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# Another Brick in the Wall: Public Space, Visual Hegemonic Resistance, and the Physical/Digital Continuum

Daniel Gilmore

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ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL:  
PUBLIC SPACE, VISUAL HEGEMONIC RESISTANCE, AND THE PHYSICAL/DIGITAL  
CONTINUUM

by

DANIEL GILMORE

Under the Direction of Michael L. Bruner

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will demonstrate that there is a similarity between the use of physical walls and digital walls as means of ideological dissemination by power structures as well as socio-political protesters. Also, I will show that their use in this manner not only changes the way that both function ideologically, but also changes the environment that these walls are created/exist in as well. The first case study will analyze Banksy's employment of carnivalesque graffiti as a means of protest. The second case study will analyze the use of digital public space and "walls" created within social media as tools of protest, paralleling the earlier examples pertaining to the physical walls of public space. The third case study will look at the employment of the digital "walls" of Facebook and Twitter in conjunction with the use of public space in Cairo and its role in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

INDEX WORDS: Socio-political protest, Public space, Banksy, Egyptian Revolution, Social media, Nestlé, Facebook, Twitter, Carnavalesque, Graffiti, Visual hegemonic resistance

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CONTINUUM

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DANIEL GILMORE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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Daniel Gilmore  
2012

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PUBLIC SPACE, VISUAL HEGEMONIC RESISTANCE, AND THE PHYSICAL/DIGITAL  
CONTINUUM

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DANIEL GILMORE

Committee Chair: Dr. Michael Bruner

Committee: Dr. Ted Friedman

Dr. Alessandra Raengo

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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To Natalie, my partner and my medium mustache and to Dakota, the tiny, who was my loyal study partner while I wrote.

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

In his article on the anti-corporate protests that occurred in Melbourne, Australia in September 2000, Rob Cover describes his personal experience of being one of the protesters confronted by police and brutally beaten (Cover 2002). Afterwards, to add insult to injury, Stephen Bracks, the Premier of Victoria (where Melbourne is located), commented that the protesters had “gotten what they deserved” (Cover 2002). Cover remarked that this filled many of the protesters with anger, but they could find no open channels through which they could communicate with those in power to articulate their concerns. Frustrated and feeling powerless, Cover said that he and many other protesters took to the street to display their anger in the only forum left open to them: the walls of the city. Here, Cover wrote the message that he and his fellow protesters were not able to communicate elsewhere. His graffiti read “Bracks=Kennet: Fascist Cunt,” equating Premier Bracks with his predecessor, Kennet, and arguing that both were more interested in corporate welfare than in the concerns of the general population. Bracks even went so far as to excuse police brutality against peaceful protesters as being “deserved,” making him, in the protesters’ view, fascists (Cover 2002). While the protesters’ channels of communication had been shut off elsewhere, and violently so by the police at their rally, their message, once written on the walls, was able to be displayed and seen by the public. Cover’s graffiti, beyond eliciting its own responses on other walls, ended up in the news as an example of the anger over Bracks’ pro-corporatist policies, seen as being at the expense of the middle class.

Other articles describe similar occurrences, where disenfranchised groups, kept from being able to access channels of communication with the existing power structures, with corporate interests, or with culture at large, have resorted to the same methods to be heard.

Rodriguez and Clair (1999), for example, discuss the use of graffiti as a communicative tool by homosexuals in the black community to combat negative perceptions of homosexuality as well as offer support for each other via the anonymous dialogue that graffiti allows. They also discuss the use of graffiti as a means of addressing sexual assault and rape on the campus of Brown University. When traditional methods of discourse regarding these subjects were closed to women at Brown, they wrote on the bathroom walls of the campus the names of men who had assaulted them. This act exposed the men who assaulted them to the public, bypassing a system that operated to keep these women silent while simultaneously communicating with other women and the general population. Scheibel talks about the use of graffiti even within “film school culture” at Loyola Marymount University and its increasing use as a display of feelings of alienation among subsets of the population (1994).

Such discussions about the use of walls as a place for “unauthorized” communication, used as a form of protest when traditional methods of communication are closed to groups, are not limited to physical walls. Beaubien (2010) discusses the protests leveled against Nestlé on their Facebook page over their harvest method for palm oil. Similar protests utilizing social media “walls” were carried out against British Petroleum (BP) after their horrific Gulf coast oil spill in 2010 (MacMillan 2010). The timeliest example that can be given of this type of digital-based protest exists in the examples of the protests across the Middle East and North Africa that began in early 2011. With no other way to communicate openly with each other (or the global community as a whole) about the abuses they were facing under their dictatorial regimes, protesters from Tunisia and Egypt relied heavily on Facebook and Twitter (Taylor 2011), in addition to writing their demands on the walls of their cities, as platforms for communicating the goals and progress of their protests.

All of these examples share a common theme: there is a group of people who have found themselves unable to communicate with those in power, as well as each other, about grievances they have against their society. Left disenfranchised with no outlets of communication, these groups took to the public spaces of their societies and expressed their protests on surfaces that could be viewed, unfiltered by all, including those they were protesting against. The mention of examples from both the cityscapes of the physical world and the digitalized facsimiles of public spaces that constitute social media together is no mistake. The communicative functions of the public space of a society and the communicative functions of the digitally constructed public spaces of social media sites, meant to emulate physical public interactions, operate in a similar manner. Both are used as platforms for the dissemination of ideology by groups in power, and both are used as spaces of potential reappropriation by groups wishing to protest against those groups. In physical resistance campaigns, the reappropriation of the wall as a tool for protest is still widely and effectively used. In the new digital age, virtual walls are used in the same manner. New media sites like Facebook and Twitter strive to digitally recreate the idealized notion of the public space open to all in an egalitarian fashion. In this setup, many have seen opportunities to take their protests against corporate entities or repressive states online, where they enjoy the potential of fewer restrictions and can reach a larger audience.

Those subjected to the continued evaporation of their right to question the individuals who run their societies (and the evaporation of equal and open access to public space that was once used to do this) have often found other means of expressing their critiques after more traditional channels have been closed to them. What often takes place is that these people, deprived of “approved” public spaces to express their views and a voice to articulate them with, reappropriate their own public spaces from those who control them. Their use of walls in a

society as a semiotic surface for the dissemination of protest messages has a long history that crosses societal bounds and can be found in practically every corner of the world among a variety of different societies and cultures. What is unique about the way that walls (both physical and digital) operate is that they provide an unmitigated channel of communication for the protester in the domain of the powerful; the surface is something that cannot be destroyed without also destroying part of the system perpetuated by those who are attempting to suppress this type of protest. The wall in modern society has long been a place of contention between those in power and those seeking to challenge that power. What I intend on arguing is that our physical public space and our digitally constructed public space operate in a parallel manner and that, increasingly, protesters are using a mix of both digital walls and physical walls as platforms for socio-political protest to effectively further their causes. Furthermore, I will argue that the use of these walls as platforms for protest, beyond their function as a space for communication, is fundamentally changed by the presence of protests such as these. This use changes not only how the surfaces of walls operate within their environment, but how they function ideologically, and how they are perceived by the general population.

I plan on building this argument by first establishing the use functions of public space and walls in the physical world: how they are used, by whom, and to what extent they are effective ideological communicators. In support of this research, I plan on looking at the ways that public space and walls are used as an apparatus to support the ideology of repressive regimes, mainly within the Middle East and Asia. Also, I also plan on looking at the way that walls within public space are used as an apparatus to support and disseminate an economic ideology and, by extension, capitalist forms of government in western countries. With this first part of the study established, I will then look at the ways in which the parallel digital landscape is

constructed to support power structures and disseminate ideologies in the same manner as its physical counterpart. This will entail looking at the visual construction and management of the Facebook pages of both corporations and governments and comparing the construction between more “open” western governments and corporations and the pages of their more repressive counterparts.

With a basic understanding of the structures of these two public spaces (the digital and the physical), the functions of their respective walls, and the similarities between these spaces established, I will then move on to discussing the literature that concerns itself with the use of these surfaces as places of protest. To begin this discussion, I will first look at the history of the concept of graffiti, what is generally meant by the term, how it came into use, and why it is used by various groups as a means of communication. After a preliminary discussion pertaining to the concept of graffiti, I will then look at specific examples of its use within public space on walls as a place of protest. As with the earlier comparisons between the function of public space and walls in repressive regimes versus advanced capitalistic countries, I will look at comparative examples of the use of graffiti as protest in these different settings. For the study of graffiti as a mode of socio-political protest in advanced capitalist societies, I will analyze the work of the graffiti artist Banksy that has appeared across London. Banksy’s work is chiefly aimed at critiquing the capitalist paradigm by means of artful challenges to both consumeristic practices and a government that works in tandem with corporate interests. Drawing on Friedrich Schiller’s notion of the “play drive” (Grossman 1968), as well as research done on carnivalesque protest (Bakhtin 1984; Bruner 2005), I will argue that Banksy’s graffiti is able to function so well against capitalism not because of its outright attack on their targets but through a playful presentation that belies the underlying critique at the heart of the piece. I will compare this to

graffiti-as-protest that has appeared in more repressive countries, specifically looking at its use on the Berlin Wall as a primer, but focusing Banksy's work on the West Bank Barrier in Israel, to find similarities in techniques, in the graffiti's content and appearance, as well as in ideological function.

For the comparison of the use of social media and digital walls as spaces of hegemonic communication, as well as their potential for social political protest, I plan on first looking at the construction of the public spaces that constitute the Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of corporations and several governments, comparing them to the way that the public spaces of cities are constructed and used as means of disseminating ideology. From there, I will look at specific cases of these public walls as a platform of protest against the groups that control and manage them. I will look first at the case of the Nestlé Facebook page protests. These protests were a coordinated series of wall posts on Nestlé's Facebook page that expressed outrage over the company's method of harvesting palm oil that, while initially suppressed by Nestlé on their page, grew to such an extent that Nestlé could no longer control the content of their wall and were forced to confront the protesters demands, eventually changing their harvesting tactics to be more environmentally friendly. Specifically, I will look at how Nestlé's digital public spaces are constructed and used in a similar fashion to physical spaces: as tools that disseminate and support their ideology. To look at cases of the use of social media walls as platforms for socio-political protest against repressive regimes, I will look at the recent uses of Twitter and Facebook as platforms for global communication for protests in the Middle East region. The final case I look at will be the case of protest methods used in the first phase of the Egyptian Revolution of early 2011. I will argue that the Egyptian Revolution stands as an excellent example of the synthesis of the use of physical walls for protest and the use of digital walls for the same goals.



There have been extensive studies completed on the history of graffiti, from its occurrence in various societies to its use as a communicative tool. Of these works, however, very few of them have been dedicated to the study of how graffiti has operated as a tool for the reappropriation of ideological surfaces as well as its application as a means of protest. Similarly, there have been extensive studies published on the use of social media in modern communication, but less so on its use as a platform for protest. There has also been little to no research on how social media functions in the larger context of its digital walls and how those walls uniquely operate as spaces of communication. Furthermore, there has been no work that discusses how these digital walls parallel the ideological construction of our walls within physical public space and how both sets of walls function similarly as potential platforms for protest. Finally, there has been no real discussion on how the use of these mediums, as both a space for the dissemination of hegemonic ideology as well as a space for contention against it, fundamentally changes their functions within society.

My study not only fits on the edge of most research that has already been conducted, synthesizing some works while adding new context to others, but it also is important and relevant to our current circumstances in a globalizing world. The ways that we communicate not only with each other, but with the power structures that constitute our societies, are becoming increasingly digitized. This digitization, however, is not a one way street: there is still plenty of communication that exists between the population and the power structures within the physical world as well. What is happening, instead, is an increased synthesis, where the communicative functions of our physical world and those of our digital world are becoming more intertwined and more indistinguishable from each other. Also, one only has to look as far as the uses of graffiti in the clashes between governments pushing pro-corporate/anti-middle class “austerity”

cuts and their populations opposing them in the West, and the clashes between the long repressed populations of the Middle East and North Africa, to understand the relevance of this study. It promises to help us better understand the process by which protesters express their grievances in societies that have locked them out of having a say otherwise.

Given the case studies that I have listed, and the goals of the argument that I have outlined thus far, I propose that the best manner of analyzing these examples and creating my argument would be a combination of the methods of visual analysis of the graffiti itself, coupled with a social semiotic analysis of the construction of meaning and understanding surrounding the acts of graffiti and their ideological contexts (Hodge and Kress 1988; Martin and Ringham 2006; Rose 2007). These two methods together, described in detail in the following chapter, will allow for a complete analysis of all aspects of my argument: the functions of the walls within public space (both physical and digital); how these spaces operate to disseminate ideology; what happens to them once they are reappropriated for the use of displaying socio-political protest graffiti; and how the visual aspects of the graffiti operate.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review**

#### ***2.1 A Short Definition of the Notion of the 'Wall'***

Before discussing the ways that walls operate as both spaces of ideological dissemination as well as reappropriated spaces for socio-political protest, it is important to first understand the way that a wall functions within society and how this function leads it to the dialectical relationship it has between the protester and the power structure that the protester fights against. Buildings, and by default walls, when looked at broadly, can be seen as being treated much in the same way by governments in most societies. They are seen as spaces owned by those in control onto which they oftentimes unconsciously project their ideological assumptions, which end up as tools to further ensure hegemonic control over the population. Because the surfaces of most walls exist in public space, this is where they are of most importance to any controlling body (e.g., government, corporation, religious group) wishing to extend the blanket of hegemony over its population and, by default, disseminate its ideology among them.

