool-product does not seem impossible for the world of design, provided that its design requirements and technical characteristics will be properly developed and categorized.

Priority should be given to ensuring the smooth flow of foam through the valve-tube, so as to achieve a uniform line during spraying. Such a controlled line will allow the artist to better handle the tool for improved performance in creating the volumes and shapes of his choice. Another feature that the tool should have is better grip on the surfaces but also the use of a reinforcing material, in order to allow greater support and increase the volume of the object that can be constructed. Finally, it would be very interesting to have different colors of polyurethane foam that will not be altered when exposed to the sun, but also create caps that will control the amount of flow, to allow smaller or bigger line thickness.

Three-dimensional design in the natural world, in addition to being an interesting field of study, is also commercially profitable for professionals and businesses engaged in it. To create the spray paint, many different scientific fields have been involved and continue to explore the properties and future evolution of the object. As with the revolution that sparked the paint spray, a corresponding artistic and social revolution could follow the creation of the equivalent tool for three-dimensional design - painting. Let this article serve as a starting point for more efforts and resources of this kind, until colorful graffiti and street art "spring up" in three-dimensional space!

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Figures

Figure 1. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.1xrun.com%2Froger-gastman-returns-with-second-tools-of-criminal-mischief-print%2F&psig=AOvVaw3z40RnOQQFk-DpP5qau4oz7&ust=1590012670288000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCOj4g-34wOkCFQA-AAAAAdAAAAABAJ>

Figure 2. <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/4e/7c/e1/4e7ce112fc3d75c50387207868767751.jpg>

Figure 3. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.leroymerlin.gr%2Fgr%2Fdomika-ulika%2Fmonosi-steganosi%2Fexilasmeni-diogomeni-polusterini%2Fafros-ytong-enos-sustatikou-075l-62330590%2F&psig=AOvVaw3qtcJXl1sg-UQH6pFZ1E8F&ust=1590012955417000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCKij1e35wOkCFQA-AAAAAdAAAAABAE>
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How Much Control do Cities Want Over Their Public Spaces?

A Look into Mural Policies

Eynat Mendelson-Shwartz

Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Technion City, Haifa 32000, Israel
Mendelson.Swhartz@gmail.com

Abstract

While promoting mural policies, city administrations are faced with the difficult task of determining the level of control they wish to maintain over urban public spaces. The premise of this paper is that, for local governments, the control and influence over murals in the urban sphere is a mixed blessing. As this control increases, officials acquire stronger tools to shape the city's murals, but they also become liable for their content and maintenance, inevitably undermining the freedoms, alternately, of property owners and artists. As control decreases, artistic and proprietorial rights are more easily asserted, but at the same time the city forfeits its ability to determine how its public spaces will look. Moreover, conflicts between stakeholders are more likely to occur, possibly requiring government intervention. This paper brings these issues into focus by exploring the role of city administrations as regulators and managers of murals located in the public realm. Using, in particular, the case study of Portland, Oregon, the paper highlights the dilemmas cities face when addressing these issues.

Keywords: murals, policy, governance, public space, control, Portland.

Introduction: The pros and cons of regulating murals

Murals have become an integral part of our urban landscape, varying in size, style, and legality. The term 'murals' refers to painted or written artworks created directly on exterior facades, with or without permission. This may include murals that are promoted by the establishment as well as those spontaneously created by individuals or groups. This paper explores whether and how cities regulate these elements in the public domain and, more precisely, to what degree they seek to control them.

Murals incorporate tensions that can escalate into real-life disputes. In turn, these disputes may require governmental interventions (Mendelson-Shwartz and Mualam, 2020b). As a result, cities around the world have established mural policies that promote and manage murals located in the public realm. Although mural policies primarily regulate sanctioned murals, they can also have an indirect impact on unsanctioned artworks through urban strategies such as buffing (removing) or policing (Guazon, 2013; Halsey and Young, 2002; Taylor and Marais, 2009; Young, 2012).

Murals are an inseparable part of urban environments, created in and for specific locations. They help shape the city's public serve as dynamic stages for communities and individuals who may have multiple and sometimes contradictory identities and interests (Mitchell, 2003; Sandercock, 2003).

In many developed countries, there are normative assumptions about how public urban spaces are created, designed, and altered (Douglas, 2016). While these paces are formed and shaped by a range of stakeholders, it is presumed that city administrations are responsible for regulating and maintaining them, mediating between stakeholders in the name of 'public interest' (Davidoff, 1965; Healey, 2015; Madanipour, 2006; Pierre, 2005).

The growing interest in the promotion of public places (Harvey, 1989; McGuigan, 2012; Molotch, 1976), has led city administrations to adopt policies that give them greater authority and influence over the design, aesthetics, and use of urban environments. For example, cities have approved

planning and building regulations, form-based codes, and design review criteria. But when it comes to regulating public space, it is not always clear whether stringent regulation is appropriate, or whose views should be taken into account, or whether a shared 'public interest' can be defined in the first place (Sandercock, 1998).

Control over public spaces has its advantages. It can encourage the creation of coherent and legible spaces, enhance their vitality, protect against external negative effects, mediate intersecting desires, and influence urban behaviors (Alexander, 1964; Dovey, 2016; Lynch, 1960; Madanipour, 2007; Jacobs, 1961; Kamel, 2014). These advantages help explain the importance of regulating mural art in the public sphere. However, intense control may result in sanitized, policed, and commodified urban spaces that do not leave room for evolution, flexibility, organic development, spontaneity, or enchantment (e.g. Ferrell, 2001; Imrie and Street, 2009; Young, 2014). This reduces the opportunity for free expression, and the formalization of subjective, alternative imaginings; instead, only messages and images deemed acceptable by the city are allowed to remain (Mitman, 2018). In addition, urban regulations are generally not given to ambiguities, leading municipal administrations to perceive the city in black-and-white terms (Dovey, 2016). Furthermore, scholars like Randal O'Toole would argue that extensive governance and planning is not always required or even possible: "*cities are complex systems that are inherently unpredictable, even chaotic...Since even the near-term future of chaotic systems cannot be accurately foreseen, any attempt to plan the distance future will fail*" (Otoole, 2007. P. 45).

To Control or not to Control Mural Art, that is the Question

As city administrations draft mural policies, they face dilemmas as to the level of control they seek to impose on their public realm. On one hand, when public officials institute a high level of control over murals, they acquire powerful tools to shape the mural's design, content, and location. But these capabilities can become a mixed blessing, for they make the city administration liable and accountable for the mural's content and maintenance (Hoffman, 1991; Merriam, 2011). In particular, murals that are pre-approved by the city administration or publicly funded can be seen as incorporating 'government speech'. If such a mural becomes contentious, the city officials would be held accountable.

As a result, administrations may establish design review processes that may in turn curtail spontaneity and artistic and proprietary freedoms, undermining the ability of communities or individuals to shape their environments. Furthermore, public officials may decide to promote mostly uncontroversial murals that are more appealing to the mainstream or general public, thereby reducing artistic expressions to mediocrity, pastiche, or kitsch (Abarca, 2016; Bengtsen, 2017; Frey 1999; Miles 1997). Lastly, city administrations may reduce the number of murals they approve due to potential maintenance costs.

On the other hand, some city administrations may wish to loosen their grip over mural art and refrain from requiring approval when murals are created. This enables artists and communities to shape urban spaces in a manner that ensures dynamism, transformation, and vibrancy, for better or worse. This independence allows for murals to evolve in a more organic and spontaneous way (Abarca, 2016; Bengtsen, 2017; Gunnell, 2010) which respects constitutional rights. But it might also leave city administrations with no capacity to control mural content or location. Lax regulation requires that public administrators 'let go' and to accommodate the unforeseen and unanticipated (Recio, 2015). This makes them vulnerable to contentious or controversial murals, along with various misunderstandings and mistakes, including the removal of well-loved murals.

What Affects the Level of Control?

Not all mural policies allow the same level of control over murals in their jurisdiction (Mendelson-Shwartz and Mualam, 2020a). First, the scope of the policy may differ. Some policies only affect specific areas of the city or types of murals (for example some policies do not affect murals located on private property) Second, because cities define signage, murals, and unsanctioned works differently, the manner governing bodies classify these terms can influence the way in which an artwork is regulated. In other words, a specific work can be seen as a mural in one city, as a sign in another, or as an unsanctioned marking in the third. Moreover, the form of consent that must be given (and by whom) for murals to be considered 'sanctioned' affects the ability of city officials to influence mural. City administrations may tolerate (or prohibit) murals in the entire city or establish tolerance zones in which they have no (or limited) control over murals and other unsanctioned

works (e.g. 'legal walls', 'halls of fame', or in 'exception zones'). Municipalities may require owner approval, de facto designating them as responsible for the murals, and develop a registry process through which they can impose non-content regulations such as size, placement, or location. And lastly, an administration might require a design review process in which murals are pre-approved, giving them significant government control.

The Level of Control Public Officials want to have

The literature exposes a wide variability in the control that cities exercise over murals through policy. Some cities take a zero-tolerance approach (e.g. Kimwall, 2013; Young, 2010). While other cities have relaxed vis-à-vis certain elements and processes regarding murals in the public domain, even to the point of encouraging unsanctioned street art or grassroots placemaking in their jurisdictions (Droney, 2010; Evans, 2015; Halsey and Young 2002; Young 2012, 2014). Although many of the latter cities tend to embrace more inclusive and pluralistic planning processes that involve public engagement and decentralization, I must point out that inclusive policies do not always indicate that the city is permissive towards its murals. While participatory planning might allow communities and individuals to play an active role in shaping their public spaces, they do not necessarily indicate that city administrations are becoming more permissive towards their public spaces. For example, planning or designing with communities does not necessarily obligate governing bodies to permit all informal acts or the exclusive self-regulation of local communities. Cities may follow creative and inclusive planning approaches and yet still promote zero-tolerance policies towards unsanctioned artworks (Young, 2010). Likewise, murals may be created by communities and still be part of municipal programs that impact the content, location, or other details. In addition, some scholars argue that tolerance policies may confine insurgent activities to areas of no political or commercial importance, de facto reinforcing government control in the guise of supporting free expression (Austin, 2010; Lombard, 2013; McAuliffe 2013; Mitman, 2018).

A city's permissiveness can be expressed via deliberate mural policies or more unofficial approaches, such as a lack of policy or non-enforcement of existing restrictive policies. A relaxed approach to mural art in public spaces may be encouraged – either publicly or behind-the-scenes—by

public authorities who want to nurture the local street art and graffiti scene. Such an approach may also simply be the result of legislative, managerial, or mundane challenges, such as a lack of political stamina or the personnel to enforce existing policies.

Thus, the literature paints a complex picture of cities' willingness of cities to institute and enforce rules that concern murals. This raises the question of why certain cities choose to strictly control their public spaces while others refrain from enforcement or drafting rules in the first place. This paper explores said questions; in particular examining how much power city administrations assume over murals in their jurisdictions, the underlying motivations behind their attitudes, and whether their mural policy is a result of municipal agendas or of legal or implementation constraints. To answer this question, I focus on Portland, Oregon, where the local government rewrote its mural policy, thereby re-examining its approach towards murals and the governance of public space. By using Portland as a case study, the paper will highlight dilemmas city officials face when promoting mural policies.

The dataset of this analysis is based on the study of policy documents, guidelines, legislation, transcripts of city council meetings, and other secondary sources such as articles and academic papers. We also conducted a series of 10 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with leading stakeholders from the Portland municipality, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and leading NGOs.

Portland, Oregon

Portland was selected for several reasons. First, due to a 1998 court ruling that prohibited the city from regulating mural content, Portland had to reinvent its mural policy. The city re-examined its approach towards murals and the governance of public spaces. As will first be seen, the city's current policy is the product of a long-standing dialogue between local government and various stakeholders. Second, Portland's mural policy applies to the entire city and impacts murals located on both public and private property. Consequently, Portland's mural policy potentially affords the city a high level of control. Third, Portland's planning decisions are well documented, aiding the isolation of decision-making processes from implementation issues. In the next section I will focus on how the mural policy of

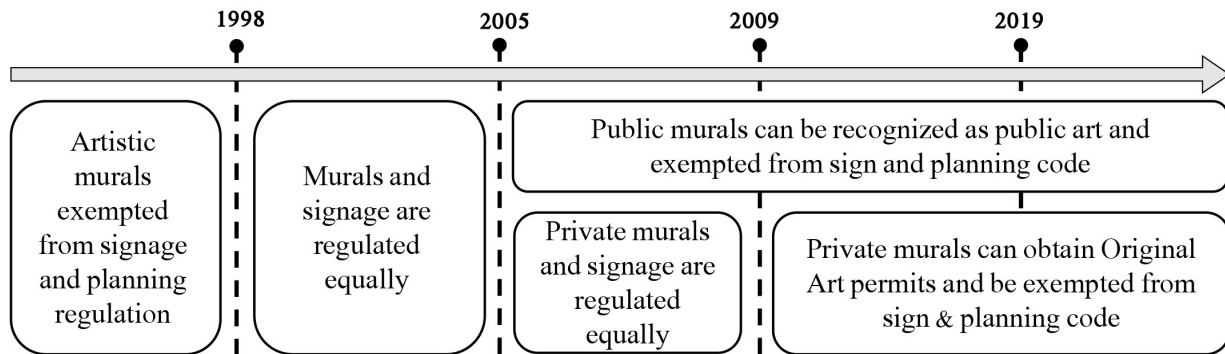


Fig. 1 – Evolution of Portland's mural policy

Portland evolved (a summary of this evolution can be seen in Fig. 1).