A wall, which by its existence within the public space should denote an equal ownership by the public (Klein 2000), is instead claimed by hegemonic forces as theirs alone, and thus they posit that they are free to do what they wish with these surfaces (Mitchell 1995; 2003). In the not so distant past, public walls, as well as the public areas where they existed, were thought to be public property, equally available to all. This, however, has changed over time, and public space has been privatized and co-opted by various power structures in order to use it to advance their own interests. In capitalist societies, these spaces are now typically filled with a mixture of corporate adage and official signage, both of which are designed to encourage the general

population to “buy the product” (whether it be consumer goods or laws), which in turn feeds the dominant ideology (Klein 2000). In a sense, when this is done, people support capitalism, which is in a symbiotic relationship with the government, which in turn means that they support the government, which means that they are supporting the overall system. So when one responds to ads in the public space and buys Nikes, they are not just buying shoes; rather, they are reaffirming support for the system in place that claims dominance over the public sphere. This action becomes cyclical. As Eagleton (2007: 40) notes, ideology is not something that exists merely within someone’s head; rather, it is in the structures of a society. So when you concede to these structures, you participate in facilitating that ideology.

Furthermore, as Sklair (2010) points out, this use of public space as a tool for the dissemination of ideology is not limited merely to walls, but also includes the buildings that comprise the composition of cities themselves. Sklair argues that buildings are increasingly built to be iconic; that is, they are meant to be immediately recognizable and thus able to represent some type of signification about their environment. Sklair uses the example of the highly recognizable Sydney Opera House that has gone from being merely an iconic piece of architecture to being representative of the entire notion of Australia. From there, Sklair argues, these iconic buildings are used to sell people on the concepts they represent. The Sydney Opera House sells people on coming to Australia, as well as buying merchandise emblazoned with it as a representation of this idea of Australian-ness. As a result, within capitalistic societies, what iconic architecture ends up being used to sell is the buying of the system itself. The same can be said of the architecture that is built within repressive regimes; it too is built to sell the population on the ideology it represents. An excellent example of this is the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang, North Korea. It was imagined as a colossal pyramid shaped building that was supposed to

become emblematic of the notion of North Korea, and, by extension, be representative of the ideology that the regime disseminates. Ironically, the Ryugyong Hotel is more representative of the actual notion of “North Korea” than the North Koreans probably intended it to be; it currently sits unfinished and abandoned, a glossy shell meant to symbolize the wealth of the regime but hollow on the inside.

Within more repressive societies, the colonization of public space is still done by whatever hegemonic force controls it, whether it is a government or a religious organization. With this control, the use of the public space as a surface for the dissemination of ideology is arguably more overtly controlled and more heavily forced. The public spaces of these societies are typically filled with large displays of propaganda, either in the form of hate posters for the ascribed enemy of the state or in murals and other outpourings of unquestionable support for the ruling body, such as monuments or dedicated constructions. One needs look no further for examples of this than the regimes of countries like Iran or North Korea, who utilize much of their public space for both the idolization of the ruling elite as well as the demonization of their enemies, typically the ambiguous West (Van Houtryve 2007; 2009). In both of these cases, this use of public space serves to support the ideology of the state remarkably well.

In these two examples of a capitalistic/totalitarian dichotomy, I believe that a differentiation between the uses of the walls within public space can be made. In the case of the examples of the globalized, capitalistic society, the absorption of the public space by corporations is not seen as something forced; indeed, it behooves those who use the space to make it seem as if their presence there is natural. The ads do not directly assault, as it were, those in the public; they are merely there, presenting themselves as options. Yet, as noted before, they still work as ideology in that they are able to convince the public that their presence is a given

and then leave the idea of themselves unconsciously in the minds of those who view them. The goal is not necessarily to get you to go out and buy a pair of Nikes, for example, right away, but eventually you will, without even particularly remembering where the idea came from. In contrast, the use of public space as an ideological disseminator by overtly repressive regimes is quite obvious and meant to be so. The goal is to have the citizens believe there is no other option, to fear the proper enemy, and to invest their trust in the state. Indeed, many of these regimes require mandatory public recognition towards the ideological use of these surfaces, no doubt as a means of further engraining the acceptance of “elite” control over the population. It is not enough to merely see the propaganda murals or statues or flags; one must physically react to them. Examples of this range from monuments to the Nazi Party in Munich that required, by law, salutes by all those passing, to the requirement of pouring adoration onto pictures of the “beloved” leaders of regimes who are closely entwined with the structure of repressive autocratic states. This works so well that it becomes engrained within most citizens to the point that they do not have to question the ideological purpose of this use; it is a given to them. Drawing from an Althusserian understanding of ideology (Althusser 1971), I would consider this to be a more active form of ideology in that the use of public space, with its obvious othering of the enemy and the near deification of the regime, is meant to be forceful. Regardless, whether the walls are used to passively or actively support dominant ideologies, they can still be used as sites of ideological resistance.

## ***2.2 Public Space and Graffiti: Reappropriation of the Semiotic Surface***

Graffiti has turned out to be effective as a tool of visual protest because of how it operates in the public space once it is created. Graffiti, when created in the public space of a society, functions as unfiltered communication to its audience. It does not have to go through any

official channels in order to be seen and it exists right in front of the public eye to be taken in as it is. When graffiti is placed on a surface, it changes that space (as well as the environment in which it exists) not only visually but ideologically. The application of graffiti to a surface that is the subject or site of political oppression, like a wall, manages to work in three ways to redefine the surface: it rejects the claims of superiority that the state holds on the surface, reclaims the surface for the public, and then uses it as a communication tool for political protest.

To define it broadly, graffiti can be considered anything that is written or placed on public spaces in order to convey a message, whether it is positive or negative. Following this definition, as discussed by Hermer and Hunt (1996), there are two types of graffiti: official graffiti and unofficial, the latter being what most people traditionally think of and consider graffiti. Official graffiti is any type of regulatory signs that are posted by government agencies or others in power to attempt to restrict behavior in public spaces. Prime examples of this include such things as speed limit signs, signs against walking on grass, no smoking signs, and so on. These are put into place to curtail people's actions and have them behave in a way that is acceptable within the existing power structures. One could also consider advertisements that are placed within the public space as another form of official graffiti, as it has the same socially sanctioned status and attempts to get people to behave in a socially prescribed, consumerist manner.

In contrast, there is, of course, unofficial graffiti, which not only stands as a mirror image to the regulatory aspect of official graffiti, but also as a means of free expression and an attempt at reappropriating public space for dialogue not possible elsewhere. There are several reasons why one might choose to use graffiti as a means of communication, ranging from solely artistic ones to specifically political. As both Lachmann (1988) and Bowen (1999) note in their

respective studies, graffiti culture, mainly in the U.S. and Canada, grew from what was perceived as a phenomenon of low socioeconomic areas associated with establishing territory during the late 1960s and 1970s to a more art driven practice with the intent of gaining recognition, and perhaps even fame, from the mid 1990s on. They discuss the motivations of several prominent graffiti writers, their career paths, and what their artistic influences were. However, this approach to street graffiti, while informative, is only half the story, seeing as how most graffiti, and specifically political graffiti, is not done by “artists,” as it were, but by the general population as a form of retaliation and a means to be able to speak out in what otherwise might be a political arena where they do not have an adequate voice.

As Naomi Klein states in her various works (2000, 2002), the traditional notion of public space, a space where people once had the ability to come out and voice opinions, something akin to what a town square once was, is something that has largely been erased from modern culture. Instead, particularly in the U.S., they have been replaced with artificial town hall-type settings, embodied in the shopping mall. Still, even in the faux public space that the mall creates, the ability to individually vocalize issues is gone. If one were to start proselytizing in a mall food court, or hang up bulletins or signs, one would be swiftly removed or even arrested. The same could be said if you tried this in many other “public” places around a city. Instead, what are left are walls and other public surfaces, unadorned and plentiful, but more importantly surfaces that are typically highly visible. As stated earlier, the government already makes use of walls and other public surfaces for its own form of graffiti, one that is intended to restrict one’s actions in a self-censoring way. We do certain things in public not because there is an immediate threat of punishment but merely because there is the implied possibility of threat that the official graffiti represents. In turn, the use of street graffiti works in two ways: it both counters the infringement



that official graffiti represents as well as reclaims public space that has been denied by alternative means.

By its very existence on unsanctioned public spaces, graffiti immediately changes the dynamics of the space (Chmielewska 2007). First, it highlights the fact that there are no longer any sanctioned spaces for disenfranchised voices to put forth their viewpoints and, because of disenfranchisement, they have been forced to do it on unorthodox surfaces. Second, it demystifies public space and communicates that it is actually safe to use for individual expression, in contrast to the message that is propagated by those in power. A piece of street graffiti on a public space communicates by its mere existence that “this space is ours, despite what they would have you believe” (Fernandez-Armesto 2004). Last, but most important, what street graffiti manages to do is communicate its message to its intended audience, unadulterated, for the length of its existence. If one were to try to voice a political or social complaint through the typical channels of dissemination, the message has the potential to be watered down, censored, or ignored altogether; conversely, when one instead turns to graffiti as their mode of communication they avoid mediators, who can be problematic, and take their message straight to their intended audience. Bowen (1999) notes that the typical audience for standard graffiti is the people who happen to see it when they pass by, which can be considered a small base to work with. But when one takes into account the nature of political graffiti, the fact that often a slogan or symbol is reproduced by several people all over a localized area with the intent of being seen by as many people as possible, then the audience grows considerably and can be divided into three parts: those who are aligned with whatever social movement is making use of the graffiti, to let them know that they have numbers; the general populace, to inform them of a growing

movement; and those whom the movement is directed against, to make them aware of the growing dissatisfaction with their methods.

The best place to witness the effectiveness of unauthorized graffiti on public surfaces is perhaps the most obvious one and it is the one space that typically garners the most response politically: the wall. A wall creates distinctions between different parts of society by saying that there are parts of space where certain things are not allowed (Kenzle 1997). A wall exists as a liminal space; it establishes the limit of something while at the same time creates the opportunity for transgressions against that space (Gutting 2005: 17). The wall functions to define borders, both culturally and politically. It makes areas available for various, usually antithetical groups: us versus them, haves versus have-nots, Christian versus Jew, upper-class versus the poor, and the list could go on. A wall, in this sense, embodies the physical manifestation of a political and ideological act of suppression and separation, as well as the state's (or whoever else is acting as oppressor) attempt at asserting superiority. It says, "We define existence and reality for you here. This is the physical representation of our claim to power." Graffiti on a wall, or any public surface for that matter, works against these hegemonic claims.

### ***2.3 The Roots of Modern Graffiti***

"The name is the faith of graffiti. The name is the *faith*." –CAY 161

"Graffiti is a way of gaining status in a society where to own property is to have an identity."  
–Chairman Martinez

In order to understand the key role that graffiti plays within modern socio-political protests and how the tenets that drive its ideology, creation, and exhibition are found within various forms of protest across many disparate platforms, it is important to understand how modern graffiti started, where it originated, and what drove its propagation. When hegemonic

systems lurch towards repressiveness and make dialogue with them difficult or impossible for segments of the population, many then find it necessary to turn to alternative methods of communicating in order for their grievances to be heard. Once the disaffected are able to communicate with each other and the public, they run the chance of actually having some chance of changing the society they live in. The best way to circumvent these restrictions to dialogue tends to be via a platform that can be used without any mediation required by hegemonic forces and one that is readily accessible to the general population so that one's message can be easily stated. Fortunately, platforms ripe for this sort of utilization exist within societies: they are the public spaces of a city, their walls and their surfaces. This circumvention can be done by reworking the surfaces themselves, by applying the message of dissatisfaction or protest directly on these surfaces in an "unauthorized" manner or, as the state defines it, "graffiti."

Although the simple act of writing on public surfaces has existed as long as there have been cities (and no doubt even before then), the current trend that is encapsulated in modern graffiti—that of artistic depictions often mixed with socio-political messages—developed in the U.S. in the late 1960s, with two somewhat different styles originating separately in both Philadelphia and New York. Although the modern graffiti movement in Philadelphia slightly predates the New York City movement by a few years, it is the New York City movement that can be credited with spreading to the rest of the U.S. before eventually being taken across the rest of the world. These modern graffiti trends did not materialize out of thin air, however, and the first New York graffiti writers attribute their ideas to an unlikely source. In order to discuss modern graffiti, it is necessary to go back slightly further than its late 1960s birth and discuss the World War II phenomenon known as "Kilroy was here."