AK Media Court Ruling

In the past, Portland used to exempt its artistic murals from the city's signage and planning regulation. Thus, if a mural was perceived as having artistic merit and did not incorporate commercial expressions, it did not need municipal approval. In 1998, a billboard company called AK Media (later absorbed by Clear Channel) sued the city, claiming that by exempting artistic murals from city legislation, the city was in fact discriminating against advertising and violating the free speech clause of Oregon's constitution. The Multnomah County Circuit Court ruled in favor of AK Media, concluding that treating murals and signs differently, according to their content, was unconstitutional¹ (City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability 2004).

As a result, Portland's city administration had to decide whether to avoid controlling all public illustrations (artistic or commercial) or to begin regulating them all equally. Unwilling to de-regulate signage, Portland chose the latter. Consequently, murals began to be regulated as signs. Reflecting on this decision, one interviewee explained: *"The sign industry would have loved it if our regulations had been just thrown out and not regulate any kind of illustration of speech. And then you could legalize unsanctioned signs"* (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018). The change in regulation granted the city full control over its murals. However, it also imposed harsh limitations, such as restricting the size of the murals to 200 square feet (18.6

m²) and forcing property owners to pay commercial fees for artistic expression in the public domain.

Control over public artworks: Public Art Murals program (2005)

In response to the concerns of artists and community members, in 2004 the city convened meetings for stakeholders to collaborate on the city's new mural policy. The outcome of this process was the Public Art Murals Program² (see for example Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). Under the aegis of this program murals could be recognized as public art and exempted from the city's sign and planning code³. Murals approved through this track would be administered, sponsored, funded, and owned by the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC). As owner of all public artworks, RACC was able to review and approve the design of Public Art murals (City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, 2004).

In light of this policy change, all outdoor wall-markings had to undergo a design review process, whether as a mural or as signage. Any marking that did not go through this process was immediately seen as illegal and could potentially be removed. To accommodate the mural policy, Portland developed a strict zero-tolerance approach towards graffiti, establishing a graffiti abatement program and task force dedicated to buffering illicit works from public and private property (Shobe and Tiffany Conklin, 2018). During this time, Portland's local government was able to achieve a high level of control over publicly located murals, shaping their content, appearance, and location to suit the city's agendas.

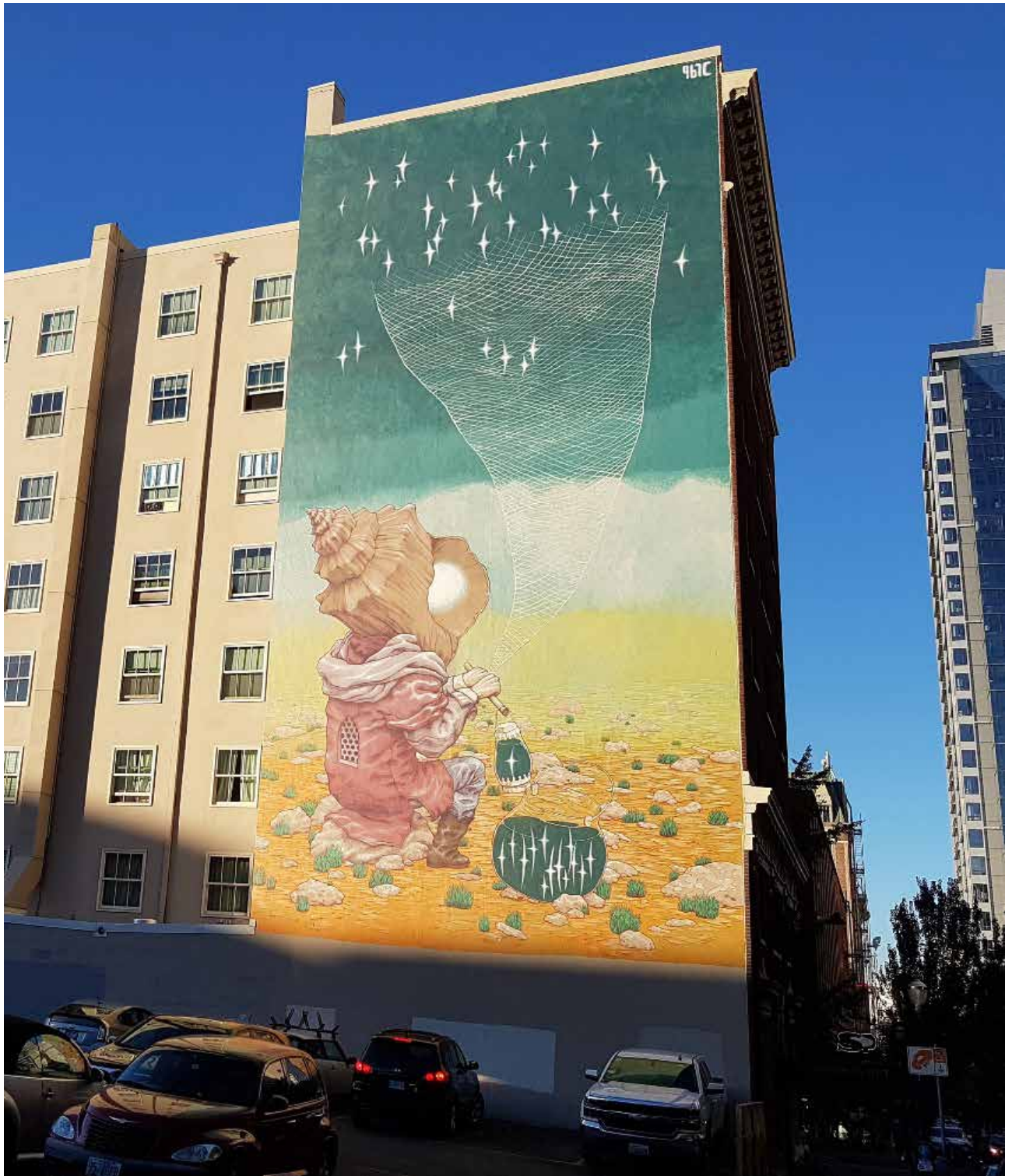


Fig. 2 - Star Catcher by Rustam Qbic, 1005 SW Park Ave, Portland, source: Author



Fig. 3 - To Oregon With Love, Blaine Fontana, 2137 Northeast Alberta Street, Portland, source: Author

Original Art Murals (2009)

The Public Art Mural Program allowed the city to distinguish between art and signage, making it possible to approve large-scale public murals. It also provided stakeholders with the opportunity to access public funds. Yet the Public Art Mural program has its limitations. First, the scope of the program is restricted to publicly owned and funded murals. As a result, it does not serve individuals who wish to create privately funded murals. Second, since murals must undergo a design review process, any mural that does not meet the artistic aims or tastes of the committee is not approved. One interviewee related to the constant tensions that the design review process caused: *“There was pressure on the public art committee to approve things that were desirable but perhaps not high quality art just so that people could get them approved”* (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018). Third, since Public Art murals become part of the city’s public art collection, they are judged as such. This has made it difficult for community/grassroots murals to be

approved, as they may be located in less visual locations and are in competition with high-quality murals created by well-known artists. In one such case, an interviewee remarked, *“we didn’t want [the mural] to be part of the city’s public art collection, they were more of a community mural”* (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018). This issue was later partially reconciled when in 2018, RACC incorporated a community mural track and an extensive community engagement process.

As Portland increasingly aimed to encourage neighbourhood-based murals as well as to address the demands of artists, owners, and community members to promote privately funded murals, the city formed another mural working group. In 2009, the city passed a new city code— Title 4 - Original Art Murals - allowing individuals and organizations to apply for a mural permit that exempts the artwork from the city’s sign and planning legislation (see for example Fig. 4).

In order not to violate Oregon's constitution, the content of Original Art murals is not regulated, loosening the city's control over some of its murals. After much debate, the municipality was willing to take this leap of faith. As an interviewee explained, "[t]here were artists and property owners who said, you know, I want a mural on my building that I want to paint ... We were a few years down the road with the RACC mural process and we hadn't had any real disasters... And so finally we got to the point where we said, okay, we'll take the risk" (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018).

However, approving murals without regulating their content elicited some concerns among city administrations, leading them to impose certain restrictions on Original Art murals. The first addressed the city's concern over opening Portland to rotating advertisement disguised as art. As an interviewee commented: "The big legal challenge became how to distinguish between signage and mural art and could those be treated differently from one another without violating those constitutional free speech provisions" (Expert from municipality, Portland, personal communication, 2018). Consequently the city required that Original Art Murals be hand painted or hand tiled directly onto walls or panels attached to the walls. Additionally, they must remain for a period of at least of 5 years. As an interviewee explained: "When you want to make money, you put a billboard up for a couple of months, towards the end people get used to seeing it and it doesn't have an impact anymore. And so they swap it out and the new work is put over and it gets people's attention. And so, keeping it up there for a while may lose its impact from an advertising standpoint". (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018). The issue of murals as advertisements was raised again in 2019, when city officials debated the possibility of establishing city-endorsed 'legal walls': "We are inundated with advertising at every turn, we don't need to provide corporations with more opportunities to bombard the public with advertisement. This is about art" (Transcript of city council meeting, August 7 2019).

The second concern was over contentious and controversial murals. Specifically, over the city's lack of ability to resolve disputes after a mural is created. As an expert from Portland's municipality explained: "...people think that what comes out of a mural won't be something that shocks them, and if it does shock them, they would call the city and complain

about it... but all we can do is look if the mural got a permit and only if it didn't get a permit as a sign or as a mural, then we can ask the owner to remove it" (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018).

To counter this concern, the municipality added a mandatory public participation process, hoping that community members would share their concerns and settle conflicts before a mural is painted. Procedural requirements of this sort were made in hope of regaining some sort of self-control over the process, through the alleged wisdom of the masses. As noted by one interviewee, "we assume that public pressure will affect [the decision], particularly if it is a business that is putting up a permanent mural on the side of its building. If it's really offensive to the community, they're going to have an interest in not doing that because they [want] people to patronize their business. But if everybody says they hate it and the owner puts it up anyway, they can" (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018).

The municipality also restricted the location and size of Original Art murals. For example, they cannot exceed 30 feet (9.14 meters) in height and cannot be located on historic landmarks, on a public right-of-way, or on street-facing walls in Design Overlay Zones such as the downtown area (City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, 2009). Additionally, Original Art Murals are not permitted on residential buildings with fewer than five dwelling units, a policy crafted in order to increase the number of people required to approve murals in residential areas.

As result of these limitations, Original Art Murals cannot be found on highly visual walls and their location in Design Overlay Zones is limited. This affects the geographical distribution of mural art in the city. As according to one interviewee, explained, "the downtown core has the most design review and design guidelines and there's a focus on what the built environment looks like and on the aesthetics of the city. Because we know we can't regulate content at all, people haven't been willing to say, okay, we're willing to have anything goes in that area" (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018).

In 2019, Portland revised its Original Art Murals code - Title 4, relieving some of its limitations: this included shortening a mural's required lifetime from five to two years, and



Fig. 4 – Rhinoceros, Josh Keyes, 1208 SE Morrison, Portland, source: Author

raising the height limits. Additionally, the city authorized the placement of Original Art murals on structures and retaining walls. This change enabled the registration of some of Portland's iconic murals, granting them legal protection. But it also allowed local government to begin regulating murals that used to be beyond its reach, thus de facto expanding its control. This policy shift suggests that the city became more confident in its decision to reflex its control over mural creation. Procedural and design requirements were sufficient to balance private and public concerns, without impinging too much on creativity, freedom of speech and proprietary interests.

Unsanctioned murals

In recent years, Portland has become more accepting of street art and other unsanctioned artworks. While every mural created without government consent is still

considered unsanctioned, the city's graffiti abatement program has modified its strategy and typically does not buff unregulated murals that are not reported by as a nuisance. Thus, the city has the power to control, but it opts not to exercise it automatically. As an interviewee explained, "[u]npermitted murals are something that the property owner asked to have on their property...the graffiti abatement program deals with graffiti vandalism, done without permission, making the owner victim of vandalism" (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018). Put differently, graffiti abatement crews proactively focus their work on areas in which graffiti has been reported, faction effect creating informal tolerant areas where, in the absence of complaint or due to the tacit or overt acceptance of the local community, unsanctioned murals remain for a long period of time. The choice to *not* exercise its powers is in itself a testament to the city's authority, discretion, and control over its public spaces. Its ability to choose where and when to intervene suggests

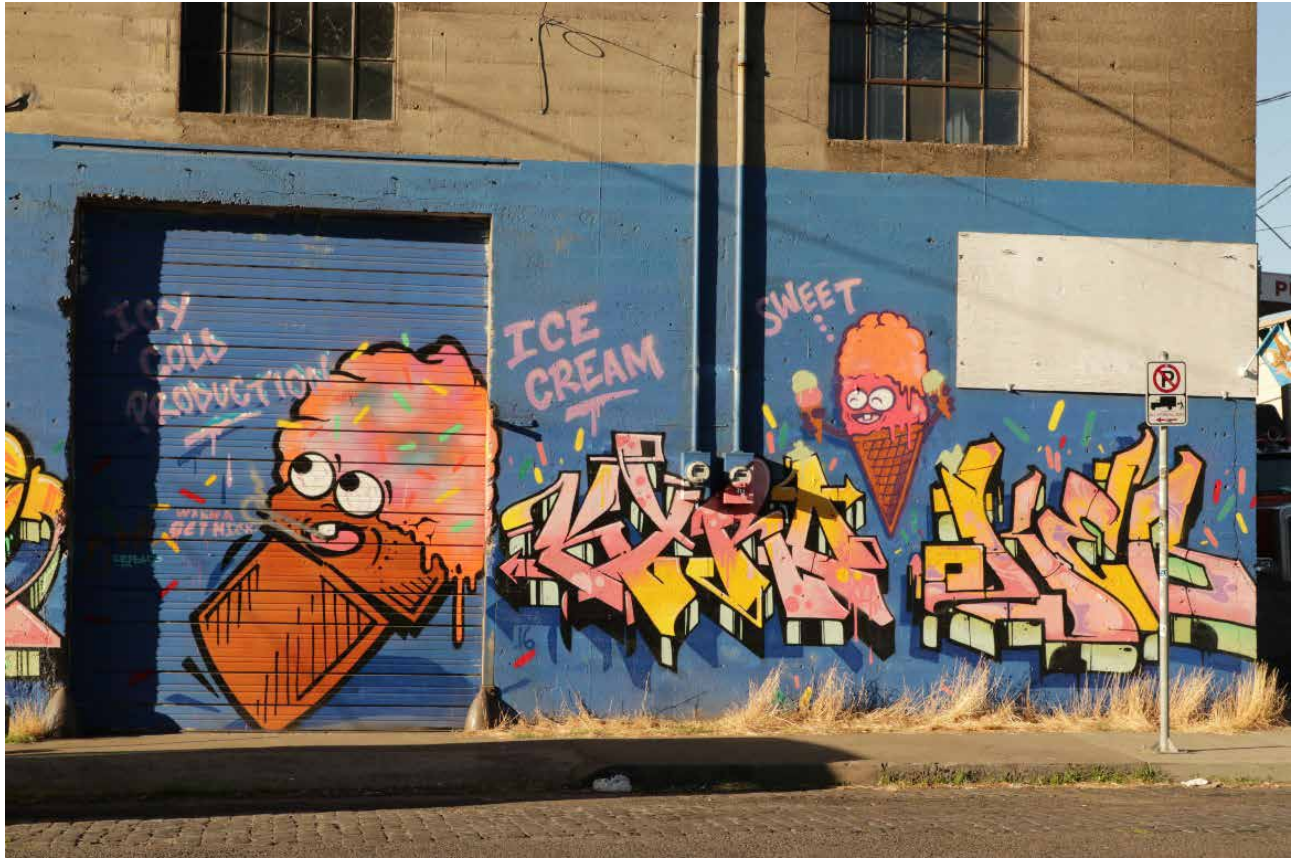


Fig. 5 – Ice cream mural, unknown artist, SE 3rd Avenue & Oak Street Portland, source: Author

that the municipality is confident enough to let people make their own choices, and to police public spaces themselves, without asserting or imposing top-down controls.

Conclusions

The case of Portland demonstrates the considerable thought Portland has invested in developing its mural policy, as well as the dilemmas (and solutions) that face city administrations attempting to balance between being more permissive and retaining a hands-on approach to public spaces.

It is evident that Portland's administration is not interested in pursuing intense control over all of the city's murals. Portland has made significant efforts in developing a variety of tools that afford governing bodies a range of control, at their discretion (see fig. 6). This enables the city to focus its efforts on governing murals that are located

in highly visual locations or are promoted by the city. The relative elasticity of the city's policy makes it possible for some murals to be created in an organic way, enhancing artistic and proprietary freedoms. Consequently, other murals can be harnessed by public bodies to promote urban development and to improve the quality of urban spaces. The degree of permissiveness of the city is related to its geography. Generally speaking, in dominant areas, such as the city center, the city's administrative maintains a high level of control. In neighborhood centers, the city relaxes its control over mural content. And in industrialized area, ally ways, and neglected spaces, the city is willing to take a more tolerance approach.

While Portland's administration acknowledges the value of regulating its public spaces, it also understands that regulation is not a quick fix. To create a pluralistic and livable public space, there are activities that should not be

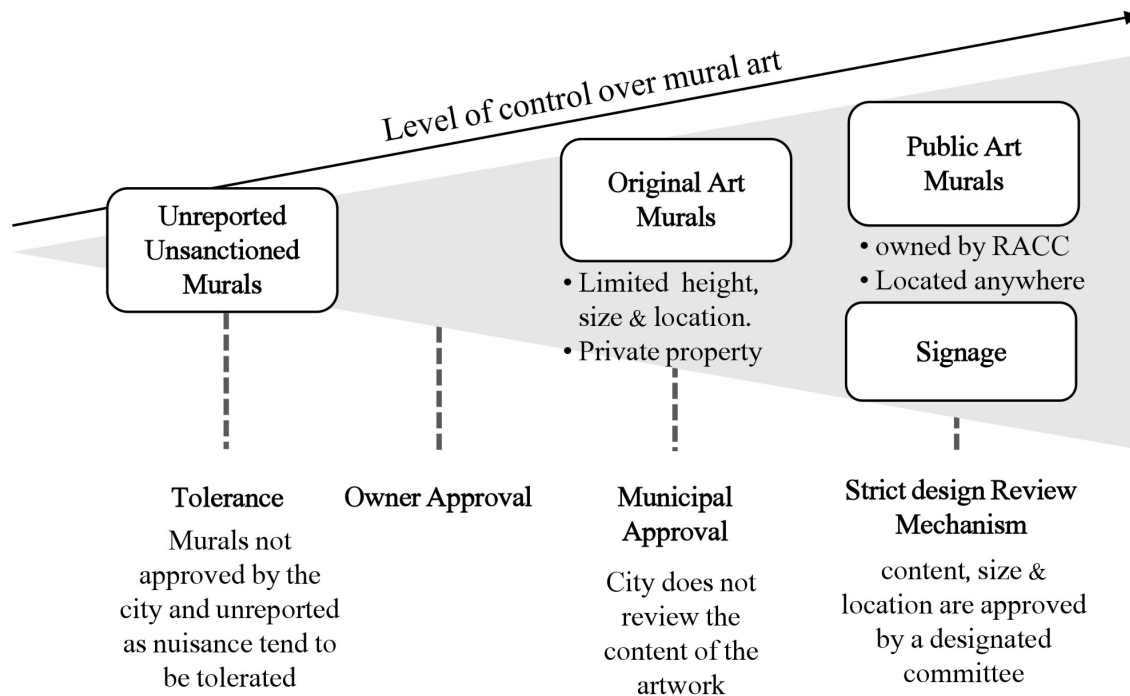


Fig. 6 – Levels of Control in Portland’s mural policy

fully regulated but instead left to develop from the ground up. Therefore, the city applies partial deregulation, and makes conscious decisions not to enforce the law under certain circumstances.

Overall, the case of Portland’s mural policy demonstrates the importance of making gradual and incremental steps towards liberating urban spaces from overbearing government regulation of art. These steps eventually contribute to the democratization of public spaces, allowing communities and individuals stronger influence over their public spaces. Control that is shared among public authorities and private stakeholders can produce a balance between individual and community interests as well as mutual supervision of public spaces in the urban environs. Indeed, looking back, one interviewee observed, “[w]e are always worried that someone is going to paint a giant swastika or that it is going to be obscene, what are we going to do if we get

that offensive mural?..... In the beginning we thought that if we cannot have any say over the content, it is going to be terrible. We finally let go of that and it has been fine. We have not had the parade of horrors” (Expert from Portland, personal communication, 2018).

Footnotes

1. Oregon's state Constitution has a broader free speech protection than the United States Constitution. Unlike federal law that distinguishes among differing kinds of expression based on their content (allowing the distinction between commercial and noncommercial speech), Oregon's Constitution addresses all expression as equal (that is, one cannot make distinctions based on content).
2. Title 5 of Portland's city code defines all public artworks (and with them Public Art murals) as "original creative work, which is accessible to the public and/or public employees, and which has been approved as public art by the Regional Arts and Culture Council, acting on behalf of the City of Portland" (Portland city code - Title 5 - Revenue and Finance, 5.74).
3. Because the distinction between Public Art murals and other illustrations created on outdoor facades is based on procedure and not content (whether or not they were approved and owned by RACC), it is possible to exempt them from the city's sign code as well as the planning and zoning code.

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Street Art & Graffiti in Belgrade: Ecological Potentials?

Srdan Tunić

STAW BLGRD - Street Art Walks Belgrade, Serbia
srdjan.tunic@gmail.com, srdjantunic.wordpress.com

Abstract

Since the emergence of the global contemporary graffiti and street art, urban spaces have become filled with a variety of techniques and art pieces, whether as a beautification method, commemorative and community art, or even activism. Ecology has also been a small part of this, with growing concern over our environment's health (as well as our own), disappearing living species and habitats, and trying to imagine a better, less destructive humankind (see: Arrieta, 2014).

But, how can this art - based mostly on aerosol spray cans and thus not very eco-friendly - in urban spaces contribute to ecological awareness? Do nature, animal and plant motifs pave a way towards understanding the environment, or simply serve as aesthetic statements? This paper will examine these questions with the example of Belgrade, Serbia, and several local (but also global) practices. This text is based on ongoing research as part of Street Art Walks Belgrade project (STAW BLGRD) and interviews with a group of artists.

Keywords: street art, graffiti, ecology, environmental art, belgrade

1. Introduction: Environmental art

Art has always been connected to the natural world - with its origins using natural materials and representing the living world. But somewhere in the 1960s in the USA and the UK, a new set of practices emerged, redefining environmental art, and moving away from traditional art history and representation. Land or Earth Art took artists and art lovers to nature itself, bringing it in its crude form into gallery spaces, collaborating with nature and challenging the very nature of an artwork. This happened in conjunction with post-WWII avantgarde and conceptual practices. Unlike environmental art, a more recent trend called ecological art, or eco art, is less concerned about aesthetics and the use of natural materials, but rather mixing art, science and technology, proposing activism and practical bio-social solutions for our environment. Artist researcher mirko nikolić¹, in his PhD about ecological aesthetics, sees this art approach as going beyond human selfishness, towards posthumanism, and incorporating matters such as climate and social justice (see: nikolić, 2016).

Of course, sometimes clear distinctions are hard to make, but for the sake of explaining the basic principles, a good example between the terms and practices could be seen in the two illustrations below. The first one, The crack of something (Figure 2), uses natural material - wood - which is processed and presented as a temporary installation, as part of an art residency program Ars Kozara set in the National park on Kozara mountain. Its physical longevity depends on the natural and human factors, under constant state of decay, and its reading lies in poetic reference to cracks in the source material. In a critique of all the artworks produced during the residency, Stojsavljević and Anćufejev state that the artists are passivizing the role of nature, by using it just as a raw material and creating a new, artistic nature, where "the artwork is more the expression of the artist" than nature itself (Stojsavljević and Anćufejev, 2013).

¹ - Original capitalization.



Figure 1. Plant a tree – Send a message. Artez. Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©LSD Magazine.

This one belongs more in the environmental art category, while a still of the video from *we - copper & copper - us: mineralizacija* project offers a more complex involvement (Figure 3). There, the source material goes between actual human involvement with nature - extraction of copper by the metal industry in Bor, the scientific and other processes that accompany it, presented as multimedia, still with an

artistic or poetic reading behind it. As an example of eco art, it tackles many ongoing theoretical discussions, such as the notion of anti-extractivism (nikolić, 2016: 241). Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, I will use environmental art (Martinique, 2016; Tunnacliffe, 2016: 17) because it covers a wide range of practices and is more applicable to the subject in question.



Figure 2. Pucanje nečega (The crack of something). Ars Kozara: art in nature laboratory #7, 2014. Goran Čupić. Mountain Kozara, Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photograph ©Ars Kozara.

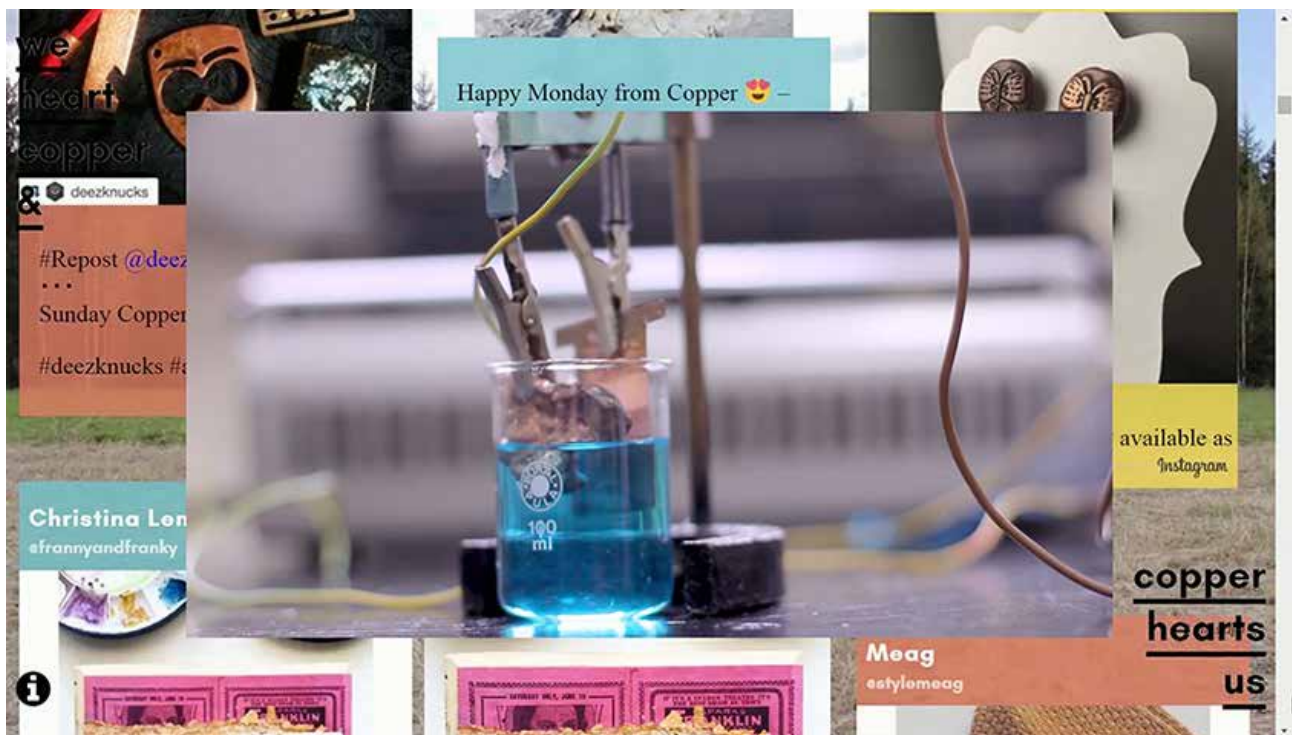


Figure 3. Blue stone synthesis experiment with Dr. Aleksandra Mitovski. Performance documentation, we - copper & copper - us: mineralizacija. mirko nikolić. Bor, Serbia, 2016. Photograph ©Duško Jelen.