The “Kilroy was here” doodle/graffiti, which consists of a basic sketch of a man with the top half of his head and fingers protruding over a wall and his long nose pointed downwards, is one of the more enduring cultural artifacts of World War II (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 38). It was found in practically every feasible place imaginable among the Allied soldiers during the war, and it was often further propagated by various soldiers who found the near ubiquitous nature of it comforting when they were so far from their homes. The “Kilroy Was Here” doodle was such a well known cultural part of the Allied soldiers’ collective experiences during World War II that it has enjoyed an extended life as a featured aspect of many pop culture creations, most notably in Thomas Pynchon’s first novel *V* (Pynchon 1964). After World War II ended and many of the soldiers who either knew of the “Kilroy was here” drawings or had drawn some of them themselves returned home, they took their love of the tiny doodle with them and began putting it in various locals around the cities that they returned to. Now, while the exact origins of the “Kilroy was here” are subject to debate among some, it is generally agreed that the phrase was first created and used extensively by a Massachusetts man named James J. Kilroy who worked as a shipyard inspector (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 41). Kilroy’s job was to inspect the riveter’s job after they completed their shifts. In order to keep track of what parts of the various ships he had inspected and what parts he hadn’t, he would mark a completed area in chalk with the phrase “Kilroy was here.” As these ships were eventually completed and sent out to use in ferrying soldiers to war, many of them noticed these writings on odd parts of the ship, noting that whoever this Kilroy was, he seemed to have been practically everywhere before everyone. Eventually soldiers familiar with the “Kilroy was here” markings began drawing a little man with his nose poking out over a wall above the phrase in order to symbolize the mythical Kilroy. As such, the completed form of the “Kilroy was here” phenomenon was created.

As “Kilroy’s” popularity and somewhat organic growth among Allied soldiers continued, each new person that drew the doodle did so in their own unique way. It was this desire to bring the “Kilroy was here” phenomenon back to the walls and public spaces of the U.S. and its subsequent spread across the country that had a hand in influencing some of the earlier New York City graffiti writers when they began thinking of the city walls as a space that could be used to announce their existence. As one early graffiti writer, known as KOOL KLEPTO KIDD, recollected, “I used to see [Kilroy was here] everywhere. Matter of fact, I used to think it was more than one person, it was in different styles” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 48). Another graffiti artist, TAKI 183, recalls a similar story about the origins of graffiti writing in the city. When asked about who were the first graffiti writers to start writing in the city, TAKI 183 said, “Who’s to say who was first? It’s not important. As a kid I remember copying the ‘Kilroy was here’ guy that I saw on walls—and so did a lot of kids my age. It was inevitable that someone would start graffiti” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 17).

The “Kilroy was here” doodle that blanketed the nooks and crannies of cities in the U.S. might seem like an odd precursor, and perhaps an even odder linkage, to the modern graffiti movement that blossomed in New York City and Philadelphia, but, as many graffiti writers have attested, the presence of “Kilroy was here” drawings was something that many of them took notice of around their cities as they began to formulate their own ideas about writing their names in public spaces. Indeed, the clearest link between the modern graffiti movement and the “Kilroy was here” doodles and other similar markings around American cities in the 1960s was the proliferation of “the name” that these precursors symbolized. In order to understand the significance of “the name” to modern graffiti and how its importance carries through to the various expressions of protest we see today, a short look at the first graffiti writers and their

motivations are in order. While the Philadelphia graffiti movement predates the New York City one by a few years, it is generally a given that the New York City graffiti movement is where modern graffiti originated, and through its popularity spread to the rest of the country before being taken overseas.

There were many reasons why graffiti writers in New York City began scrawling their names across practically every conceivable surface. Beginning in the late 1960s and progressing in earnest throughout the 1970s, New York City saw a serious downturn in economic vitality and standards of living for many within the city as job prospects became scarcer and money for public investment dried up. Those that had the means left the city, taking their money with them, further exacerbating the problem. As is typical, the areas hardest hit during this prolonged economic downturn were the lower income and minority areas, areas that many of the graffiti writers lived in (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 24; Mailer 1974: 5). While there were no definitive outlines of what constituted the socio-economic backgrounds of who graffiti writers were, it was a general rule that most of them were from working class or poor minority families, most of them lived in The Bronx or upper Manhattan around Washington Heights or Harlem, and most of them were young males, typically in their mid to early teens (Mailer 1974: 14). It was within this environment of deteriorating public space, evaporating concern from the city government for the poor, rising crime rates, and a growing feeling of being “left behind,” that many of these young teenagers would become graffiti writers.

There were other aspects of the New York cityscape that worked to influence young graffiti writers. While they lived in areas that were economically depressed and they felt that they were becoming increasingly invisible within a society that just did not seem to reflect their experiences, they also lived in a city that reflected great images of wealth and power. While the

areas of Upper Manhattan might have been economically depressed and deteriorating, the financial powerhouse of Wall Street and Lower Manhattan, as well as the areas around Midtown Manhattan, were booming. Everywhere in these areas one could see large advertisements for rich corporations selling their latest products, and names of rich and powerful men now attached to streets or parks symbolizing their importance. During election years, politicians would add their own layer of ownership to the canvas of named displays that already blanketed the better parts of the city (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 58). Even the more mundane aspects of the city, things like billboards or subway cars, had names on them. All of these things belonged to somebody, and, by displaying their names on them, they designated that not only were these various things theirs, but that they had the power to own them. With this inundation of names on every possible surface that seemed to denote ownership, recognition, and power, many graffiti writers came to realize that they could put their names on things too. Having their name somewhere would perhaps mean that they too had some sort of cultural cache in a city that seemed to so readily trade in such things. Combine this with an exposure to the traditional gang tactics of marking territory by scrawling their names around parts of the city, and one can see how many of the early graffiti writers had an idea of what they wanted to do (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 44). They too would begin writing their names across the city, but not to mark areas of territory like the gangs, per se, and not merely to let people know that they were there either, but rather a combination of these two things. Graffiti writers would write all over the city to show that they existed and the city belonged to them too. The writers would show that you didn't need to be rich or powerful to have your name all over the city; rather, it was something that anyone could do and that everyone had a right to do it.

There was an idea that New York was a city that had essentially become economically segregated, with one version of the city for the rich, powerful, and affluent, who had access to the best infrastructure, schools, and services, and another version in the outer boroughs for the poor, working class, and the minorities, where the city had forgotten that they existed (or stopped caring), where their infrastructure was falling apart, their city services were non-existent, and anything they had left to their names was quickly being cut further. It was this sort of discrepancy that brought many of the first graffiti writers to decide to write on the walls and subway cars of New York, to show themselves and others that they still existed. As one graffiti writer, LSD OM, put it, “My first impression of why other people were writing was because I felt people were angry, upset that they didn’t have a voice in the world, that the government was telling us how it was and how it was going to be, and I think people were too free to let that happen. Writing was a way of saying, ‘Don’t make a decision without consulting us. Look at this wall and all these lives here. You may not see these people standing on the platform of the train, but all of these names you see are people with lives and meaning’” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 23).

Other graffiti writers were not content with merely letting those in control of the system know that they existed and deserved respect; some of them wanted to supersede the system itself. Many graffiti writers basically said that they saw names of ownership on subway cars or around platforms and thought, “if leaving their name makes this their car, then putting my name over it makes it mine.” Norman Mailer, in his book *The Faith of Graffiti*, eloquently summed up the sentiments behind thoughts like that by saying, “There were kids all over town waiting to hit their names. A bona fide clue. An object is hit with your name, yes, and in the ghetto, a hit equals a kill. [...] You hit your name and maybe something in the whole scheme of the system



gives a death rattle. For now your name is over their name, over the subway manufacturer, the Transit Authority, the city administration. Your presence is on their presence, your alias hangs over their scene” (Mailer 1974). Still, not all graffiti writers were explicitly interested in challenging the hegemonic systems of 1970s New York; some of them just found pleasure in being able to write. Writing gave them a creative outlet, a means to communicate with other teenagers like themselves, and an escape from the less pleasant aspects of their lives (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 44, 59). Lots of these writers spoke simply of the genuine joy of seeing graffiti that they or their friends had written pass on subway trains while they were at a Yankees game in The Bronx or while waiting on a subway platform (2010: 24, 65). Still others talked about the genuine exhilaration that was to be had by exploring their city and discovering hidden parts of it as they searched for the best spots to write new graffiti. They said that this process made it feel like the city belonged to them (2010: 31). Many graffiti writers talked about how writing graffiti helped them break through the rigid social or ethnic barriers that were still in place in much of American society at the time, and helped them form lasting friendships with people their age that they would have never met otherwise (2010: 51, 83).

With an understanding of the origins of modern graffiti and what motivated the participants in this nascent movement, we can now turn our attention to another important factor: the evolution of graffiti writing style. Modern graffiti started out being stylishly simplistic. Much like the aforementioned “Kilroy was here” doodles, most of the early graffiti “tags” (as they came to be known) consisted simply of the writer’s name or alias. Many added another part to their tags beyond just a name; they also included the streets that they lived on (Mailer 1974: 4). So early graffiti writers had names like CAY 161 or HENRY 161 or TAKI 183, designating their chosen names and where they were from, like 161<sup>st</sup> Street or 183<sup>rd</sup> Street. A common tag from

this time would have been a fairly simple drawing, perhaps slightly stylized but mostly not, either created in permanent marker or paint. These tags first appeared on the sides of buildings, or in the writer's apartment buildings, or various walls across the city. Eventually they made their way to the trains and subway stations, taking over the walls of the platform and the surfaces of the subway cars (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 89). As more people began to take up graffiti, writers increasingly began to borrow stylistic techniques that they saw other writers using, giving their tags little flourishes here and there to make them unique. Even more interestingly, graffiti writers in different New York boroughs developed different methods of graffiti writing, some preferring different style lettering or different platforms. As writers from the four main New York boroughs (Manhattan, The Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn) began intermingling with each other, and the trains that they wrote on circulated throughout these four boroughs, the styles continued to feed off of each other, developing interesting syntheses of style and providing a unique evolutionary pattern for writing style in the city.

One of the biggest factors that led to the development of graffiti writing styles in New York City beyond mere exposure to different graffiti styles from different boroughs was competition among the graffiti writers themselves to have the more impressive tags. This would not only increase the visibility of their tag among the others on a given surface, but it would also help it stick out in the minds of viewers. The better a tag was, the logic went, the more people talked about it, and the more people talked about it, the more cache you had. Simple tags began to get additional flourishes here and there to make them more visually unique. CAY 161's tag came with a small crown above his name (Mailer 1974: 10). Some artists drew flowers or peace signs as part of their tags (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 91). Graffiti writer STAY HIGH 141 would draw a small stick figure man sitting on his tag, smoking (2010: 64).

Eventually the simplistic style of just writing a name became unpopular as other, more elaborate, writing styles took over. Graffiti writer STAY HIGH 149 explains, “Graffiti before 1973 looked like simple writing on a wall, short and simple. After 1973, it became bigger and more iconic. You wanted to magnify it to make it more noticeable to the public” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 74). Bubble lettering became increasingly popular for graffiti tags, making the tags grow in size. Color was increasingly used to fill in the now larger lettering. Shadowing was given to the letters to make them stand out and seem three dimensional. As the artistic talent of the writers grew, so did the graffiti they created. Tags became larger and more elaborate with increasingly stylistic fonts. Accompanying figures grew from being simple outlines to full blown drawings, often taken from the comic books that many of the graffiti writers read (Mailer 1974: 14). Tags grew larger and larger until they became known as something called a “piece,” short for “masterpiece” (Cooper and Chalfont 1984: 27). These pieces would often encompass several square feet of a wall or significant portions of the sides of subway cars. As one graffiti writer, COCO 144, said of the increasing one-upmanship among writers, “The only alternative available was to do a piece, to go over everybody’s name in a bigger format with larger letters” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 71). This explosion of styles roughly coincided with one of the more favorable times for graffiti in New York City. It had not yet really broken out nationwide and the New York City government had not yet attempted in earnest to combat the growing presence of graffiti on practically all of the city’s surfaces, most notably its subway cars.

Although graffiti was becoming nearly ubiquitous on every available surface in parts of New York City, from basketball courts to corner stores, the most coveted place for writers to leave their marks were still the subway trains. In fact, the biggest trend for graffiti writers when it came to subway cars became the practice of creating “wholecar” or “wholetrain” pieces

(Cooper and Chalfant 1984). Wholecar and wholetrain pieces are exactly what they sound like: very large and elaborate graffiti pieces that would either take up the entire surface of one subway car or, in the largest cases, the entire side of a whole subway train. Of course, it should be noted that creating these graffiti pieces took considerable more time and effort than the previous creation of the simpler tags. As such, this required graffiti writers to sometimes work together in “crews.” Also, these pieces had to be done on the sides of the subway cars where there was time and seclusion enough to complete the piece. As such, many writers took to sneaking into the subway storage yards in the middle of the night or traversing various subway tunnels to find where subway cars were stored inbetween stations to create their pieces.

The rise of the wholecar graffiti pieces was a boon to many graffiti writers; they saw it as an opportunity to get increasingly creative with the pieces they were creating and, by extension, gain increasing recognition across the city for their work, not only from fellow writers, but from the general population as well. However, there were some graffiti writers that saw the rise of wholecar graffiti as an opportunity to do something more with graffiti than simply put their names up on the train or create artistic murals in order to garner more praise for themselves. One such graffiti writer, who went by the alias LEE, saw the wholecar movement as an opportunity to communicate with his fellow New Yorkers from a platform that they would all be able to access: the subway car. LEE’s work was notable for not only being incredibly advanced and artistic, but also deeply politically conscious. As one of his fellow graffiti writers noted in retrospect, “LEE came along and decided that he was going [to use the wholecar movement to] to paint his own personal messages: fears of his own death, fears of the city becoming bankrupt—things that were extraordinary for a sixteen year old kid. At a time when most kids don’t want to reveal anything, he wanted to reveal it all” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 102). Beyond wholecar pieces that

communicated LEE's own personal concerns, he also created several pieces that were comments on various socio-political problems facing New York and the larger world at that time, most notably environmental issues (Cooper and Chalfant 1984: 48). LEE was also one of the first graffiti writers who saw the term "graffiti artist" used in reference to his work, something that became increasingly common among graffiti writers as time went on and artistic expression became a more central aspect of their work.

With graffiti becoming increasingly popular within New York City, it was only a matter of time before it spread to other cities in the United States. As noted before, other cities, most notably Philadelphia, had their own distinct graffiti movements that developed separately from the movement in New York, but it was when New York graffiti writers began spreading out from their city that graffiti began to really take hold elsewhere. Cities in the tri-state area around New York were within easy commuting distance for many of the graffiti writers there, and many of them took regional trains to places like Boston, New Jersey, or Providence to begin writing graffiti in those areas. Much like bees pollinating flowers, the youth of these cities took a hold of the graffiti styles that the New York writers brought with them and began to develop their own graffiti scenes. Other cities experienced the growth or outright creation of a graffiti scene when prominent graffiti writers from New York would either go visit these cities or moved there with their parents (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 168, 208).

The pilgrimage of graffiti writers to different cities in the United States was only part of the reason for the growth of modern graffiti. In New York, graffiti was increasingly being seen as an "edgy" new art form, and it attracted the interests of several gallery owners and art collectors who hoped to gain something by sponsoring some of these writers for gallery shows (2010: 73). These galleries that displayed graffiti works became very well known and word

travelled fast. Some galleries managed to get graffiti writers shows in Western Europe, where they would create graffiti to be displayed. The advent of artistic and galleried interests in graffiti work gave rise to the first generation of “street artists” such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. These street artists never painted on trains as earlier graffiti writers did, but took the writer’s notions of open access to public spaces and their availability for the reappropriation of visual expression to heart and created several notable works of art both within the public space of New York as well as for various galleries (2010: 380).

Musicians also took note of the potential that graffiti could add to their images, and they too attempted to employ various graffiti writers to create backdrops for their music videos or to be in the videos themselves (2010: 132). Photographers too began to take note and started taking photos of the graffiti around New York City in earnest. The ephemeral nature of the graffiti tags and pieces, especially in the face of the city’s increased crackdown, made it especially useful to have photographs taken of them so that they could be preserved and shared after they had been erased or written over. One of the most influential collections of graffiti photography, a collaborative effort by photographers Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, was called *Subway Art* (1984). This book contained several large, high quality prints of graffiti from the New York City subway trains, particularly many very elaborate wholecar and wholetrain pieces. *Subway Art* was consistently mentioned as one of the most integral aspects to the spread of graffiti to American cities that had no contact with the New York graffiti movement. Teenagers in these cities would get a hold of copies of *Subway Art* and, inspired by the graffiti pieces they saw inside, would endeavor to create graffiti in their own towns and cities (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 127). All of these influences worked to build the profile of graffiti and graffiti writers worldwide, and it introduced modern graffiti to areas that had no direct exposure to the New York City movement.

There was one cultural phenomenon above all the others that really helped propel modern graffiti into a worldwide phenomenon, exposing it to teenagers across the globe who would have never encountered it otherwise. The rise of hip-hop music, itself a New York City creation, helped to propel graffiti even more into the forefront of American culture and served as a useful vessel for bringing the phenomenon overseas when hip-hop acts toured. Graffiti was considered one of the “four elements” of hip-hop, along with break dancing, rap, and DJing (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 25). The popularity of hip-hop artists, and the graffiti crews that they usually brought in tow with them, served to not only further evolve graffiti style, but expose it to large audiences. “Wildstyle” graffiti (called that because the text of the graffiti had become stylized to the point of abstraction) became a staple of the hip-hop scene, even prompting the shooting of a film by the same name. *Wild Style* was released in 1983 and it was a loosely fictionalized account of the New York City graffiti and hip-hop movements that cast actual graffiti writers and hip-hop artists in lead roles. *Wild Style* became something of a cult classic, further cementing the role of hip-hop and graffiti within American culture and tying them together as interconnecting aspects of the same movement.

When hip-hop artists toured overseas, mainly in Europe, they were sure to bring their graffiti crews with them, where they would spread out across whatever city they were in and begin canvassing it with Wildstyle graffiti and other large pieces. Many of these hip-hop acts would perform in working class and minority areas where the ethos of both hip-hop and graffiti, themselves born out of similar situations in New York, would find a charitable audience. Many of the youth that saw these hip-hop acts and their graffiti crews in places around the United Kingdom in the mid 1980s were deeply impressed by what they saw, and so they began their own graffiti movements there. Of particular note was one young graffiti writer from Bristol who

went by the alias “Banksy.” Banksy started out as part of the Bristol underground scene, which was a subculture centered around the imported phenomenon of graffiti writing and hip-hop. As a graffiti writer during this time, he typically engaged in freehand graffiti writing, which was the style of the New York graffiti scene, until a run-in with police while attempting to spray paint a train led him to an epiphany of sorts. While hiding from the police under the train he was attempting to paint, Banksy noticed that there were serial numbers stenciled on the underside of the train carriage. The apparent ease at the application of the stenciled numbers led Banksy to realize that stenciling would make graffiti a much easier process than attempting to create it freehand (Banksy 2007: 13).

#### ***2.4 Examples of the Wall as a Space for Socio-Political Protest***

Contemporary examples of effective political graffiti on the public surfaces of cities are usually harder to come by in long established, open western countries. For the most part the clashes that we have with our western governments are no longer like the ones that occurred during the 60s or 70s, the era of student uprising and vast social change, and have become rather benign (Manco 2002). What has been rising in occurrence, however, in these politically open societies, is protests against the growth and consolidation of power by multi-national corporations (Klein 2002). Both South American and Middle Eastern countries are prime candidates to be looked at (Chmielewska 2007), but currently the most high profile cases are ones involving former Soviet satellite countries and the always controversial conflict between Israel and their occupation of the Palestine Territories.

The first, and perhaps best, example of graffiti used as a tool for communicating social protest can be seen in the former East Berlin area on the Berlin Wall. The wall stood as a very prominent, classic example of graffiti used as protest before it fell in the late 1980s. The use of



graffiti on the Berlin Wall worked in a two-fold manner. First, it called into question the legitimacy of the wall itself. By graffitiing the wall, protestors were communicating that its existence was wrong and that it should not exist (Stein 1989). Second, the graffiti served to communicate to the rest of the world the dissatisfaction that Berliners had with the wall and the political system it stood for. Also, the graffiti worked on the wall in an ideological manner. By spraying on the wall, an act that was done most by West Germans, they were nullifying the claims of ownership by the East German Government not only over the wall but over the political process that spawned it. The wall sat several feet back within East German territory, so any West Berliner who went to spray the wall was not only committing an act of vandalism against the East German state, but political protesting as well. By violating the wall, they also violated the arbitrary border between East and West, and by doing this they questioned the authority (and even the need) of those who enforced that border. By spraying graffiti on the surface of the Berlin Wall, they were ideologically questioning the existence of the oppressive East German state in and of itself.

Although the transitions of power in former Communist and Soviet countries like the Czech Republic, the Ukraine, the former East Germany, and Georgia have been fairly non-violent, there was still a large number of grassroots protests that worked towards governmental change, many of them spearheaded by student groups. In particular, Manning (2007) notes that the “Rose Revolution,” as it was termed, which brought governmental change to Georgia, was largely headed up by student groups. He made note of their use of graffitied slogans around the capital of Tbilisi, where both the word “Krama!” meaning “enough,” as well as the organization’s name, Student Initiative Group, came to coincide with protests that were staged. Again, although these groups utilized graffiti as a means of communication about their political

aims, these were situations where the momentum was already going, so to speak. A more interesting example lies in the continued use of graffiti as protest in the Palestinian territories, starting with the First Intifada of the late 1980s and early 1990s and through to the present with the graffiti protests against the controversial Israeli West Bank Barrier.

Peteet's (1996) particularly rich essay on the subject of the use of graffiti in the West Bank starts with its use during the Palestinian Intifada of the late 1980s. The word Intifada, literally translated from Arabic as "shaking off," but generally meant to be understood as "rebellion" in English, was applied to the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation that lasted from 1987 to 1993. Peteet noted that during the Intifada and afterwards, graffiti was the primary means of communication between the Palestinian people and the various political factions vying for influence. Often, one could deduce which political faction was stronger or weaker at a certain time by seeing where their slogans were and whose had been painted over. The use of graffiti in Palestine has continued since then and can be seen most prominently in the protests against the existence of the West Bank Barrier.

The West Bank Barrier, currently under construction by the Israeli government, is an attempt to isolate the West Bank from the rest of Israel, similar to the reason that the Berlin Wall was built. The Israeli government claims that the wall is intended to stem the flow of suicide bombers and terrorists into Israel, which may be the case, but it has had devastating effects on large areas of the West Bank as well as its residents. The use of political graffiti as a means of protest against the West Bank Barrier functions in similar ways as it has in other areas, where the population is largely disenfranchised and has no other means of voicing their opposition. The graffiti, by being put on the barrier itself, works in a twofold manner. First, it challenges the existence of the barrier; second it uses it as its means of communication (Fernandez-Armesto

2004). By doing this, not only is the barrier itself protested, but it becomes the means by which communicating the protest is possible. Also, this graffiti works to transform the barrier from being simply a symbol of restriction to being one that represents the Palestinian opposition to the barrier. In effect, the graffiti is not necessarily meant to just communicate to Israelis and the Israeli government, but more importantly it is meant to communicate to Palestinians that there is still a sense of hope and a sense of resistance within their own community.

### *2. 5 Graffiti as Carnavalesque Protest*

The previous sections of this chapter worked to establish the history of the modern graffiti movement as well as discuss the ways that it grew to be seen as a tool that could be (and has often been) used for protest. With this laid out, I can now turn to discussing the phenomenon of graffiti writers and street artists couching the socio-political messages of their graffiti in humorous or fantastical themes instead of creating messages of direct critique of hegemonic structures. This is increasingly being done by protesters for two reasons: in order to increase the chances of their work engaging an otherwise uninterested audience and to manage to escape censorship from governments that might be quick to cover up more directly critical messages. Oftentimes the goal of the graffiti writer or protester in this case is to achieve both. This technique of layering a serious critique under humorous, whimsical, or fantastical subject matter in order to smuggle a critical message into an otherwise unreceptive audience for consideration is known as “carnavalesque” protest.

There is a history of the employment of carnivalesque techniques in acts of resistance against power structures in both late capitalist countries as well as more repressive regimes. In both instances, these employments of the carnivalesque have worked to launch an effective challenge against the power structures that controlled the state. The idea of using “playfulness”

to enhance the quality of human life and its ability to be used as a tool for releasing us from self-imposed bonds of repression goes back to the Ancient Roman world (Bakhtin 1984). In the eighteenth century, Friedrich Schiller argued that if people took a cue from animals, who only worked insofar as they needed to survive and then spent the rest of their time playing, we could increase the overall quality of our lives. Schiller dubbed this unconscious desire to engage in unseriousness the “play drive” (Grossman 1968).

The major theorist on the origins of the carnivalesque and its development into a socio-political protest technique today is Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin argues that ideas of the carnivalesque and its application to literature and art stem from the concept of the carnival, a whimsical period of revelry and celebration originating in medieval Europe and commonly associated with the Christian hierarchy in place in societies there at the time. The point of the carnival in medieval European culture was to provide a period of time where the rigidity of societal hierarchies were temporarily broken down or reversed and the poor or lower classes would pretend to be rich members of the upper class and the affluent would pretend to be fools or beggars. During this period of social irregularity, opposites would interact and different strata of society that would normally have little or no contact with each other would intermingle. As Bakhtin stated, “all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age” (1984: 10). All of this took place during a festive, circus-like atmosphere and usually lasted for several days, which would then be followed by the much more rigid and solemn Christian season of fasting and repentance known as Lent. The present day Mardi Gras and Carnival festivals that occur in the Western world (usually around the month of February each year) are the descendents of these original carnivals.