Figure 4. Green works. Paul Curtis, a.k.a. Moose. San Francisco, 2009. Photograph ©Wide Walls, 2014.

Trying to pin down strict definitions of both graffiti and street art might turn out to be too complex, having in mind numerous and fluctuating readings. Relying on the research by Ljiljana Radošević, who has been following street art and graffiti in Belgrade and Serbia in the last 20 years, both street art and graffiti belong to public art (or art in public space, urban art), fluctuating between a subculture and fine art movement, lifestyle and art practices (Radošević, 2012). However, there are many similarities between them - in her research which tackles terminological issues she states: "It goes without saying that graffiti and street art are closely connected and intertwined: sometimes they share the same walls, the same artists and the same techniques, but most of the time they produce a different visual material" (Radošević, 2012). While the graffiti movement has roots in 1970s US subculture, street art emerged later, mixing the graffiti heritage with visual arts (also see: Norvaišaitė, 2014: 9-11). For this paper, I will focus on artworks made on walls - murals, made by artists predominantly working in the field of graffiti and street art in Serbia.

In both street art and graffiti (SAG), there is a plethora of nature and animal motifs, while a breakthrough in more ecologically aware techniques appeared in the mid 2000s. A set of practices labelled as reverse graffiti offered the technique of removing layers of dirt to create messages and images. It is also known as clean tagging, dust tagging, grime writing, clean graffiti, green graffiti or clean advertising. Because of this, it has been accepted in green marketing (Figure 4). Another technique, moss graffiti combines stencils and moss paste to leave less invasive marks in public areas. Some other artists started using discarded materials in the form of recycled art, such as Bordalo II (Figure 5). These techniques remain rare in the graffiti and street art world, and are predominantly tied to themes such as urban pollution, exploring biodegradable materials, and making the urban environment more green (Bambić, 2014b; Norvaišaitė, 2016).

This trend does pose a few questions and challenges for more traditional styles, techniques and forms. On the one hand, graffiti and most street art is based on aerosol paint

and the use of industrial spray cans. New eco practices are far removed from this approach, distancing themselves from the non-eco-friendly aspects of spray cans, such as waste, presence of heavy metals, and poisonous chemicals. However, both share great visibility in public space, potent direct communication, and are ephemeral at the core.

2. Case Study: Belgrade

If not originally rooted in these new environmental practices, is it still possible to have graffiti and street art that raises awareness of ecology? I would argue that it is possible, if we see graffiti and street art as part of the urban ecosystem. Metaphorically, this often non-permitted artform grows like purslane from cracks in concrete, on walls and other surfaces, covering spaces from small corners to whole facades. It both pollutes the visual field like weeds and serves as a beautification method. It can serve a similar need like growing a plant or keeping a pet, where we nurture a connection with nature around or far removed from us.

Belgrade is the birthplace of graffiti and street art in Serbia, with roots in the mid 1980s, expanding only in mid 1990s during the student protests against the Milošević regime. From the original letters of graffiti subculture, characters of street art, and traditional mural painting, this city also offers environmental motifs taken from flora and fauna. It goes without saying that just by simply depicting a natural motif, a work does not automatically have ecological messages. However, by diving deeper into the artists' oeuvre, one can note ecological potentials, apart from manifest eco murals, which I aim to support. In several examples, I would also pay attention to how artist intention relates to interpretation of the work, and what could be done to make this eco reading potentially more clear.

For the purpose of this text, several active street artists were contacted based on the presence of natural motifs in their work and nine out of twenty responded to a survey via Instagram between autumn 2019 and spring 2020. All are actively producing SAG, whether coming from (visual) arts, the very subculture of graffiti or other backgrounds: Jana, wrnkl, Lunar, Piros, Junk, ZEZ lunatic, Artez, Quam and Brva. Most have been active for the last



Figure 5. The Swift/Apus Apus. Bordallo II. Lodz, 2015. Photograph ©I Support Street Art, 2015.

decade, or longer, and all but one operate from Belgrade. This does not at all cover all the street art and graffiti artists operating in Belgrade, or Serbia, with a potential ecological reading.

The survey was designed to discover more about the reasons and meanings behind the animal and plant motifs present in their works, as well as messages artists wanted to communicate in the streets. The focus on motivation, motifs and messages, as well ecological potentials, is echoing Veronika Norvaišaitė's approach in her study *Environmental Communication in Street Art: Motivations & Messages of Reverse Graffiti Creators*, where she interviewed artists and green companies utilizing reversed graffiti around the world. In grounding a certain ecological practice, it is necessary to understand the messages communicated behind certain motifs (Norvaišaitė, 2016: 62). Motifs are also important because, according to nikolić, environmental art imports nature into culture, e.g. by depicting nature and/or using it as raw material (nikolić, 2016: 46-52).² In this process, nature is considered as something taken from the outside, while more radical eco-orientated art sees nature as part of a "cohabitation of agencies, human and other-than-human" (nikolić, 2016: 51). Following their leads, chapters *The Elm-Chanted Forest* and *Urban Jungle* will mostly tackle the use of nature's symbology, as subject-matter, through a variety of animal and plant motifs, while *Plant a tree, send a message: Ecology, responsibility and activism* will pay more attention to critical practices with certain ecological techniques as well.

Additionally, when asked about ecological readings of their work, most of the artists dismissed the label, stating that they are more interested in urban than natural surroundings, social relations, and an individual's place in society. Apart from using animals as alter egos, metaphorical motifs and formal inspiration, several of them acknowledged the communication potential of SAG and noted several artworks that have ecological messages. Regarding motivation, reasons for including natural motifs differ among: inspiration for formal and symbolic explorations (symbols widely popular and understandable), love towards the natural world, animals as transmitters of

2 - In the street art and graffiti world, using natural materials is still rare and an emerging practice, that's why this article focuses mostly on depicted motifs.

emotions and messages, metaphorical greening, search for spirituality, and alter egos.

3. The Elm-Chanted Forest: Nature as alter ego

Creating and invoking a connection between urban and natural spaces, at least through images, artists are visually challenging the often gray and brown city, dilapidated and discarded areas. Among the most popular motifs are animals which are culturally infused with symbolism, according to Claude Levi Strauss, because they are "good to think with." On the streets of Belgrade in the past years, most species in SAG are local animals (domesticated and wild), with a few examples of exotic and pop culture ones. There is also a great number of hybrid beings, standing somewhere between monsters and fantasy creatures.

Artists such as Lunar and Brva emphasize that animals can transmit emotions and universal values with more sincerity than humans (or human motifs). According to Lunar, who is based in Zagreb and has been making art since the late 1980s: "Evolutionally, they were there before humans and aren't capable of causing such damage (to the environment) as humans have, they simply exist" (Interview with Lunar, 2019). ZEZ lunatic said that "nature is an inevitable motif, after all, we're all nature" (Interview with ZEZ lunatic, 2019). By relying on commonplace and personal symbolic readings, the artist gives animals meanings of happiness and tenderness (rabbit), wisdom (owl), and strength (bull).³ This reading is quite personal and often relying on commonplace assumptions and present cultural symbols.

Several artists create distinct characters that can be interpreted as alter egos. They stand as signs, visual signatures, that we can recognize in addition to their overall style. Given the often anonymity of the creators, these animals the authors identify with could be seen as their stand-ins in public space, fulfilling the function of a tag. Rage (also known as Resto) uses a characteristic animal alter ego that looks like a fox, as well as a dog called Jackie (Džeki / Џеки.; Figure 8); Lunar is recognizable by his often positive, good-hearted cats (or tomcat, Catso; Figure 6), wrnkl with his pug stencils (Figures 18 and 26), and Brva with French bulldogs (Figure 7).

3 - Other artists depict a variety of animals, both local and global, such as Junk, Weedzor, Lemon One, Oniro (IT), and Ami imaginaire (FR), the latter two leaving a few pieces behind upon visiting Serbia.



Figure 6. United Colors of Belgrade, Festival Rekonstrukcija 2018. Lunar & Flying Förtress. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Street Art Walks Belgrade / STAW BLGRD.



Figure 7. Festival Rekonstrukcija 2019. Brva, Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©Festival Rekonstrukcija.

Piros has a distinct invented animal, which is a hybrid with a rooster's head and wasp's body, called Džamutka (Figure 9). He emphasizes that painting Džamutka is an "expression of my own freedom statement. She has a noble mission, to inspire and motivate on her path!" (Interview with Piros, 2019). According to Radošević:

...for its author it represents all the best in this world – extreme dedication and ability to fly. And if pushed to the limits it can sting. The name was derived from the Roma dialect in which it has a meaning of curse word but it can also mean something frightful and unseen. Therefore Džamutka can be everything and nothing and exactly this contradiction can infuse all sorts of traits in her" (Radošević, 2020).

Piros' hybrid is an invented character with great personal symbolism, and it is rather common to see imaginary creatures and hybrids.⁴ As in the case of Džamutka, cultural background and local history often influences the

4 - Another Belgrade-based artist, Velvet, has a mermaid/octopus character, referencing Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, which could stand as her alter ego or at least trademark. Weedzor usually depicts colorful animal faces, while for Runaway Festival 2019 the artist made a unicorn in a project sponsored by Sprite. Artists such as Snout, Endo, and Alek Leaf also often use monster-like or hybrid characters.

artwork, as could be seen with few artists from abroad who made their mark with a fusion of certain "tribal" elements, referencing native imagery from Latin America, such as Farid Rueda (MX, in Belgrade) and Jumu (PE, in Čačak). Rueda in his two murals so far made as part of the Runaway Festival painted a deer (Figure 10) and an eagle (the latter in collaboration with TKV), common forest animals in Serbia, incorporating them in his complex and rich in color style blending Mexican popular culture and evoking pre-Conquest Mexican societies.

Birds are a common motif - Brva made one of his early murals of an owl, while TKV and Jana often depict swallows (Figure 11). Jana analyses the bird motif as representing a personal and social need to (not)belong to a group identity:

Birds were a handy metaphor - if you pull out a bird (from the swarm) she's a freedom symbol, and when you push her in the swarm she becomes part of a multitude of sameness, something that doesn't have an identity (of its own) (Kalaba, 2019).

As we can see in this example, the reading fluctuates depending on the context. Similar is with another example. Rats are expected companions during the night when most SAG artists do their magic, and are often referenced on the walls of Belgrade. An undisclosed artist known simply as



Figure 8. Џеки. Rage. Belgrade, Serbia, 201?. Photograph ©Street Art Walks Belgrade / STAW BLGRD.



Figure 9. Džamutka. Piros. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Piros.



Figure 10. Runaway Festival & Donji Dorćol. Farid Rueda. Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©Street Art Walks Belgrade / STAW BLGRD.



Figure 11. Jana. Belgrade, Serbia, 2017. Photograph ©Jana Danilović.

Ratz (or Rats) made a series of human-sized rat characters engaging in everyday activities and street scenes in 2013, reimagining the city dwellers as living in a hood (Figure 12). TKV - Kraljica Vila (The Fairy Queen) - also made a rat series between 2018 and 2019 (Figure 13), where she accepts them as one of street art & graffiti symbols. And this should be no surprise given the popular imagery of artists such as Banksy (UK) and before him Blek le rat (FR), the latter leaving his traces in the yard of the Cultural Center Magacin (Belgrade) in 2009. Blek le rat famously said that the rat is “the only free animal in the city” and their image reminds city people of often invisible and suppressed urban elements (I Support Street Art, 2017).

Insects are also a notable theme. Quam dedicated most of his recent art to natural motifs, using them to explore formal qualities. Murals of monarch butterfly’s hatching (made for DUK Festival 2019; Figure 34), scarab and longhorn beetle (Figure 14), or drawings of crickets, cicadas, moths and the

rest stand as poetic interpretations of the natural world, often with a symbolism of rebirth and transformation (series *Metamorphosis*), if not just fascination. However, Quam prefers when the message is subtle and not imposing: “I like the form of living creatures, they are rewarding to draw because they have a lot of information and could be used in a variety of contexts” (Interview with Quam, 2020).

Relying on the fantastic and metaphorical, several artists have been depicting human-plant hybrids. Artez has a series of humans who in place of heads and torsos have plants, or humans with bird houses as heads, inviting the birds in (Figure 15). This could be read as an attempt to acknowledge the (need for) nature inside of us (Interview with Artez, 2020). In a wider field of urban art, plants are also used as an ally, often tackling issues such as activism, community and urban regeneration (see: Pedersen, 2018).



Figure 12. Rats. Belgrade, Serbia, 2013. Photograph ©Street Art Walks Belgrade / STAW BLGRD.