Bakhtin compares the use of the carnivalesque in literature to the activity that would occur in the carnivals of popular culture. He argues that these ideas of upending societal norms and challenging established hierarchies by way of fantastical displays eventually found their way into literature and art, where they were used as elements of socio-political subversion cloaked in a humorous exterior (Bakhtin 1984). Through the use of carnivalesque tropes, a "world upside-down" would be created, ideas and truths would be endlessly tested and contested, and all would demand equal dialogic status (Stallybrass and White 1986). Through this, the egalitarian nature of all things could be proclaimed in a way that de-privileged the authoritative ideological disseminations of the hegemony through their mixing of serious high culture ideas with whimsical or fantastical low culture surroundings or circumstances. It is thus argued by Bakhtin that within literary or artistic forms of expression is where one finds the best sites of resistance to the dominant ideology of hegemonic structures and a platform where cultural, and socio-political, change is possible.

With this brief history of the origins of the carnivalesque established, as well as a short discussion of how it grew from something associated with medieval carnivals to a subversive technique used in literature and art to critique dominant ideological and hegemonic structures, it becomes clear as to how this humorous, whimsical, and seemingly non-confrontational technique would be a valuable asset to protesters and other activists looking to critique the power structures of their society without being perceived as overtly antagonistic by their targets. When one wants to critique power structures or socio-political issues that are so ingrained in a society (either by means of repressive force or by ideological dissemination) that direct and overt discussion of them is made literally unthinkable, the task can be made easier if critiques are not placed on the surface but wrapped in a humorous or whimsical shell. This way, the serious critiques that might

lie at the heart of one's statement, whether it is a satirical piece of writing or, more relevantly, an act of graffiti, can possibly go unnoticed by the hegemonic forces that are intent on squelching discussion of the topic because they are concealed under a guise of unserious humor. The successful avoidance of detection means that a message has a better chance of reaching its intended audience, allowing them time to consider what is being proposed, thus hopefully leading them to eventually consider acting on it.

As previously pointed out in Stein's essay, humorous graffiti and carnivalesque subject matter was instrumental in the spread and effectiveness of the graffiti that adorned the Berlin Wall. In Bruner's essay "Carnavalesque Protest and the Humorless State," he discusses the implementation of carnivalesque protest techniques by the revolutionary group Orange Alternative in the final years of the Communist Polish state (2005). The Orange Alternative movement and their use of carnivalesque techniques in the creation of anti-regime graffiti stands as a good example of the potential for using carnivalesque techniques in order to subtly critique existing power structures under the guise of humor. The initial, overtly, anti-regime graffiti created by protesters in Poland during the Solidarity movement was covered up and its creators punished. Confronted with this, members of Orange Alternative began painting pictures of "elves" in place of the covered anti-regime graffiti. The Soviet-style power structure in place did not know how to process this ridiculous, seemingly non-sequitur, graffiti that was showing up on the walls of Poland's cities. The elves did not appear to be harmful attacks on the legitimacy of the state, like the graffiti before it was, so they left them alone. Furthermore, the Orange Alternative members who were painting the elves could not be arrested by the state for creating "anti-regime" graffiti because there was nothing overtly anti-regime about the elves. The people

of Poland, however, knew what they represented, and because of their playful ambiguity, they managed to survive and help bolster the anti-communist movement.

As stated before regarding the evident uses of the carnivalesque in the literary and art worlds, its employment by graffiti writers and other street artists seems to be something that fits almost naturally with the act of creating graffiti as an act of protest. This is especially true in societies where one cannot overtly critique some systems of power for various reasons. One of the newer, and increasingly popular, carnivalesque techniques that is being employed by graffiti writers and street artists is known as “culture jamming.” In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein goes into great detail discussing various aspects of the culture jamming phenomenon, a growing movement targeting corporate advertising by changing or challenging the ads in public spaces by means of graffiti, street art, or other forms of public protest (Klein 2000: 279). Culture jamming usually (but not always) takes the form of altering billboards or other types of large prominently placed advertisements in order to display a message that subverts the original intention of the altered ad, typically as an act of protest. Culture jamming can be thought of as a type of “détournement,” a technique developed by the Situationist International group (Debord 1958). Détournement consisted of “turning expressions of the capitalist system against itself, reclaiming individual autonomy from the passive spectacle that the system produces” and was used to set up subversive political pranks (Debord and Wolman 1956). This idea of détournement and the use of subversive political pranks in order to turn the ideological gaze of capitalism back in on itself can be thought of as a sort of forerunner to modern culture jamming and indeed carnivalesque approaches to graffiti as a whole.

Interestingly enough, modern culture jamming also has its origins within the modern graffiti movement, although not in the way that one might expect. When graffiti began to spread

from New York City and arrived in other areas of the U.S., it was often modified slightly to fit the culture and environment of whatever city it was brought to. When graffiti culture reached Texas, it took on an interesting twist. A Texan graffiti writer named Ron English, after being unable to secure any gallery shows for his graffiti like some of the more famous writers up in New York were achieving, decided to instead start putting graffiti up on the billboards that littered the Texas landscape. As English put it, “I suppose if I was in New York I would have painted subway trains, but we didn’t have those in Texas, so I did billboards” (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 384). English began by creating “slick pop-art satires of classic paintings and advertisements” (2010: 384) on these billboards: a definite ancestral link to today’s culture jamming techniques and visual repertoire. Ironically enough, the new technique of graffitiing billboards ended up being imported into New York City by Ron English himself when he moved there in 1986, somewhat of a cultural reversal for New York, a city that had almost singlehandedly exported modern graffiti culture to the rest of the country.

As evidenced by the use of culture jamming against capitalist structures, even in typically “sedate” Western societies there has been a rise in the occurrence of protests against the growth and consolidation of power by multi-national corporations (Klein 2002: 3). Examples of this can be seen in the graffiti work created by Banksy. Banksy’s work, created primarily in Western capitalist cities like London, New York, or Los Angeles can be seen as a form of culture jamming rather than more straightforward graffiti. Banksy’s approach has been to call into question the entire capitalist paradigm by means of artful critiques of both consumerist practices and governments that work in tandem with corporate interests. His works are able to function so well not because of their outright attack on their targets, but through a playful presentation that masks their underlying critique. Banksy’s use of graffiti, in an often carnivalesque manner,



stands in contrast to the usual use of graffiti as a tool for socio-political protest in more repressive regimes. In the following chapters, I will explore in detail how graffiti is used to communicate on both the walls of capitalist societies and on the West Bank Barrier wall, the latter of which exists in a more repressive regime.

### ***2.6 The Walls of the Twenty-First Century: Digital Protest and Social Media***

Now that I have provided a basic description of the dual function of the wall within society as both a surface for the dissemination of ideology as well as a surface with the potential to be reappropriated as a space of protest against hegemonic power structures, I can now discuss the function of the digital walls of social media within society and how their functions mirror their real world counterparts. In terms of social media and its function as the basis for the digital wall, there are two specific sites of particular interest: Facebook and Twitter. As stated before, the digital walls of these social media sites operate in much the same way as their physical counterparts. The public forum space that is created within these social media sites is designed to mirror the supposed construction of the public spaces of old: a general, equal access public forum in which anyone can come and voice their opinions. In that endeavor they seem to succeed in creating this digital replication of the egalitarian public space that has effectively disappeared from our physical societal interactions.

Indeed, on websites like Facebook and Twitter, the barrier between government and people has thinned, with citizens being able to interact directly with their representatives via their Facebook pages or posting to their Twitter feed. The ability to have discourse with corporations has also changed in this digital landscape, giving more power to the consumer in contacting corporations in a meaningful way. While it may seem that the advantages over the physical wall given by the digital wall when it comes to protesters being able to engage with their target

audiences are many, there is more similarity between the two walls than might be imagined. In order to understand how the digital wall actually functions as a medium for socio-political protest, and how its function in doing so parallels the function of the physical wall, we must first analyze the operation of the digital wall itself.

The best example of the digital wall that I intend on analyzing can be found most easily on the social media site Facebook. Indeed, the main area of any Facebook profile is centered around each user's wall: a virtual space where one can share items of interest, post comments about their day, and where their friends can communicate with them as well. Every Facebook profile has a wall that forms the cornerstone of that profile and allows its user to interact with the rest of their virtual community. When Facebook began, the function of the site as a means of social interaction was strictly limited to college students, but as time went on the site began to open more and more to other groups until, in its current manifestation, it has become open to virtually any entity that wishes to create a profile, whether an individual person, a corporation, or even a government or religion. On Facebook today, one has personal friends to interact with, and they can become "fans" of Coca-Cola and "like" the Catholic Church. This inclusion of corporate groups and other administrative entities is where the function of the digital wall on Facebook turned into something different from what it was in its infancy.

When initially created, the function of the digital wall (indeed, the whole notion of the profile) was to create an open and egalitarian common space in which people could interact with each other freely. With the inclusion of corporations and other entities into this egalitarian arena, the dynamics of the public space that had already been established began to change. What happened was not that powerful, monied entities took over the common area from the general populace and began to use it as they saw fit; instead, these entities entered an area already

controlled by existing populations and they found that they had to operate in it according to the same rules as everyone else. Earlier, I pointed out, via Naomi Klein, that the notion of the open public space within society has all but vanished. The areas where the general population once had to deliberate any pressing concerns openly had been, piece by piece, taken over by various power structures until the notion of a truly open public space, owned equally by the public, was at best an anachronism. What has been created in the digital public space of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter can be thought of as having the potential to operate as reinventions of this notion of equal access public space. It is not, however, a virtual copy of the lost public spaces. I would argue that, instead, digital walls of social media have the potential to operate more in line with the definition of the “third space,” or “the commons,” as proposed by Hardt and Negri (Hardt & Negri 2009: 111). This commons, according to them, is neither private nor public, but an altogether different space that is shared equally by all. Ideally, on Facebook one can question Coca Cola’s labor practices freely and for the whole world to see, without much blow back from Coke. One can decry a government’s or a religion’s anti-civil rights agendas, again often without any threat of retaliation from these entities and, best of all, the message that is posted is there for a (potential) global audience to see (Neumayer & Raffl 2008).

It is in this manner that a key function of the digital wall and its relation to the physical wall as a space for activist/protest rhetoric can be seen. Like the physical wall, once the message is put up, everyone can see it. Yes, the targeted party can “take down the message,” but it is impossible to do this before someone else sees the message and, perhaps, decides to join the protest. In addition to this, the anonymity that is provided by the use of the physical wall as a repository for resistance-message graffiti (that is, no one knows who put it there unless they get caught) can also be found to a degree in the digital counterpart. Anyone can make an alternate

profile in order to post anonymously, if that is even needed. And, also in relation to its physical counterpart, the targeted entity, whether it is a corporation or a government, cannot truly silence the protest without destroying a part of itself. To stop someone from graffiting a wall, one will eventually have to tear down the wall or give in and let the wall be used in this reappropriated manner. Eventually the possibility for effective management of the space disappears, as I will discuss shortly. The same applies to the digital walls of corporations and governments; they can either close down their profile or adapt to the protests.

Twitter is the other key player in the digital public space revolution that has changed the way that both general activism and protests are operating. The Twitter wall functions much in the same way as the Facebook wall. Indeed, with the advent of Twitter (which was launched roughly two years after Facebook), the Facebook wall has evolved to match the functions of Twitter's wall. Many corporations have Twitter pages as well as Facebook pages. Where the real value in the function of the digital wall of Twitter lies (in its relation to the physical wall) is in its function to serve as a mass communication tool for everyone who can see the messages it carries. In the same way that a message written on a wall in protest can be seen by many people throughout the course of a day, a "tweet" that is posted on the digital wall of a Twitter profile can be shared and spread by a willing audience in order to rally people to a cause or to raise awareness about a situation (O'Leary 2010). There are many examples that one could find of the digital wall space of Facebook or Twitter being used as a platform for protest. Many of them would mirror the ways that people have used physical walls for the same purposes.

### ***2.7 Examples of the Digital Wall as a Tool for Protest***

There are numerous examples of people utilizing the digital public space created by social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to protest against various social or political issues.

Indeed, it could be argued that the relative ease of access to these sites, the egalitarian construction of the digital public spaces, and the increased ability to actually be able to interact with many previously aloof institutions, whether they be political or corporate, has led to a rise in “online activism” among many different socio-economic groups that ordinarily would not be as engaged in similar forms of activism in the physical world. The utilization of digital public space for socio-political protest can be found happening in many parts of the world. Examples range from the Twitter fueled demonstrations that took place in Moldova in 2010 (Barry 2010, Mungiu-Pippidi 2010), to the “Repeal Prop 8” campaign that found global support on Facebook (No H8, 2009), to the savaging of BP (formerly known as British Petroleum) on its social media walls after the Gulf Coast oil spill in 2010 (Milman 2010). While the use of Facebook and Twitter as communicative tools seems especially apt for most of these cases, social media appears to work especially well in facilitating two types of protests: protests against corporations with unseemly business practices and, more importantly, repressive regimes with brutal track records in regards to their populations.

In the case of the 2009 mass protests in Iran, Twitter was utilized as a global digital wall for everyone with access to the internet to follow what was going on inside the repressive country. While the digital wall as protest tool turned out to be quite effective, it did not produce the changes that the protesters aimed for. The Green Revolution, as it came to be known, erupted following the 2009 Iranian presidential election in protest against the disputed reelection of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and in support of opposition candidate Mir-Hosseini Mousavi, starting June 13, 2009. Iran, like many other closed off, repressive regimes, has tight control on the media, as well as any communication technologies that might foster global discourse among its population. It would go without saying in this case that access to sites

like Facebook and Twitter were already somewhat restricted before the eruption of the Green Revolution. When supporters of the opposition movement took to the streets, they needed a way to communicate not only with each other, but also with the rest of the world so that others could be aware of what was going on within Iran and, hopefully, support their cause (Twitter). Twitter became the platform of choice for dissenters and, even though the country tried blocking the website, people were able to host proxies as well as reroute IP addresses for access to Twitter and to post messages (Grossman 2009).

In terms of getting their message heard on a global level, as well as communicating with each other, Twitter worked perfectly for this purpose (Jaafar 2009). The bulk of the main protests lasted for months inside the country and it looked as if, however improbable, the Iranian government might actually be in danger of being overthrown. International support was also widespread. People in countries all over the world hosted their own protests in support of the Green Revolution in Iran and urged their governments to intercede on behalf of the protesters to help their cause. In this, it can be seen how the digital wall of Twitter functioned like the physical walls of a society as a tool for communicating with other protesters and the general population. The protest messages displayed on the digital wall managed to resonate across the entire world, acting like an amplified version of what happens on physical walls during a physical protest and, no doubt, what was actually happening on the ground in Iran at the time. Like the physical walls, the opposing government forces could not stem the flow of information completely, and the messages reached others who would join in the opposition. Unfortunately in this case, although the digital wall worked in the same way as a global version of the physical wall as a protest communication platform, the revolution did not manage to change the election results or, if it was indeed their goal, topple the government in Iran (Morozov 2009). It is

sometimes the case that not all revolutions work; history is certainly littered with the carcasses of failed uprisings. However, what is different between this uprising and others that did not work as planned is the amount of global attention that it managed to garner, something that would not have been possible had it not been for the use of the digital wall as their means of dissemination (Segan 2009).

Iran, however, can be read as a precursor, in both motivations for the protests as well as tools used in pursuit of political and social change, to the string of Middle Eastern protests and revolutions that erupted in the region in early 2011. The most successful example of these protests, in both political success as well as the utilization of reappropriated surfaces, both physical and digital, would be the case of the Egyptian Revolution, which started on January 25, 2011. I will return to the case of the Egyptian Revolution in chapter five. There are other methods of utilizing digital public spaces as a means of protest beyond what was just discussed previously. Whereas the previous examples dealt with a more straightforward approach of utilizing social media channels already established for communication with hegemonic actors in order to pursue social or political change, this sort of option is not always readily available or accessible. Often, in more repressive regimes (even more repressive than Iran) access to social media is severely curtailed. In that environment the ability to effectively counteract government ideological dissemination or repressive action becomes more difficult. However, when one opportunity is shut out within digital public space, it seems that another opportunity becomes available. If there are no channels within digital public space to effectively engage a government or corporation that one is protesting against, then one can turn to people who know how to circumvent this lack of access. This can be done by taking over the digital spaces occupied by governments or corporations themselves via the practice of hacking.

The act of hacking, ordinarily an act that might be thought of as apolitical, has been utilized in several instances in the recent past as a tool for socio-political protest. Whereas most people that participate in hacking might do so for reasons ranging from personal challenge to competition to illegal gains, the potential to use the skills developed by hacking as a means of supporting protest seems to have always risen with the advent of online immersion by governments and corporations. Much like the implications of reappropriating physical public space for the goal of protest, being able to hack into a website and change the contents found there into a message other than the one that the website operators intended has profound ideological potential as a counter-hegemonic act. A hacked webpage can be thought of as operating similarly to a reappropriated wall, culture jammed billboard, or occupied public space. In all cases the surfaces in question (whether the webpage surface or the physical surfaces) are utilized by hegemonic forces in order to disseminate dominant ideology. Also in all cases, when people engaging in counter-hegemonic actions reappropriated these surfaces, they not only changed the functions of said surfaces, but their ideological functions as well.

An excellent example of this reappropriation of digital websites by way of hacking as a means of protest can be seen in the work of the secretive hacker group known as Anonymous. It should be noted that Anonymous, almost by definition, is not a cohesive group at all, but rather a collective with little authoritative structure, and no definitive overriding message beyond the idea that information and people should both be free (Landers 2008). The decentralized nature of Anonymous' structure, as well as the open nature of their membership (anyone can work with Anonymous if they wish to), has meant that, at several different points in time, various people have operated in conjunction with others as Anonymous operatives. They have focused on a range of socio-political issues that portions of the hacker collective have felt merited their



involvement. At various times, hackers operating under Anonymous launched online campaigns against organizations like Scientology, Bank of America, neo-Nazi websites, and in favor of causes such as Wikileaks, Occupy Wall Street, and Bradley Manning (Whipple 2008; Tuutti 2011; Wikipedia 2012). While all these instances of online activism by Anonymous no doubt pique interest, it is their work in support of the various pro-democracy movements during the Arab Spring that warrant the most attention.

As accounts and online footage of the pro-democracy protests in Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere spread, Anonymous began launching “operations” in support of the revolutionaries engaging in protest in these countries. The first such operation launched by Anonymous was called Operation Tunisia in support of the pro-democracy protests against longtime Tunisian leader Ben Ali (Anonymous 2011). Operation Tunisia mainly consisted of “denial of service” attacks against Tunisian government websites, stopping access to the websites for the regime. In addition to pushing Tunisian government websites offline, Anonymous also shipped care packages to Tunisian protesters with routers able to circumvent government attempts to block access to the internet. These proved to be a vital tool in propagating the revolution (Ryan 2011). Anonymous also worked to assist the protesters of the Egyptian Revolution, launching Operation Egypt soon after the start of protests in Cairo. Operation Egypt consisted mainly of denial of service attacks against regime websites, keeping them inaccessible and offline, as done in Tunisia (Wagenseil 2011).

While these two examples of reappropriation of digital space for protest are relevant, the tactics that Anonymous used in support of Syrian protesters are especially pertinent to this study. Operation Syria consisted of Anonymous’ standard assistance to Syrian protesters with information on how to circumvent the regime’s internet censorship, but instead of taking the

Syrian government's websites offline as they had in Tunisia and Egypt, they instead hacked the websites and replaced them with images and messages in support of the anti-government protesters. Anonymous first hacked the Syrian Defense Ministry website and replaced their page with images of the revolutionary pre-Ba'athist regime Syrian flag. They also posted messages of support for the burgeoning Syrian revolution on the commandeered websites (Chappell 2011). The Defense Ministry website was not the only one that Anonymous reappropriated as a platform of support for the anti-regime movement, they also reappropriated the websites for every major city in Syria, as well as The Syrian Central Bank. Even non-government pro-regime websites were hacked and reappropriated, their pro-regime messages replaced with messages of support for the protesters and images critical of Syrian President Bashar Assad (Chappell 2011). The reappropriation of the Syrian government's websites mirrors closely the idea of reappropriation of physical walls or of culture jamming for socio-political protest within public space, both functionally and ideologically. Instead of just simply limiting access to the regime's online sources of ideological dissemination, a good feat in and of itself, Anonymous began to use the platforms that the Syrian regime had used for their own benefit against them.

In this chapter, I have endeavored to examine all the relevant literature available to support the argument in my thesis that not only can the surfaces of our society (both physical and digital) be thought of as platforms for ideological dissemination that are capable of being reappropriated for protest but that graffiti can be thought of as a useful tool for to be utilized by protesters for this purpose within public spaces. This examination consisted of first understanding the ideological underpinnings of a "wall" and how it functions within a society. Then, I looked at academic literature that dealt with the idea of walls and public space as semiotic surfaces that can be utilized by hegemonic forces for the production of ideological

meaning within a society. In the examination of that literature, I also discussed the broader ideas of what “graffiti” is and how it can be thought of broadly, as well as its multiple functions within a society. With the basic theoretical groundwork laid down, I took a detailed look at the history of the modern graffiti movement. This history spanned from graffiti’s roots in the economically depressed, minority areas of New York City and Philadelphia, to its favorability and utilization among youth populations, and finally to several examples of its rise as a legitimate act of public expression and tool for protest.

After discussing the literature needed to support my arguments about the ideological functions of public space and walls and their potential as reappropriated platforms for socio-political protest via the use of graffiti, I turned to a discussion of literature that analyzes the rise of digital public space and how it also can be utilized as a platform for protest. This review of literature began with discussions of the beginnings of new social media platforms on the internet and their role in fostering and expanding this new digital public space. From there, I discussed the literature that looked at the utilization of social media and digital public space not only as platforms where activists and protesters could effectively disseminate counter-hegemonic messages, but also how social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have begun to be used as tools for the encouragement and growth of large scale protests and even revolutions. With a review of the relevant literature completed in this chapter, I have set the stage for an analysis of my three case studies. The literature reviewed in this chapter will allow me to explore how each case study relates to the larger idea of socio-political protest and the reappropriation of public space and walls within physical and digital space, as well as how all three studies relate to each other and, most importantly, supports my argument about the use of graffiti as a tool of protest.

A brief discussion of the methodology that I will use to analyze my case studies will follow this literature review before I begin my analysis in chapter three.

## ***2.8 Methods***

I have chosen three texts to look at for the purpose of this thesis, each one working in relation to the other and all of them working together as a whole to investigate the claims that I have laid out previously. The first text will involve the reappropriation of walls in public space as a platform for dissemination of socio-political protest. The first text will look at the employment of carnivalesque protest techniques employed by the graffiti artist Banksy to combat both capitalist hegemonic regimes and more overtly repressive hegemonic regimes. I will be looking at both his work created within the city of London and on the West Bank Separation Barrier located in Palestine. The final two texts will involve the reappropriation of the digital walls and public space of social mediascapes as platforms for protest and the dissemination of counter-hegemonic messages. The second text I will look at will be the case of the reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall as a space to launch a protest against the company's palm oil harvesting practices. The third and final case will look at the use of the public space of Facebook and Twitter in conjunction with the physical spaces of Cairo as a means of disseminating information during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and how it became a critical part of overthrowing the Mubarak regime.

I have chosen these texts because they each cover a different facet of the areas of interactions with power structures within public space that I am proposing to investigate. They also all face this challenge in unique ways, but ultimately these texts all do the same thing: they reappropriate public space as a platform for socio-political protest. The case study involving the graffiti of Banksy shows not only the versatility and effect of graffiti as a means of protest, but

also how the same techniques can be used in different ideological settings against different hegemonic forces. The examples of the reappropriation of digital public space as a means of protest also work similarly. Both examples use the same tools for different purposes.

The texts I have selected for analysis all exist in different environments and are the products of differing circumstances. They also consist of several different components that combine together to form the whole of my argument. Because of the multi-faceted nature of my selected texts, a strong and comprehensive methodological approach will be needed in order to properly analyze these texts, connect them to the overall arguments being made, and present them as a cohesive picture. Also, since all of my proposed case studies deal with some type of visual element, I will need to rely on a methodology that pertains specifically to analyzing visual artifacts and images within public space. In Gillian Rose's introductory chapter of *Visual Methodologies* she argues that an effective visual methodology must do three things in order to adequately analyze any visually oriented object of analysis. A good visual methodology must "take images seriously;" it must "think about the social conditions and effects of visual objects;" and it must "consider [its] own way of looking at images" (2007: 12). She also notes that there are three sites where the meaning of an image is made: the sites of production of the image, the site of the image itself, and the sites where it is seen by various audiences. Given these parameters, the following methods should prove to be effective in addressing all of these issues in my analysis of the case studies.

I will be relying primarily on a comprehensive visual methodology to analyze my texts, drawing mostly from Rose's *Visual Methodologies*, as well as *Social Semiotics* by Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress. I will also occasionally draw on work from *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen and *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*

by Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt. This methodological approach will look at a different aspect of the texts, and will present a complete analysis of all the examples discussed. My methodological approach is as follows: I will rely on a Semiology and Social Semiotics analytical approach to analyze the images in question in my three case studies by way of how they interact with other signs in their environment, the environment they are placed in, and how they mediate various power structures. . Furthermore, this methodological approach will provide me with the tools to analyze the public responses and reactions to the images in my three case studies. This rich methodological approach will allow for a serious and complete analysis of my chosen case studies. Given this methodological approach, I will stitch together a picture of how each one of my three case studies not only operates within public space, but how they are perceived by the public.