Many artists stated that by depicting natural motifs they are symbolically and visually participating in a project of making Belgrade greener. Junk, as well as Piros and Artez, emphasizes that his murals contribute to the effect of greenification of the city. In his words:

There is not a specific message, more an effect, it's interesting for me to take natural elements and invented characters and put them in an urban space and to have that colorfulness - which I often employ in my work - popping out from the concrete grayness (Interview with Junk, 2019).

Spring Vibes (Figure 16) and Mother Nature murals, as well as his contribution to the Rekonstrukcija Festival 2018 bear witness to this statement. Another artist, Marko Ćulum, following this thread, states that creating a mural is just a part of activities one could do to make the environment look better, and that he as an artist can provide "a game for the eye, an impulse" to make one's day better in the city's concrete grayness (Banić, 2020).



Figure 13. TKV. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Street Art Walks Belgrade / STAW BLGRD.

Another well present scene is forest and farm, as a personal project or a setting for collaborations. Artists such as Junk and Snout depict a variety of plants, animals and often symbols grouped together. But the most striking ones might be the large-scale graffiti jams, such as Meeting of Styles 2010 and Runaway Festival 2018 (Figure 17). The collaborative large-scale mural made for the latter offers a possible interpretation of the famous Animal Farm novel by George Orwell, where Brva contributed a pack of dogs and sheep. Animals serve as symbols of e.g. freedom, independence, struggle, and love, and that through street art the artist wants to communicate those messages. Brva claims that this aspect of his work can be seen as ecological because "...it draws attention to specific types of animals which require (that) attention" (Interview with Brva, 2020). While attention is good, as a prerequisite for further ecological actions, it raises the question - what next? Fitting well with the environmental art definition, these examples are trying to address ecological questions from within the art world, via aesthetics. But how to create stronger, more purposeful messages and links with the ecosystem? This will be further explored in the next two chapters.



Figure 14. Quam. Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©Igor Svetel / Walls of Belgrade.



Figure 15. Artez. Belgrade, Serbia, 2017. Photograph ©Artez.



Figure 16. Spring vibes pt. 2. Junk. Belgrade, Serbia, 2016. Photograph ©Junk.



Figure 17. Runaway Festival 2018. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Vatovec.

4. Urban Jungle: Commenting on the environment

While most of the previous examples were not made specifically to foster a direct (or sometimes conscious) ecological message, and most artists usually avoid putting “eco” in front of their works, nevertheless there are murals with general ecological messages. Ecology, usually understood as a human’s relation to the natural world, can be understood as using natural motifs to comment on our wider environment. In her research about how environmentally engaged urban street art provokes interactions between various urbanites with the environment, Claire Malaika Tunnacliffe notes:

The environment does not stand-alone against political, social or economic issues; our daily reality is woven out of these entanglements. Environmentally engaged urban street art reflects this by critiquing everyday life through the social interstices it creates, and revealing new environmental understandings, raising an awareness of surroundings (Tunnacliffe, 2016: 18).



Figure 18. wrnkl. Belgrade, Serbia, 2014. Photograph ©Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani.

Festival Rekonstrukcija in Belgrade (Figures 7 and 21) recognized this potential for street art to address and collaborate with the communities in and via public space, paving the road to a more general citizen activism:

Art interventions set in the context of everyday people’s lives, in neighborhoods, can influence a new reading of the city (parts) in a multifaceted way, creating new urban contexts and connecting people. By positioning the art in public space, it [public space, author’s note] stops being faceless and closed for communication, rather, on the contrary, calls for a dialogue - between the city and individuals, between the inhabitants themselves, but also by provoking the creation of other artworks, which juxtaposed make new relations (Marković, 2020: 5).

While collaboration with communities, if not the ecologists themselves, in this sphere remains scarce, artists do see the power in public art, which is a valuable resource for more active community engagement. In chapter 3, I mentioned a few uses of alter egos - some other artists use them as commentators on society (and the urban environment), that I like to label street philosophers. From the past years, some of the most prominent ones on the streets of Belgrade have been wrnkl, Vudemn (an actual philosopher) and Orbot. wrnkl - also known as inspektor Joda zgužvani (inspector Yoda the wrinkled) has taken an image of one of his pugs as the literal face for his messages. Made as stencils, with added speech balloons, the pugs comment, often with almost untranslatable word plays, on gender relations, subvert common sayings, and generally play with language loaded with an activist mindset (Marčetić, 2014). A few examples include: “Izvini, nisi moj (stereo)tip” (Sorry, you ain’t my (stereo)type), “Duga je ulica” (The street is long/ rainbow), “Ne tuci (p)se” (Don’t beat dogs/yourself) and “Strah rađa nasilje” (Fear gives birth to violence; Figure 18). On a more general level, the artist sees that animals have the spiritual potential to reconnect us to nature, reminding us of an alienated world that has therefore become even magical, and aims to present animals as equal to, if not above, humans (Interview with wrnkl, 2019).

Artists such as ZEZ lunatic created a world full of anthropomorphic beasts and animals, raging on and from the walls, in a surreal, comic book-like setting. He mentioned in the interview that his goal is to both express emotions and offer a critique of contemporary society, mainly capitalism, consumerism and materialism, such as in the mural More food for people (Figure 19), targeting fast



Figure 19. More food for people. ZEZ lunatic. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©ZEZ lunatic.

food chains such as KFC and McDonalds (Interview with ZEZ lunatic, 2019). The artist finds it important to raise the consciousness of the onlookers: "For me, it's enough just to create a reaction, whatever it might be. Lethargy is worse than any bad reaction" (Milošević, 2018).

Nevercrew from Switzerland made their *Imitation of life no. 9* depicting a paint machine going over an old blue (actually sperm) whale, made for Mikser festival 2014 (Figure 20).

Often using endangered species, such as whales and polar bears in their poetic interpretations of our environmental challenges, Nevercrew said that: "It's about transformation, evolution, which are all ideas very current in this area (Savamala)" (Bambić, 2014a). We could also assume the city itself represented as the sea mammal, old but still standing, putting up with another renovation by the machines, while remaining the same at its core.



Figure 20. Imitation of life no. 9. Nevercrew. Belgrade, Serbia, 2014. Photograph ©Ana Bambić Kostov / Widewalls.

Poetic and symbolic approach is also utilized by Jana who covered many walls with jungle-like plants and often presents human hearts intertwined with swallows, waves, plants, and other elements that have personal and symbolic meanings. These are made as large-scale murals and more intimate paste ups, where Jana literally plants a seed in us: a heart made for Rekonstrukcija Festival 2018 has a growing branch poking out of it (Figure 21). Another, The Heart of the Mountain at Divčibare mountain was made for the Mountain Music Festival in 2018,⁵ making a rare intervention into the natural surrounding itself (Figure 22). By utilizing visual symbols, she constructs a metaphor somewhere between notions of tamedness/civilization/smoothness and wildness (in a positive light), linking our inner wilderness with the one surrounding us (Interview

with Jana, 2019). Here, the connection is direct, by using widely recognized (heart, plants) symbols, and setting the hearts in certain context (abandoned building, mountain), the artist is able to communicate her message with less ambiguity.

Artez usually combines plants with humans and their intimate surroundings, offering a connection with nature, but also ecological messages. Works such as Plant a tree, send a message (Figure 1); Unexpected journey through the day 3: Help her grow; Reading makes you grow (Figure 23) and many others offer both a message of greening the city and personal, doable engagements that everyone can do in our daily lives. In general, when asked about ecological aspects of his work, the artist aims to be more aware while working, not leaving trash behind him, recycling materials and tools, and so on. "What I like most is spending time in

5 - <http://mmf.rs/2019/05/>



Figure 21. Festival Rekonstrukcija 2018. Jana. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Street Smart Belgrade.



Figure 22. Srce planine (The hearth of the mountain). Jana. Divčibare, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©Mountain Music Fest.



Figure 23. Reading makes you grow, Campo en Blanco project. Artez. Armstrong, Argentina, 2016. Photograph ©Firma creative.

nature, that's why I'm trying to bring a bit of greenery to the space I'm working in by using floral motifs" (Interview with Artez, 2020). Junk says similarly: "My works in a way point to the fact that we need more green areas in the city, and by using colors and motifs from nature I'm creating an image about how important it is for a city to have its little green oases" (Interview with Junk, 2019).

Lunar with his cats (Catso) has an underlying belief to promote universal messages of a good and constructive world, as shown in his murals Daily care for nature, Protectors (Figure 24) and Savage Love. In the survey, Lunar noted grimly that many ecological solutions, such as recycling, have been globally used to "smudge our eyes" instead of contributing to real social change. He is disappointed with human ignorance of ecology, and "... aware of my own powerlessness, but just the same I don't

plan only to sit down and look at the downfall that we're presented with by the hordes of parasites [corrupted politicians]" (Interview with Lunar, 2019).

Duo Studio Kriška made a fictitious and allegorical Endangered Savamala's Ghost Panda in Belgrade (Figure 25), as part of their wider project Ghost people of Savamala, with an interesting social twist: "...he represents all the repressed inhabitants of Savamala, the ones without a voice, that are not seen or are pushed aside, but are still a part of the community" (Kriška studio, 2013; also: Start Street Art Belgrade, 2014a). This and most of previous works rely on symbolic and often poetic and subtle reading of our environment, reflecting on the society and communicating a personal need for closer links with the natural world. A way towards activism and more bold ecological involvement could be made by incorporating ecological findings and less



Figure 24. Protector. Lunar. Zagreb, Croatia, 2019. Photograph ©Lunar.

ambiguous messages.

5. It's our responsibility...: Ecology and activism

In discussing various practices of reverse graffiti, Veronika Norvaišaitė notes that art in the streets has social potentials and in her research underlines that "...creators of reverse graffiti are much more driven by the possibility to beautify neglected places and improve the social atmosphere there than by a desire to bring to attention the issue of pollution" (78). In other words, they seem equally interested in influencing the social and the physical environment. In the case of Belgrade, the social aspect - beautification and pro-ecological messages - seem to be predominant, still with a few notable eco technical interventions lining towards eco graffiti and eco art.

Many artists are focused on humans and their relation to the city environment and nature. wrnkl's philosophical messages, as previously mentioned, target homo- and trans- phobias, violence towards people and animals (as in Ne tuci (p)se - Don't beat dogs/yourself, Figure 26), and aim to influence people's perceptions in a playful and

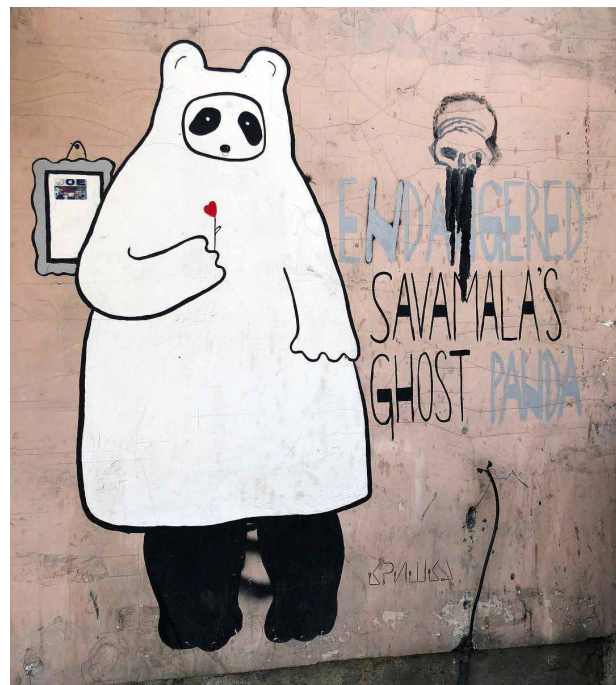


Figure 25. Endangered Savamala's Ghost Panda. Studio Kriška. Belgrade, Serbia, 2013. Photograph ©selenborcbakan.

activist way. Another example is a green mountain goat pushing a domino-like structure in Piroš' mural made as part of Be pArt Budva Festival in 2018 (Figure 27). For this mural the artist stated in his portfolio: "The main purpose of this project is to spread [e.g. talk about, author's note] the negative attitude of young people towards improper construction, unplanned urbanism and the irresponsible behaviour of humanity towards nature and its resources" (Piroš, 2020: 27).

In Pop Lukina street no. 6 in Belgrade, we have a mini case study which shows two different voices in the eco story, both which gain their strength from knowing and incorporating the local context in the artwork itself. The first one was made as part of Belef 09 festival, with BLU's piece The tree eater. BLU (IT), still keeping an anonymous identity, creates large-scale often site-specific murals on a global scale, infused with critical and activist commentary of social relations, values and current politics. The Belgrade one presents a business person with buildings instead of teeth devouring a green tree (Figure 28). "The message is clear - nature loses the battle with urban expansion and enormous developmental projects which are destroying it



Figure 26. Ne tuci (p)se. wrnkl. Srebrno jezero, Serbia, 2014. Photograph ©wrnkl.



Figure 27. Be pArt Budva festival. Budva, Montenegro, 2016. Photograph ©Fondacija Budva.

day by day” (Start Street Art Belgrade, 2014b). The mural is more current than ever given that the city government has initiated many reconstruction projects in the past years that removed trees and previously green spaces by filling them with concrete and insisting on the “concretization” of public space (Tešić, 2019). This is all happening in a period when there is a rising concern about the air quality, which has dramatically worsened during the 2019/2020 winter period.

The newer mural is Zeleni grad - nova energija (The green city - new energy) initiated by NIS (Naftna industrija Srbije - Oil company of Serbia), which had a petrol pump just underneath BLU's piece (Figure 29). Designed by Sara Antov and Dragan Vuković, and executed by the Paint Kartel graffiti crew, the mural imagines the interconnected city like a leaf with its veins. It serves a marketing purpose (Danas, 2018), signaling an ecological dedication of the company and a vision of a green future (if already not the

present), which features more green areas followed by art.

Two years afterwards, the muralization has not been continued and the ecological potential of many public spaces is unrealized, if not already erased with concrete. “The big companies nowadays are, ironically, the ones to be the loudest in carrying on campaigns for protection of the natural environment and investing big money in recycling which became a profitable business as well” (Start Street Art Belgrade, 2014b). The tree eater and The green city showcase two approaches, coming from a personal activism and urban redevelopment. While the former became a reality, in its 11th year of existence, the latter stands as a fragile promise.

Looking back at motifs, while many animals seem to be accepted as a global imagery, ready to be used anywhere, some of them are specifically linked to local and endangered



Figure 28. The tree eater. BLU. Belgrade, Serbia, 2009. Photograph ©Start Street Art Belgrade.



Figure 29. Zeleni grad - nova energija. Sara Antov and Dragan Vuković. Belgrade, Serbia, 2018. Photograph ©NIS.



Figure 30. Odgovornost je naša za orla krstaša. Piros. Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©Igor Svetel / Walls of Belgrade.



Figure 31. Crna žuna ne može bez šuma. Mišo Joskić. Podgorica, Montenegro, 2018. Photograph ©Mišo Joskić.

species. Another “urban-ecological” artwork by Piros represents the eastern imperial eagle (orao krstaš) that was unveiled in the lower Dorćol area, tied to a campaign by LAV beer and the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia (BPSSS), supported by the Association of Lower Dorćol (Figure 30). The aim of the campaign was to protect endangered birds and their habitat and rebuild it at Fruška Gora mountain. According to the mural initiators, at the time (2019), although the eagle is the national symbol, only one nesting pair was found in the country and BPSSS worked hard to provide them all the necessary resources to reproduce (B92, 2019; Piros, 2020: 41). In an example from neighboring Montenegro, Mišo Joskić depicted a deforestation scene warning the public about the habitat loss of black woodpeckers, initiated by the Center for Protection and Research of Birds (CZIP) (Đurović, 2018; Figure 31). Apart from being related to larger call-for-action projects, these works provide more context and involvement, by bringing attention to animals which require it, to paraphrase Brva’s words.

As far as my knowledge goes, there have not been any continuous and actual attempts to use reverse graffiti or

similar techniques in Belgrade.⁶ A Youtube video shows Moose (UK), one of the founders of reverse graffiti or clean tagging, who worked on a hallway in Belgrade in 2011 with a few fine arts students.⁷ Recently, in 2019, Belgrade artist Ivan Kocić made a mural Griffon Vulture (beloglavi sup) using recycled materials, an extension of his Recycling of Play assemblage project, which could be an interesting way forward, mixing mural and installation art (Figure 32).⁸ Together with Piros’ eagle mural, it tackles a sensitive bird species, which was luckily saved from near-extinction. Additionally, it is also part of a wider environmental project, supported by the EU, and was made in collaboration with school kids (Evropa.rs, 2019).

Recently, in autumn 2020, a mural was made as part of Converse City Forests project, the very first one in

6 - wrnkl mentioned an intention to do moss graffiti, but hasn't done so yet (Interview with wrnkl, 2019).

7 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0nHYRFm5JA>

8 - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BztR9yAlsxG/> A prominent international example of eco alternative street art techniques could be found in the works of Bordalo II (Figure 5).

Serbia which uses colors⁹ that actively clean the air from pollutants (Figure 33). This technology is based on the photocatalytic process naturally present in the Earth's atmosphere (Banić, 2020). Artists Artez and Wuper created a scene called *Celebrating our roots* inspired by tradition and ecology, where one of the characters depicted has a bouquet of flowers instead of their head (Arsić, 2020). In a podcast about ecological street art, Wuper mentioned that the ecological colors gave "mural a good story behind it" and how the artist hopes the technique would come to life, especially in cities like Belgrade (Banić, 2020). In the current absence of other practices, technically this mural is the closest Belgrade came to eco-art in the streets, by incorporating materials which actively contribute to the environment's wellbeing. Here we could have an example of what nikolić calls "a cohabitation of agencies, human and other-than-human" (nikolić, 2016: 51), where the active colors and their interaction with polluted air are integral part - conceptually and physically - of the artwork.

9 - <http://www.knoxoutpaints.com/about.do?id=20800>

6. Conclusions

Given the pieces present in Belgrade streets and the specific artworks by the artists who responded to the survey, one can see that most ecological actions come from personal, aesthetic programs, with a few examples of direct activism. While few would categorize their initiatives as ecological, given the public aspect of their work and motivations to make art, it is evident that street art and graffiti have great potential in talking about our environment. Given the rapid industrialization and increasing migrations to big cities worldwide, Tunnacliffe states that street art does have potentials to "rewrite" the urban environment:

It is important to remember that nature and society do not exist in isolation from one another. Everyday life in the urban setting is made up of social and natural entanglements. To ignore their relation to one another is to ignore the very fabric of today's urban society, maintaining the invisible barriers between the two (Tunnacliffe, 2016: 7).



Figure 32. Beloglavi sup (Griffon Vulture). Ivan Kocić. Belgrade, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©A. Malko / Ras Srbija.



Figure 33. Celebrating our roots. Artetz & Wuper. Belgrade, Serbia, 2020. Photograph ©Igor Svetel / Walls of Belgrade.

This statement provides ground to understand one's work in the streets as potentially artistic. Therefore, it is my goal to find a way of approaching street art and graffiti with ecological potentials. However, it would not be beneficial to force ecological readings onto the artists' work, as to quote Quam, "themes of preserving the natural environment are almost never present in my work. I think I'd change profession if I wanted to deal with those topics. I use elements from urban and natural surroundings in my works to often tell a personal story or because they are interesting as drawing templates" (Interview with Quam, 2020). On the other hand, Brva says "the connection (between SAG and ecology) is of course possible only if ecology is honored in all aspects of a mural, from creation to the message itself" (Interview with Brva, 2020). I feel that if the work itself is not closely related to an artist's oeuvre, it can lose much of its creativity and power; likewise, if it's solely a beautification project, it has a bleak ecological potential.

Most artists agreed that a way forward towards eco art would be to use more eco-friendly colors (as with the newest example by Artez and Wuper), recycling (Kocić) and a purposeful ecological activism (Piros's eagle). Certainly, if remaining within traditional, not biodegradable techniques or less polluting colors (such as acrylics), SAG could still rely on an aesthetic greenification of the gray city walls, focusing

primarily on communication of ecological messages, which many artists see as a great potential. To achieve it, more work is needed on researching the current ecological challenges, local context and ways how to address the public. Support and momentum gained from city projects that aim to tackle ecological issues has its benefits, and could be used creatively by the artists, however avoiding traps of greenwashing and relying solely on projects to do continuous eco work.

On the other side, scientists and researchers according to Curtis, Reid, and Ballard, have mostly overlooked the potential role of the arts in disseminating scientific findings, although the arts have a history of social activism. According to them:

The arts can synthesize and convey complex scientific information, promote new ways of looking at issues, touch people's emotions, and create a celebratory atmosphere, as was evident in this case study. In like manner, the visual and performing arts should be harnessed to help extend the increasingly unpalatable and urgent messages of global climate change science to a lay audience worldwide (Curtis, Reid, and Ballard, 2012).



Figure 34. DUK Festival 2019. Quam. Čačak, Serbia, 2019. Photograph ©DUK Festival.



Figure 35. Curlew. ATM. London, 2016. Photograph ©ATM.

While both artists and ecologists can benefit from mutual collaboration on these issues, many raise concerns on how these initiatives could be framed and used. In her research about reverse graffiti, Norvaišaitė notes: "Since eco communication has seen a growing mistrust when coming from the government and industries (...), and graffiti is supposedly a socio-political commentary free of mainstream influences, street art could be a potential channel of environmental communication" (Norvaišaitė, 2014: 3). As an independent practice, within SAG ecological murals could tackle biodiversity and shift attitudes, where both the artists and the viewers are directly visually engaged in its ecological messages (Arrieta, 2014), whether part of official projects or bottom-up initiatives.

Turning to local and endangered species, these artworks

could be more site-specific, linking history, biology and activism in raising awareness. A very good example is ATM (UK) who mainly depicts local species that are always connected to the local history and environment, whether present, endangered, or already lost. With continuous, contextualized and well researched bird murals, his aim is to inspire care and conservation (ATM, 2017). This approach has potential especially when involving the community - from scientists, artists, to regular people - as stakeholders, such as in the example of Curlew mural done as part of Endangered 13 conservation effort where street art raised visibility of disappearing species in the UK (Figure 39).¹⁰ The actual example of Festival Rekonstrukcija in Belgrade stands as a living example how an art initiative could foster both new production, community engagement and express 10 - <http://humannatureshow.com/endangered13/>

solidarity (Marković, 2020).

Of course, the most obvious way requires abandoning the traditional techniques and going towards experimentation, turning to moss and/or reverse graffiti, if not other art mediums. However, reverse graffiti does not equal direct ecological messages; artists could tackle nature and the urban surroundings in a wider way, beautifying neglected surfaces and improving the living atmosphere (Norvaišaitė, 2014: 57-69). At the present moment, these experimental techniques could provide both a challenge for implementation and ways of demonstrating originality, given its present lack in the Belgrade.

As a conclusion, street art and graffiti are without doubt part of the urban ecosystem, with potentials to aesthetically and critically reflect on it. Apart from its great communication power, by supporting deeper engagement, research and collaboration, as well as eco techniques and even activism, SAG in Belgrade could gain a critical edge and scientific base (as in contemporary eco art), becoming a stronger stakeholder in making the city really more green.

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Conceptual Post-Street Art in Russia

Anton Polsky (MAKE)

Abstract

Global street art turned into a neo-pop(ulist) post-street art (inter)muralist movement operating with simple visual messages easily accessible for people via Instagram. Artists' anti-capitalist pseudo-critical statements—what I call 'protest for sale'—circulating in social media are easily co-opted by creative city discourse, the capitalist neoliberal system, discipline society, and the art market. Artists' voices from peripheral scenes and regions dealing with local contexts, languages, and communities, and those who work in a more nuanced and sophisticated way are overshadowed by street art celebrities and their domesticated rebel aesthetics. Taking as an example Russian conceptual and dialogical post-street art I want to show other perspectives on the development of street art.

Keywords: street art, pop art, conceptual art, regional scenes, Russia

My previous essay in this journal was dedicated to street art periodization, influenced by a widely discussed article wrote by British anthropologist Rafael Schacter¹. According to him, street art, like any other artistic movement, has its period and can be characterized by distinct practices, techniques, and a core group of artists. My aim was to test and clarify this idea applied to a certain regional scene:

“Although street art as a consistent global movement existed approximately around 1998 to 2008, this periodization needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes. And, as street art is site-specific and peripheral by its nature, it needs to be perceived as follows. Not everywhere, especially in comparison to the cities or regions with less developed art institutions and art market, the processes of instrumentalization and co-opting of street art by the creative city discourse happens with the same dynamic.”²

Considering given periodization I propose to use terms *proto-street art* and *post-street art* to describe personal unsanctioned art practices in public spaces—before 1998 and after 2008 (specified for a certain region/scene).

1 - Schacter R. Street art is a period, PERIOD. Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City. Edited by Konstantinos Avramidis, Myrto Tsilimpounid. London: Routledge, 2016. P. 103–118.

2 - Polsky, A. Specifics of Periodization in Russian Street Art. SAUC - Street Art & Urban Creativity Scientific Journal, 4(2), 2018.

According to the results of my ongoing research, examples of proto-street art in the USSR can be found in works of Moscow and Odesa conceptual artists in the late 1970s—early 1980s. These examples of unsanctioned artistic statements in public spaces aesthetically similar to examples of contemporary street art were made with no influence of graffiti movement and before street art became a consistent movement—hence can be called proto-street art.

Post-street art practices are much more diverse and can include urban interventions, spontaneous sculptures, partizaning, street performances as well as exhibitions and murals by former and practicing street artists. While street art was site-specific, but globally consistent movement, today's post-street art is divided into numerous sub-genres and not necessary site-specific, but in many ways thematically unified.