Semiology can be briefly defined as the study of sign systems in operations such as codes, including those of linguistic signs (Martin and Ringham 2006). Rose defines the method a bit more precisely: “Semiology demands detailed analysis of images, and its reliance on case studies, and its elaborate analytical terminology, create careful and precise accounts of how the meanings of particular images are made. This method provides a precise and rich vocabulary for understanding how the structure of images produces cultural meaning” (2007: 103). This methodology will be good for analyzing how people create social meaning between themselves and interactions with their environments. It will also help me to understand how the composition and context of the visual texts that I will analyze help to produce their meaning. Rose begins her discussion of the Semiology methodology by noting that it has become a prominent methodological choice in visual analysis because it “confronts head on the question of how images make meanings,” and she goes on to argue that “Semiology offers a very full box of

analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning” (2007: 74). She goes on to say that the chief concern of Semiological studies is with a definition of science that contrasts scientific knowledge with an Althusserian definition of ideology. This notion of ideology argues that knowledge is constructed so as to legitimize unequal power relations within a society, thus “science” can be seen as a way of illuminating and revealing those inequalities (2007: 75). So, if ideology can be taken to be understood as the social construction of meaning, then Semiology, according to Rose, is primarily concerned with the social effects of meaning (2007: 76).

When it comes to using a Semiological methodology in order to analyze visual objects, Rose argues that Semiological studies “tend to concentrate on the image itself as the most important site of its meaning. Its focus on signs means that Semiology always pays careful attention to the compositional modality” (2007: 78). Given these parameters, Rose argues that a Semiological methodology must do the following things in order to offer a complete analysis: decide what the signs are; decide what they signify “in themselves;” think about how they relate to other signs “in themselves;” explore their connections to wider systems of meaning, from codes to ideologies; and then return to the signs via their codes to explore the precise articulation of ideology and mythology (2007: 98). As can be seen based on the guidelines laid out by Rose, Semiology works as an effective visual methodology because it follows all three steps she laid out earlier: it takes images seriously, it considers the social conditions and effects of visual objects, and it is reflexive regarding its way of looking at images. Beyond the basic tenets of Semiology that Rose discusses, she also describes a slightly deeper approach to understanding Semiology as an analytical tool, or what has been termed “Social Semiotics,” something studied in depth by Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress.

According to Hodge and Kress (1988), “Social Semiotics is primarily concerned with human semiosis as an inherently social phenomenon in its sources, functions, contexts, and effects. It is also concerned with the social meanings constructed through the full range of semiotic forms, through semiotic texts and semiotic practices, in all kinds of human society at all periods of human history” (1988: 3). Rose notes how Hodge and Kress argue that Social Semiotics can be understood as a sort of “mainstream semiotics” that “emphasizes speakers and writers or other participants in semiotic activity as connecting and interacting in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts” (2007: 101). In order to do that, Hodge and Kress propose a “second level of messages which regulates the functioning of ideological complexes” which they refer to as the “logonomic system” (1988: 4). Hodge and Kress define logonomic systems as follows:

A set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities.

Logonomic systems prescribe social semiotic behaviors at points of production and reception, so that we can distinguish between production regimes and reception regimes (1988: 4).

Rose argues that the idea of Social Semiotics, as well as Hodge and Kress’ idea of logonomic systems, works as a “crucial addition to the analytical lexicon of Semiology since these sorts of social modalities are fundamental to the interpretation of visual images” (2007: 101). A social semiotical approach will help provide the necessary vocabulary for unpacking the visual and contextual meanings of the various texts I will be discussing.



If a Semiological approach accented with ideas brought forth by Social Semiotics serves as an effective methodological tool for analyzing visual images and their effects within their respective environments, then an approach that looks at how people interact with and understand those visual objects will also be necessary to give a complete analytical picture of the entire process that is occurring. Fortunately, my preferred method of analysis will also be useful in understanding how the public receives and interacts with visual protest within physical and digital public spaces. As Rose argues, Social Semiotics and Semiology are increasingly concerned with the idea of an audience's receptions to visual images and signs (Rose 2007). She states that "There have been some efforts to emphasize the social modality at other sites. [It has been argued], for example, emphasize above all the site of an images audiencing, arguing that Semiology 'is centrally concerned with reception'" (2007: 79). This facet of the outlined methodological approach can be seen as being similar to an audience studies methodological approach to analysis, but somewhat less rigorous than what a full audience studies analysis would entail. Nevertheless, this added approach will help to provide a complete picture and thorough analysis of my case studies by looking at all aspects of its creation, exhibition, and reactions. In essence, this will cover the entire "life cycle" of an instance of visual protest within public space: from its birth and display to its consumption. Rose (2007) argues that there are strengths in analyzing an audience's reactions, stating that "audience studies can explore the richness and complexity of audience's engagements with visual materials while paying attention to social power relations. In sum, this body of work on audiencing strongly emphasizes the importance of the social modality of the audiencing site" (2007: 214).

This approach will be good for looking at a number of social interactions that are occurring when the general population views graffiti within physical and digital public spaces.

This additional facet of the Social Semiotics methodology will provide an additional analysis as to how viewers interact with the graffiti, the environment that it exists in, and what their interactions with these public spaces were before they were reappropriated for socio-political protest. Using various online resources, including news sites, blogs, and social media, particularly YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, it should be possible to view and analyze published reactions and observations in regards to my case studies not only from traditional news outlets, but also directly from first hand audience accounts. Looking at published accounts of reactions and interpretations to the visual objects that make up my case studies should provide an accurate picture of how each has been received in their respective environments and what that means for their effectiveness as a whole. In summary, Social Semiotics and Semiological methodological approach discussed earlier should provide me with a detailed picture of the operation of all of the visual objects and signs in each of my case studies from numerous vantage points. In the first case study, I plan on looking at the ways that public space and walls are used as an apparatus to support the ideology of advanced capitalist societies and how the graffiti artist Banksy uses carnivalesque graffiti as a means of socio-political protest against the dominant capitalist power structures of western society. I will focus on his anti-capitalist graffiti in London to analyze how his reappropriation of public space in that city is used to artfully critique capitalist ideology.

My first case study will also look at the graffiti created by Banksy on the West Bank Separation Barrier in Palestine. In contrast to the previous examples, in this case study, I will look at the way that the West Bank wall is used as a symbol of a repressive regime and works to disseminate ideology in support of the dominant power structures at work. I will then look at the way that Banksy's graffiti on that wall works to undermine its ideological function as well as call

into question its structural functions. I will analyze how the content and composition of Banksy's graffiti on the West Bank wall parallels the graffiti he uses as a critique of capitalism in London. The second case study will look at the Nestlé Facebook page protests: a coordinated series of wall posts on Nestlé's Facebook page that expressed concern with their method of harvesting palm oil that, while initially suppressed by Nestlé on their page, grew to such an extent that Nestlé could no longer control the content of their "wall" and were forced to confront the protesters' demands, eventually changing their harvesting tactics to be more environmentally friendly.

The third and final case study will examine the use of the digital "walls" of social media and the use of physical walls as platforms for protest against repressive government regimes. For this, I will look at the case of protest methods used in the Egyptian Revolution of early 2011. I will concentrate on the use of the walls of Facebook and the public space of Twitter as digital platforms for dissemination of anti-regime information. I will also look at the way that these digital public spaces were employed to outmaneuver the government forces the protesters were working against and how they managed to challenge the physical power structures of a repressive regime with digital tools. Furthermore, I will look at the ways that the Egyptian revolutionaries reappropriated the physical walls and public spaces within Cairo by way of graffiti as well as physical occupation as a means of combating the Mubarak regime. Finally, I will analyze the ways that the revolutionaries used both the reappropriation of digital space and physical space together to bolster the activities of the protesters and heighten the effectiveness of their revolution. In this, I will argue that the Egyptian Revolution stands as an excellent example of the synthesis of the use of physical walls for socio-political protest and the use of digital walls for the same goals.

### Chapter 3:

#### Analysis of Banksy's Graffiti within Physical Public Space

“The human race is the most stupid & unfair kind of race. A lot of runners don't even get decent sneakers or clean drinking water. Some runners are born with a massive head start, every possible help along the way and still the referees seem to be on their side. It's not surprising a lot of people have given up competing altogether and gone to sit in the grandstand, eat junk and shout abuse. What the human race needs is a lot more streakers.” –Banksy

“It takes a lot of guts to stand up anonymously in a western democracy and call for things no-one else believes in – like peace and justice and freedom.” –Banksy

There are three things that can be surmised from the previous chapter's literature review. First, cityscapes can be thought of as ideological constructions with their surfaces as platforms for ideological dissemination. Second, these surfaces can be reappropriated by counter-hegemonic forces for the purpose of socio-political protest. Third, graffiti, often a tool of protest, can be seen as existing and developing along a continuum from the first practitioners of graffiti writing to modern-day hackers and online activists. To begin exploring these phenomena, in this chapter, I will be analyzing the work of the graffiti artist known as Banksy. Banksy's work stands as a current example of many different elements of graffiti's use for protest discussed previously. His work typically consists of stenciled graffiti with carnivalesque or whimsical subject matters that belie a deeper concern over the status quo of western society. This work is often found in large Western cities, places like London or Los Angeles, and it seeks to incorporate the surfaces that compose public space as integral pieces of the overall composition of the graffiti. Banksy's approach has been to critique the entire capitalist paradigm by means of artful challenges to both consumeristic practices and the function of a government that works in tandem with corporate interests. These pieces are able to function so well against this paradigm not because of outright attack on their targets, but rather because they take on a playful presentation that belies the underlying critique that is at the heart of the piece.

In order to begin a discussion on the use of carnivalesque tropes as a contributing feature to visually themed protest as employed by Banksy, I think it is important to understand how close to the heart of Banksy's work the ideas of the lightheartedness, humor, and playfulness actually lies. As journalist Simon Hattenstone describes Banksy's work in an article for *The Guardian*, it is "beautiful, witty, and gently subversive" (Hattenstone 2003). I think the description of "gently subversive" is not only apt, but it is really the crux of the whole functionality, and thus success, of Banksy's work. But the adjective "gently" should not be taken to mean meek or without force; indeed, I would argue that many of the critiques that Banksy displays in his work, whether they be of the security state, poverty and globalization, or the capitalist paradigm, are quite damning once you get to the real substance of the argument behind them. However, Banksy manages to successfully deliver these harsh critiques "gently," as we will see, so that what would normally be an unpalatable conversation or thought process for many is instead craftily snuck in and absorbed by the viewer under an often carnivalesque and fantastical wrapper.

All of Banksy's graffiti pieces, though varied in nature depending on where he creates them, what they critique, and where they are exhibited, employ carnivalesque methods to create a humorous, fantastical, or whimsical visual image. Banksy's work is aimed at charming viewers to first engage his graffiti, then to consider the underlying implications that the images posit, and then to consider the possibility that change in the dominant paradigms is possible, just as it has been shown as possible within the context of the graffiti piece. To illustrate this point, I will now move towards examining some selected examples of Banksy's work to establish a typology of his artistic practice, how each instance of graffiti is different from the other pieces, what they

share in common, and what, ultimately, they say about Banksy's strategies for initiating reflection and political thought.

Let me start my discussion of Banksy's visual topography with one of his more recent, as well as more simplistic, creations. Banksy's graffiti pieces have no official titles so I will just refer to this first example of his work as "Tank Elephant" (Fig. 1). Showing up in Los Angeles in the middle of February 2011, all this graffiti consists of is the sentence "This looks a bit like an elephant" written on the side of an old, abandoned storage tank along the side of a stretch of highway. While this is very simplistic, it manages to do several things unique to its location and its surface. The first thing that this simple piece does is it transforms a previously unremarkable piece of refuse along a highway into something that people's eyes will be drawn towards. The highways and state routes of America are littered with old, unused billboards, abandoned or unremarkable industrial landscapes, and bits and pieces of random things like tires or crosses or old campaign signs that meld together to form the background of a drive down these roads (Fig. 1a). They do not stand out because we have conditioned ourselves to not give them any attention; unconsciously we have realized that they are no longer "hailing" us to look at them, that they have lost their importance, and, as such, one could drive several miles along a stretch of road and, if asked, not be able to recount what they saw lying along the side or beyond the traffic barrier. By writing a message on one of these pieces of "background noise," Banksy works to draw the eye towards something it would not normally consider by employing the use of text, playing on our conditioned desire to read and interpret words that we see within public space. Already, we can see that he has changed the dynamics of the environment with the simple introduction of words on a previously ignored surface. Whereas before a driver might ignore the unused tank, or only register its presence unconsciously, now they are consciously drawn to it by

the desire to read what is written on its side. The background has now been brought into consideration by this simple first act and the viewer is now ready to read and interpret the message contained on the surface.