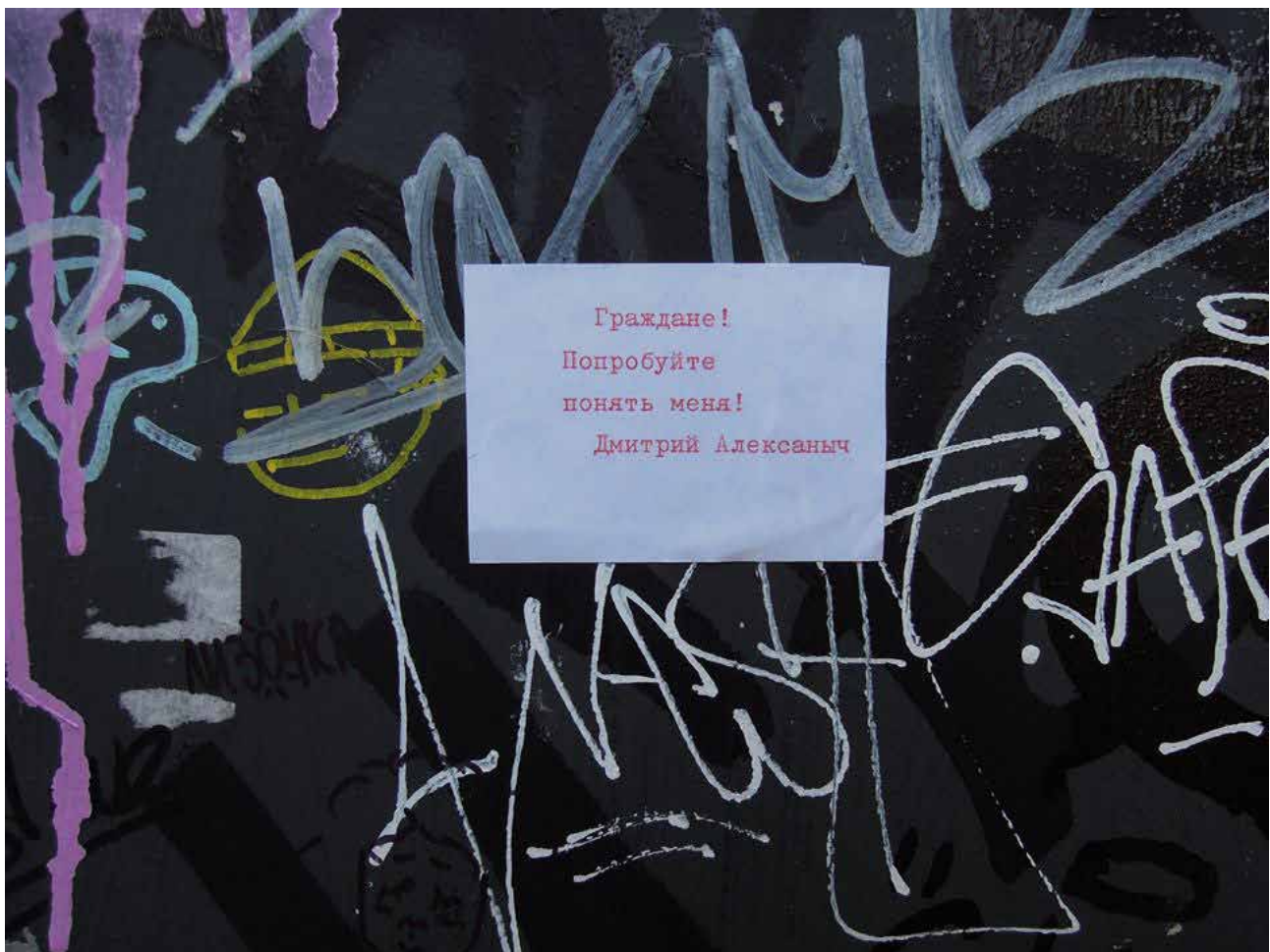
My hypothesis is that globally post-street art became a neo-populist aesthetic/style filled with domesticated anti-capitalist images circulating mostly via Instagram and other social media platforms. But certain parts of post-street art practices are hardly visible through this lens. I believe that Russian street art is very unique but critically underrepresented in the West. My claim that the reason why is that the local scene took another line of development

into conceptual post-street art. This happened for many reasons: logocentrism of Russian culture, its isolation from the rest of the world, and the focus on the local context, its connection to the tradition of Moscow conceptual school and Russian literature.

Not being able to get on the international level on an equal scale nor to find their comfortable niche in the art market and contemporary art, peripheral post-street artists in underdeveloped areas searching for new aesthetics and ways of interacting with co-citizens. Such ways as focus on local agenda (using Russian, not English), logocentrism, experiments in a field of dialogical and socially engaged art, building own theory, and DIY-institutionalization. These

characteristics are common for many of the conceptual and socially engaged post-street artists, as well as for Moscow conceptualists whose works can be described as proto-street art. This doesn't mean that all of the street artists in Russia have turned this way, many of them work in a more westernized pop-art aesthetics focusing on an international audience, same for the global scene where a wide variety of street art methodologies can be found.

My current research on Russian street art is crucial not only for the description of periodization and specifics of the local (post)street art scene but for building the theory of street art and for searching different overshadowed tendencies in post-street art practices on a global scale.



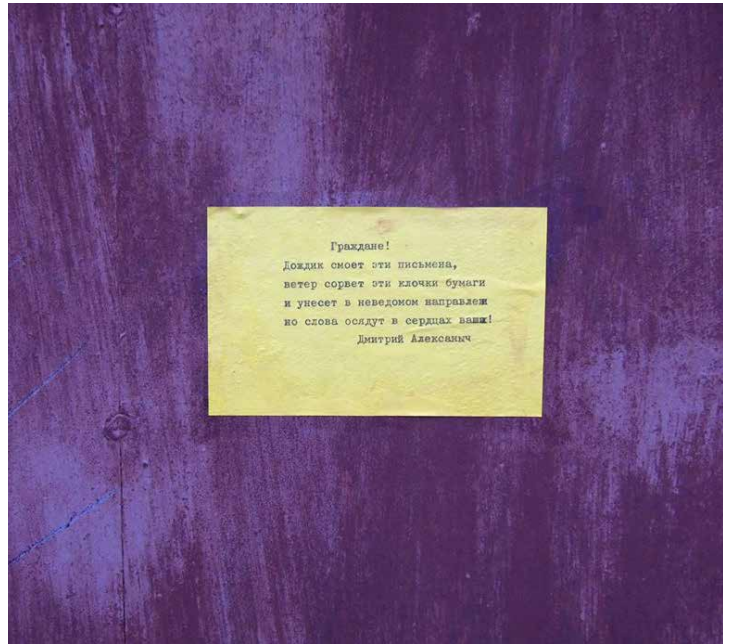
Citizens!
Try to understand me!
Dmitry Alexanych

Dmitri Prigov, 1980s
Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019

Citizens!

The rain will wash away these letters
the wind will tear these pieces of paper
and carry them away in an unknown direction
but the words will settle in our hearts.

Dmitry Alexanych



Dmitri Prigov, 1980s

Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019



Citizens!

Be patient! Be patient! A little more and everything will be alright!

Dmitry Alexanych

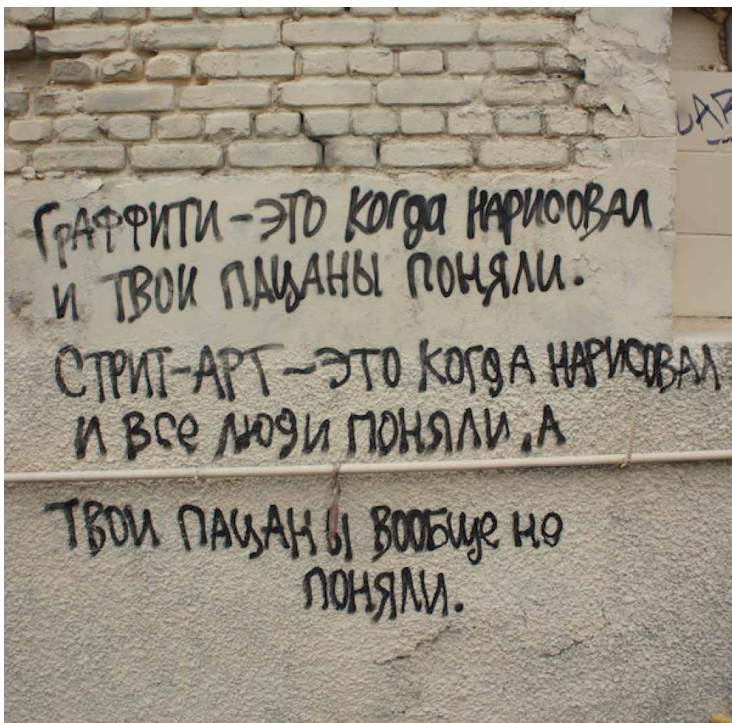
Dmitri Prigov, 1980s

Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019



I do not complain about anything and I almost like it here, although I have never been here before and know nothing about this place.

Collective Actions, 1977



Graffiti is when you drew it and your boys understood.

Street Art is when you drew it and all the people understood, but your boys didn't understand at all.

Maxim Ima, 2020



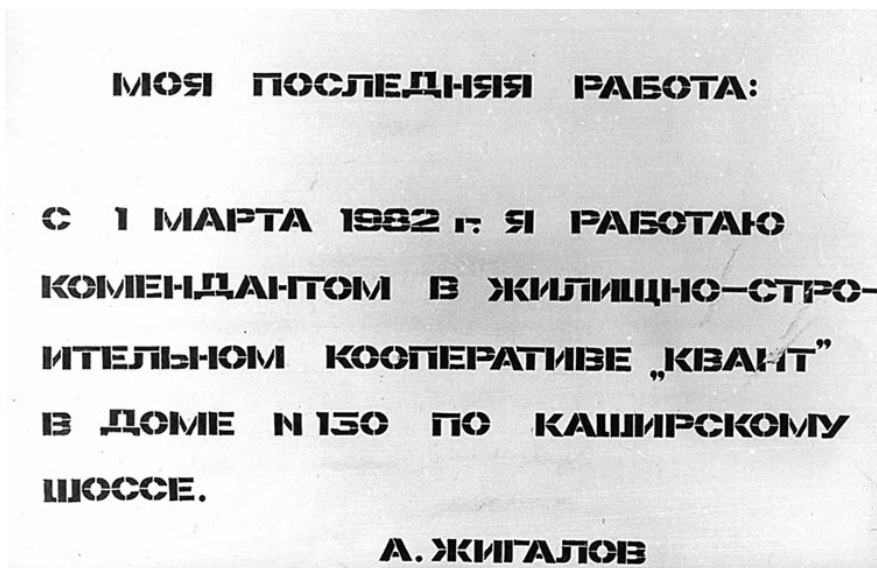
Kirill Kto, Patchwork, 2016



Partizaning, DIY-crosswalk buffed by officials, 2012



SZ-Group, Signs, 1980



My Recent Work

Since March 1, 1982, I have been working as a commandant in the Kvant Housing and Construction Cooperative in house number 130 along Kashirsky Highway.

TOT ART



Graffiti friendships and existential visual sociology

Malcolm Jacobson Stockholm University, Sociology department

Abstract for: Urban Creativity Lisbon Conference July 2020

Keywords: Graffiti hall of fames, friendship, photography, existential sociology, cultural sociology

The aim of this paper is to utilize photographs to investigate existential aspects of graffiti that are theoretically underdeveloped such as how the subculture offers foundation for life-long friendships. Previous literature on the life of graffiti writers has often emphasized aspects of hyper masculinity such as competition, bravery, law breaking and risk behavior and neglected how boundaries concerning space and generations are negotiated through graffiti writing.¹

Illuminated the existential meanings of graffiti allows subcultural research to contribute theoretically to an enlargement of sociological analysis. This calls for analysis of subcultural emotions of joy of co-existence in times of social distancing. My attempt is to reconsider graffiti research through the lens of cultural sociology and existential sociology.² These perspectives consider how layers of meaning are connected to human fragility and the finitude of existence.

The main source of empirical material are photographs from my personal archive that stretches over 30 years³. These photographs represent situated knowledge achieved as a participant observer and a subcultural insider during global infusion of subway graffiti⁴. I return to my archive to reconsider how photographs can represent the way friendship is performed through gestures of shared artistic practices in graffiti hall of fames in New York and Stockholm where graffiti painting is permitted

Hall of fames have similarities with galleries as places where paintings are displayed. But in hall of fames paintings are produced directly on walls by several artists who work side by side utilizing their bodies in execution of letters that are tall as a man⁵. A visual analysis of this side by side practice aims to illuminate existential dimensions of coexistence and friendship across life courses of aging graffiti writers. When writers socialize words are in focus but not expressed through oral communication. Instead writers concentrate on individual molding of the letters in their nom de plumes. Despite focus on individual achievements shared aesthetics and bodily co-existence is vital.

Photographs from annual get-togethers and daily use show how hall of fames facilitate friendship bonds that stretches over decades and continents. Hall of fames are places for reunion, for commemoration of lost friends, and for aesthetic inspiration and diffusion. Additional to several internal subcultural practices hall of fames offer openings between the subcultural towards the society around. As open air public places for graffiti painting they invite non-writers to see how graffiti is executed and offer possibilities to meet the artists. The social meaning of hall of fames builds on the traditions and conflicts throughout graffiti history were will for expression often has clashed with ownership of property. Hall of fames are places where the stigma associated with graffiti as something causing harm and insecurity can be addressed. As such these places connect subcultural outsiders with other citizens and contributes to restore social trust between different aspect of society⁶.

Photographs from hall of fames displays gestures that establishes and confirm social bonds. Gestures like

1 - see for example Macdonald, 2001.

2 - On cultural sociology see Alexander, 2008 and Hannerz, 2015. On existential sociology, see Bengtsson & Flisbäck. 2016.

3 - See Becker, 1974, on how photographs can be used theoretically in social science.

4 - Haraway. 1988.

5 - Kimvall. 2014. Mariduena, 2012 .

6 - See Alexander 2016 on civil repair.

handshakes and hugs may in times of pandemic appear as memories from another time. But the warmth of coexistence through shared artistic focus in hall of fames continues. Many writers hold that their way to socialize is quite ideal in unsettled times, plenty of outdoor space and possibility to retain social proximity without intruding on the six feet of prescribed social distance.

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Two friends reconnect after years of distance. Harlem Hall of Fame, New York, 2018. Photo © Malcolm Jacobson.



Artists and visitors during Spring Beast Festival. Snösättra Hall of Fame, Stockholm, Sweden, 2019.

Photo © Malcolm Jacobson.



Collaborative painting by ETC-crew, an opportunity for old friends to reconnect. Snösättra Hall of Fame, Stockholm, Sweden, 2019. Photo © Malcolm Jacobson.

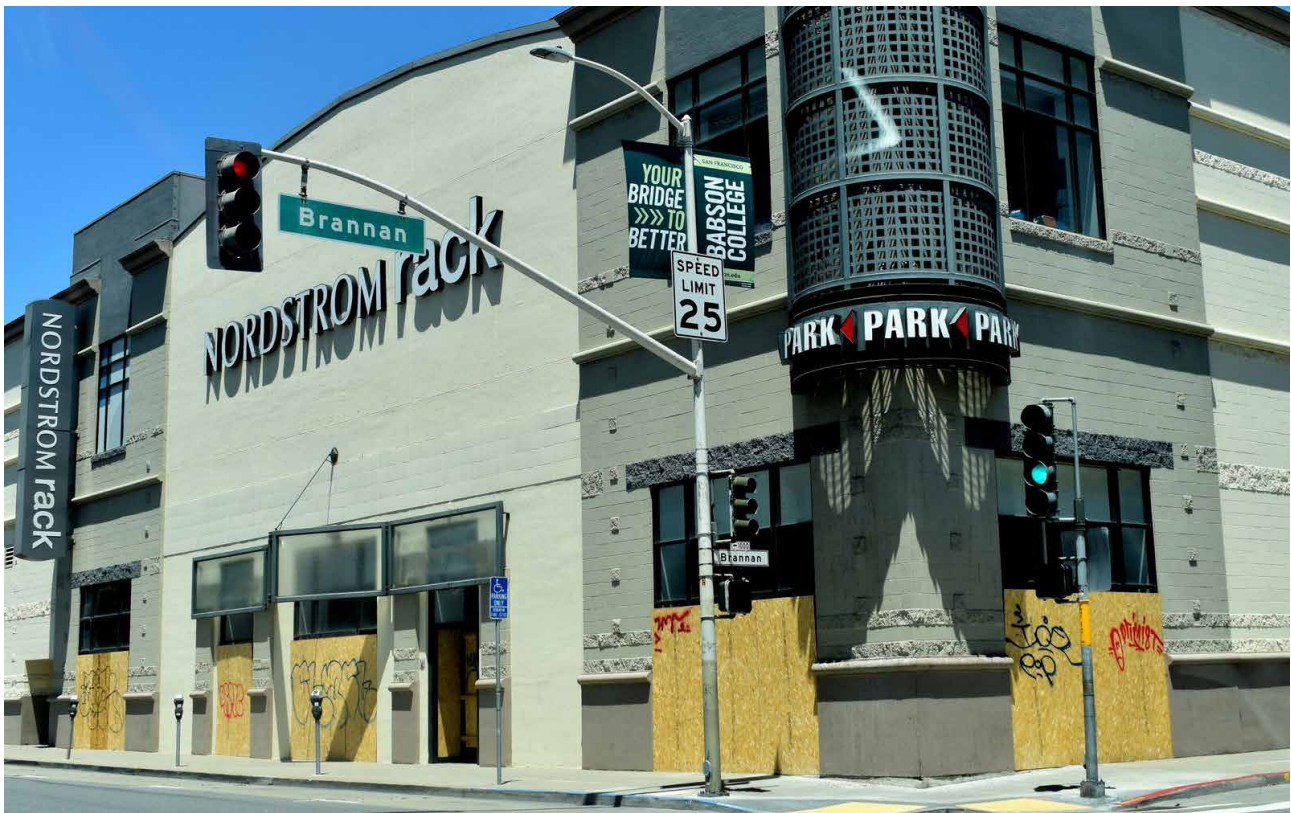


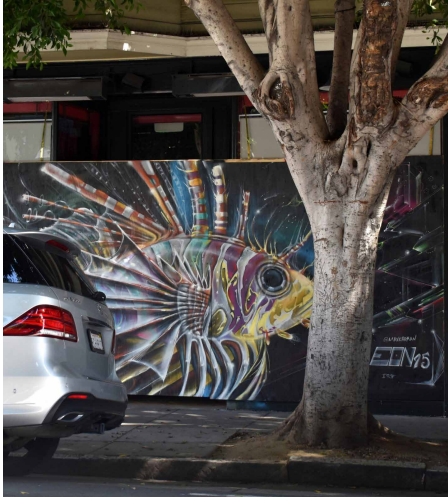
Two friends reminiscing their shared graffitied life course. Snösättra Hall of Fame, Stockholm, Sweden, 2019. Photo © Malcolm Jacobson.

Today in San Francisco (27 May 2020)

Jim Prigoff

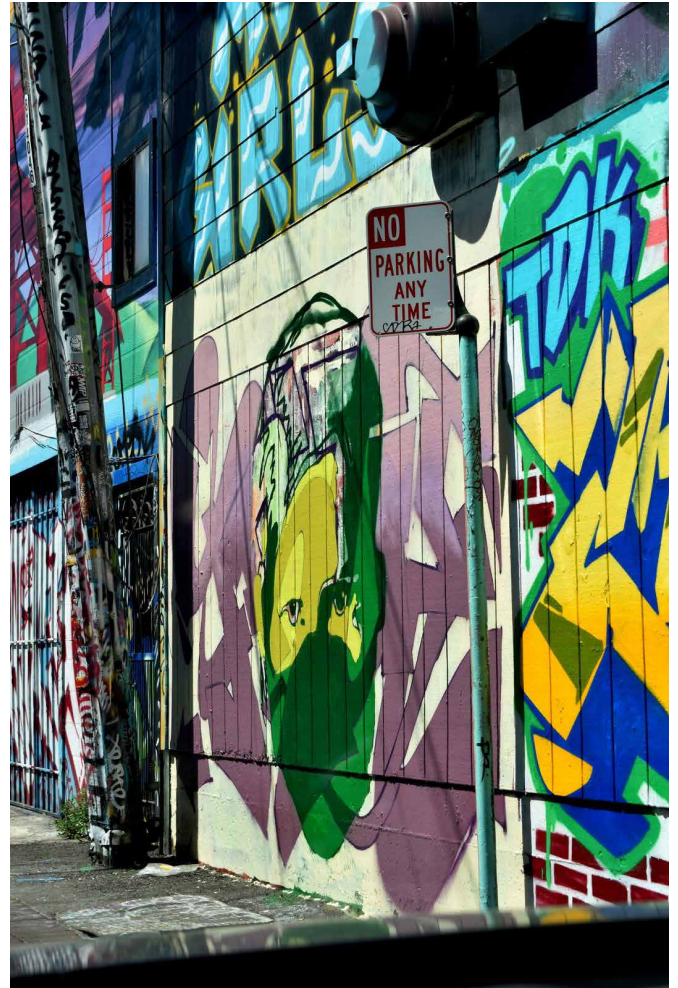
After two and a half months of staying at home, I ventured to SF to make an important pick-up. I never got out of my car. I documented a few aspects of the trip which I thought I would share.





1. PAINT THE VOID - An artists group formed a collective to paint more than 40 boarded up store fronts. Many could be found along Hayes street, but they were spread out all over the city.





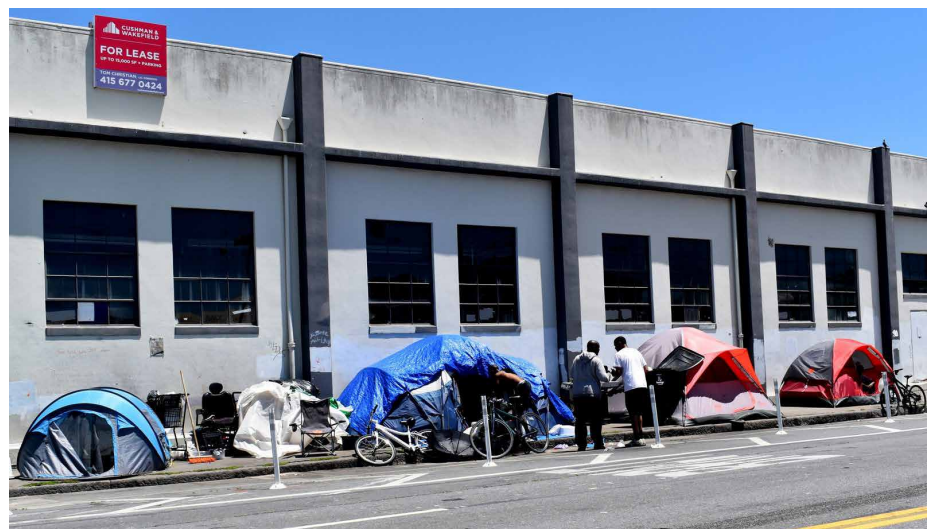
2. Balmy Alley had a Donald Trump virus wall and Lilac Alley a woman wearing a face mask.



3. Graff artists had been out with many new walls in Erie, the one being shown particularly intricate.

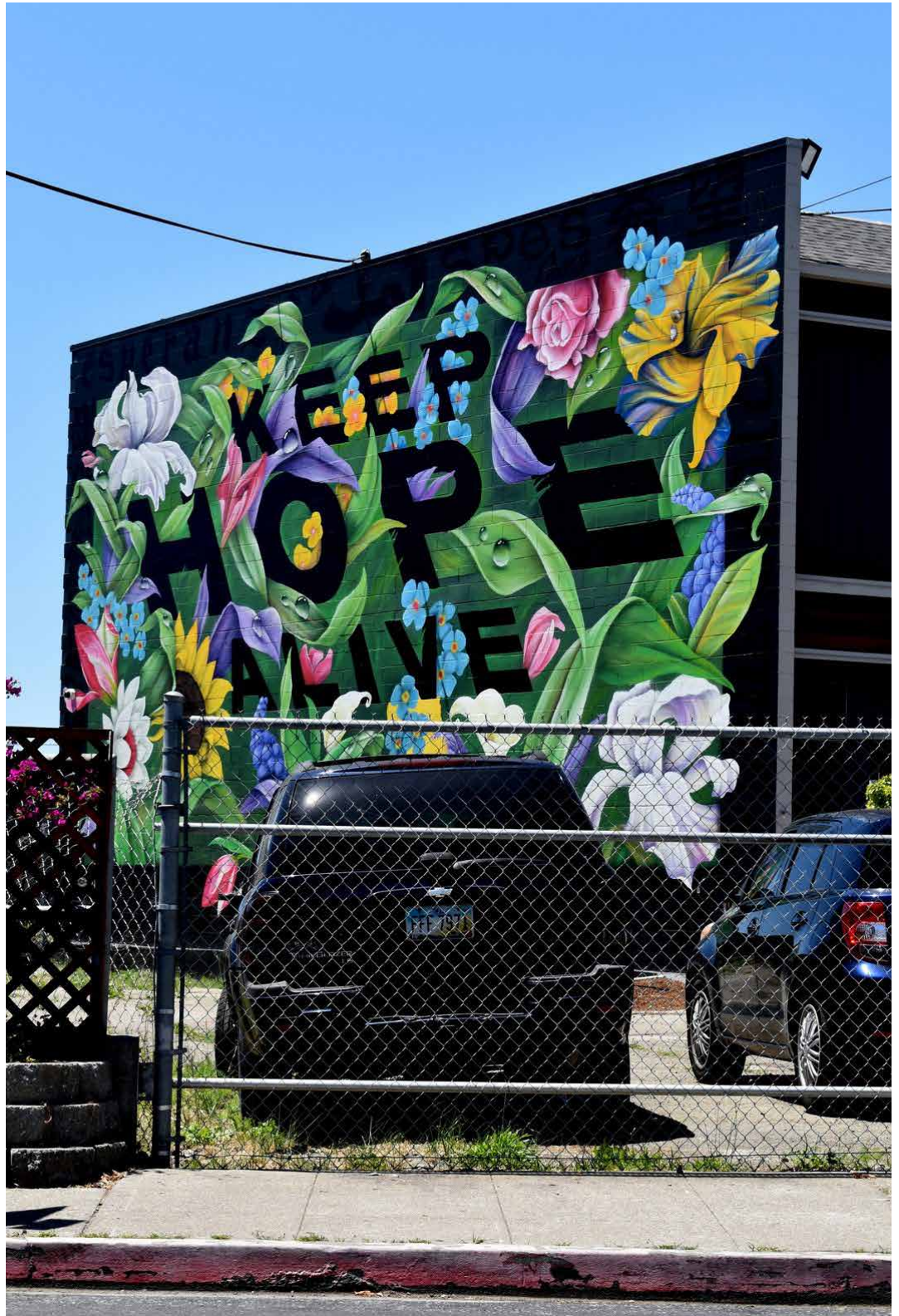


4. Although I have documented homeless encampments in SF over the years, the proliferation I saw today was overwhelming. Tents were to be seen everywhere through downtown.





5. The contrast of “those who live above it all” is quite clear in this newly built high-rise apartment building.



6. I exited highway 80 near Richmond to close with the final picture, a note of HOPE.



SAUC

We place here in discussion the maturity of the academic and pedagogical field that graffiti, urban and street art, urban creativity constitute. It's in fact identified a consistency of knowledge and structure of thought in the several disciplinary areas.

As we are convinced that this trend will continue in multiple forms including experimental ones bridging theory and practice, here's the result of the invite for participation in this reflection. Here is also combined the conference outcomes. There were two main results to achieve during the dialogues of the 2020 online conference.

One was to observe the maturity of the academic and pedagogical field that graffiti, urban and street art, well, urban creativity in general have. On the 2020 conference was in fact proven that the consistency of knowledge and structure of thought in the several disciplinary areas regarding the urban creativity topics, are giving way to multiple approaches to classes integrated in master courses, informing the teaching of art historians, the work of designers, and research of cognitive scientists and educators. It was evident that this trend will continue in multiple forms including experimental ones bridging theory and practice, sometimes inverting the role of researchers and authors, but always enlarging audiences, practitioners and studios.

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