What the sentence actually says works on a second level to change the dynamic of the space, lend new context to the environment that it exists in, and to challenge the viewer with alternative meanings. “This looks a bit like an elephant,” is not only a declarative statement, but also an inviting one; it invites those who read this sentence, within the context of the surface that it exists on, to consider the space in a different manner based on the declarations of the sentence. Once one reads “this looks a bit like an elephant” their mind is drawn to make the comparison between the shape of the tank and the shape of an elephant and to consider that perhaps the tank does indeed look somewhat like an elephant. George Lakoff, in his book *Don't Think of an Elephant!*, argues the same thing: that by suggesting alternative modes of thought, one can control the flow of debate and, thus, how things are perceived (Lakoff 2004). What Banksy does with this sentence is he first grabs the attention of the viewer with the promise of readable text and then uses that text and the space that it is located on to challenge the viewer's preconceived interpretations of their surroundings in a fantastical manner. “This looks a bit like an elephant” is a harmless and rather humorous declaration that seeks to charm the viewer into looking at the space with the imagination of a child. “This looks like an elephant” could actually be replaced with a much more serious, philosophical declarative statement, something along the lines of “consider the world around you in ways that are new and not prescribed by dominant ideology.” That statement, besides not fitting on to the side of an old storage tank, is less inviting and whimsical than the invitation suggested by “this looks like an elephant” to imagine the tank as something that it is not, and it would have no bearing on the surface that it exists on. “This looks

like an elephant” works at the same suggestion in a more playful manner while also simultaneously getting the viewer to do exactly what it wants them to do: to consider their environment different than how it is presented to them.

Other pieces of Banksy’s operate in a similar manner, challenging the viewers to consider their surroundings in a different manner and, by extension, to question the dominant paradigm they exist in through a whimsical presentation of a serious argument. Take, for example, another Banksy piece, which I refer to as “Road Sign” (Fig. 2). This piece is a subtle reworking of the typical road sign you would see in parts of the U.S. alerting drivers to the possibility of children crossing the street in front of their vehicles. I have included one of these signs for comparison to Banksy’s piece (Fig. 2a). First, we should take note of the environment in which the piece exists. Banksy’s “Road Sign” was created on a wall near a sidewalk that runs along a busy street. This area would have been covered with other traffic signs for both pedestrians to heed as well as motorists. Like the aforementioned “background noise” of the highways, signage within many cities is something that is digested on an almost unconscious level. They are seen, in a sense, and heeded, but they are very rarely given any serious consideration. This, like the “Tank Elephant” piece, works on two levels to first present the viewer with a whimsical image to get their attention and then to challenge their notions of their surrounding space by virtue of its fantastical nature. Banksy changes the image of the children crossing in the street sign by simply adding a kite to the equation, changing the implied interpretation of the image that the children might just be running or crossing the street (an emotionally vague picture) to that of children having fun by flying a kite.

What is interesting about the inclusion of the kite, besides the fact that it changes the entire visual context the children are seen in, is that it breaks through the frame of the sign that



the children exist on. This tiny detail suggests an existence of permeable boundaries that can be transgressed if one is willing. The children on the sign are not limited to the space that they exist in; instead, they are capable of running right off of their sign in order to follow their kite, which has already made the breach. The bleeding paint off the edges of the sign also operates in a similar manner to the kite that has broken the boundaries of an enclosed space. It suggests a porous boundary, something that is not solid and can easily be transgressed. This is in contrast to the typically held notion of the state of permanence attributed to actual street signs, which come complete with hard edges and glossed over surfaces. As with “Tank Elephant,” the simple, whimsical nature of the piece not only draws the viewer’s attention to it, elevating it out of the visual background, but it also invites the viewer to interpret their environment by presenting the possibility for transgressing hegemonically imposed limits. Banksy’s “Road Sign” also operates on another level to disrupt the dominant paradigm of its environment. As previously explained, street signs and other governmentally produced “directional” signage can be viewed as a form of official graffiti, aimed at directing the actions of the general population within public space. Banksy’s piece works to directly highlight the ideological function of official signage within public space and, by extension, to question its validity by presenting the viewer with a parodied form meant to highlight the absurd nature of the original. By simultaneously providing a fantastical reinterpretation of a common street sign, he draws attention to the artificial limits created by the signage itself (Hariman 2008).

A third and final example for the purpose of establishing a visual topography for Banksy is his piece that I will refer to as “Island Boy” (Fig. 3). This piece shares many traits with the previously discussed pieces: a simplistic depiction, a fantastical subject matter, and a close relation to the surface and environment it is found in. “Island Boy” depicts a young child who is

sitting on top of a small tropical island, complete with flowers and a palm tree. The tree, island, and flowers all have the typical look of how a young child would draw such things. In the child's hand is a marker, and the unfinished flower next to the child implies that he has created the island he is on by drawing it into existence. The parallel to the fantastical nature of the pieces examined earlier should be almost immediate. This graffiti could be considered to have the most overtly fantastical theme of all three examples; it contains a boy literally creating an alternative environment in response to the one that he finds himself in.

The environment that the graffiti exists within, and by default that the boy exists in, also is employed in tandem with the piece itself to imply a deeper level of context. Like the other examples discussed, the whimsical depiction of a boy literally creating his own world is meant to first draw the viewer's eye by presenting them with a carnivalesque framework to grab their attention. From there, the presented possibility of a rejection of the paradigm one exists in for a paradigm one can define for themselves is exhibited. The surface that the piece exists on, an old grey cinderblock wall in a state of mild disrepair, could be taken as representative of the "real world" that the boy, and by extension the viewer, exists in. The wall is dreary, uninspiring, cold, and (most importantly) taken as something absolute and impenetrable. The fantasy depicted in "Island Boy" works to chip away at the perceived "absoluteness" presented to us by the cinderblock wall and the power structure that it exists within. The piece seems to argue that if it is this easy for the child it depicts to challenge the dominant structures of his world to create something more suited to his tastes, what is stopping the viewer from challenging the structures of their own societies?

In light of this assessment of some of the more iconic graffiti created by Banksy, we are now in a better position to examine the larger themes of his work, as well as the ideological ends

he seeks to reach through their creation within specifically chosen areas in public space. Let us now take a look at some of the work that Banksy has created throughout London in order to see how these principals have been employed to critique some of the more contentious aspects of late capitalist British culture, such as rampant consumerism and the increasing presence of a security state apparatus. Because of the deeply ingrained nature of these aspects of British culture (and, by extension, western culture) and the by-design aversion to their acknowledgement, let alone discussion, among the public, any critique requires a creative method of presentation. With this in mind, we can begin to see the real effectiveness of Banksy's carnivalesque and fantastical approach to socio-political commentary within public space, especially how it can be an effective tool for getting people to think about and discuss aspects of their society that are meant to go unquestioned.

The first piece I will analyze is actually a rather recent piece that Banksy created around December 2011 on the side of the National Gallery Museum in London that was dubbed "Ostcctv" (Fig. 4). The piece is rather simple: it consists of two stenciled figures meant to look like ostriches, one with its head "stuck in the sand" (in this case, under the ledge of the building), and the other with its head straight up. The peculiar nature of the piece (and the origin of its name) is that Banksy chose to use one of London's ubiquitous closed-circuit television (CCTV) security cameras as the head for the ostrich with its head straight up. The completed piece fits in rather well with the incorporated CCTV camera, making it feel like a natural, flowing extension of the stenciled figures and not disjointedly connected at all.

What is interesting about this particular piece is how, much like the "Tank Elephant" piece, it manages to challenge its audience to notice the normally unnoticeable aspects of our constructed public space and question the normally (by design) unquestionable aspects of

dominant ideology with simple subject matter. Similar to how the simple addition of the phrase “this looks a bit like an elephant” to an old storage tank transformed a piece of refuse on the side of a highway (something that is typically filtered out or, at best, not thought about consciously by a passing viewer) into something that caught the eyes of passing motorists and, hopefully, moved their train of thought, the simple application of the stenciled silhouettes of two ostriches manages to do three things. First, it transforms a piece of public space that is ordinarily invisible into something that draws attention. Second, it draws the casual passerby to consider something in their environment they would normally ignore. Third, it encourages the now engaged viewer to challenge the dominant ideology at work by considering their normally taken-for granted environment in a new way.

But while the “Tank Elephant” piece was aimed at having any viewers whose attention it managed to capture generally expand their mental horizons and question the constructed nature of public space and the invisible portions of its content, the “Ostcctv” piece is aimed at having viewers not only question the invisible portions of the constructed space around them, but the nature of those invisible portions and the ideology driving their existence and placement within public space. Even considering the fact that the shape of the security camera so closely resembles a large bird’s head, it is no coincidence that Banksy chose a CCTV camera to be the focal point of his ostrich stencil. CCTV cameras are meant to be an invisible part of the public space around central London and beyond. They are meant to be there and not be there, visible and not visible, acknowledged and ignored. London’s CCTV cameras are meant to be a constant reminder of a security presence in the city and, hopefully, a bulwark against crime. After all, the logic goes, if you are under the impression that someone is constantly watching you, then you are less likely to engage in activities that might result in trouble should you be caught. Of course, whether or not

the CCTV cameras that blanket London and other British cities are actually effective deterrents against crime is another question entirely. One thing that is certain is that they are meant to exude an inconspicuous aura of the idea that “you are being watched,” much to the dismay of civil libertarians. The real accomplishment in the deployment of these cameras is that they have become such a regular fixture within the city that many people now do not readily pick them out; they blend in with the rest of the cityscape and, as such, are not thought about or consciously seen. Thus, people are subjected to constant surveillance while in public under the guise of “security,” and many do not think anything of it, even as they pass under these cameras daily.

What Banksy’s “Ostctv” piece does is take an object placed within the public space that is meant to be considered invisible (indeed, it could be argued that the entire function of CCTV cameras hinges on people not thinking about them being there) and draws people’s attention to it. That way they can consider its place within public space and the deeper ramifications its existence there has for them. Banksy does this by employing the same type of carnivalesque techniques he uses in other pieces, drawing upon simple yet fantastical subject matter. A stencil of an ostrich is simple, whimsical, and benign. These types of disarming qualities draw in a viewer’s attention to delve further into what the image is presenting to them. Their first reaction would probably be something along the lines of “Oh look, someone put an ostrich on the wall over there,” followed by “How funny, they made the CCTV camera the ostrich’s head.” With this simple realization, Banksy has now hopefully gotten the viewers of his piece to take the first step in thinking critically about the idea of an ever growing security state: he has gotten them to consciously acknowledge the camera in the background. Now the desired train of thought for viewers to take would be something along the lines of “I never really noticed that camera there before. There are so many cameras all over London. Why do we need so many cameras?”

Banksy draws viewers in with a fantastical premise for this graffiti, gets them to consciously think about the CCTV camera that is incorporated in it, and from there hopefully to think about the larger ramifications of security cameras. Banksy's piece leads viewers to begin to consider the purposefully invisible additions to their public space that are meant to act as mechanisms of hegemonic control, and it accomplishes this by drawing attention to something that the state undoubtedly works very hard to get people to ignore (that you are being watched constantly). Furthermore, he does this in an innocuous way that draws in a viewer and then leads them to consider its deeper meaning.

Beyond the many pieces of graffiti Banksy has created around London that critique the large state security apparatus that is present there, he has also created and exhibited other pieces designed to playfully critique another "unmentionable" aspect of British/Western culture: advanced capitalism and its bedfellows, such as rampant consumerism and shallow materialism. These works, like his others, range in their levels of complexity, but they all have at their center real concerns with aspects of advanced capitalist culture and attempt to offer real critiques of those practices. I will now look at two different instances of graffiti that work at critiquing two different aspects of the capitalist paradigm.

The first example is one of Banksy's more simplistic pieces. Like much of his other graffiti, it works to incorporate the surface that it exists on in order to reappropriate it as not only a platform for his message, but as an integral part of the message itself. However, this particular project does not include any stenciling or strictly visual images; rather, it consists of a simple sentence written upon a blank, street-level billboard. The sentence reads simply, "The joy of not being sold anything." I will refer to this as "Banksy Billboard" (Fig. 5). Like the "Oscctv" and the "Tank Elephant" pieces, the "Banksy Billboard" is specifically designed to transform a part

of the public space landscape from something that is effectively invisible, thus not thought about, into something conspicuous and thought provoking. Within advanced capitalist societies, as Klein has noted, being bombarded by advertising in public space is the norm (Klein 2000: 3). Advertising in public space is as much a fact of life within Western societies as breathing. As a manifestation of the underlying dominant ideology, it is designed to feel natural within the space and thus not questioned. In fact, as “Banksy Billboard” alludes to, advertising is so accepted on an unconscious level that when there are blank spaces on walls in public space we typically do not think about the lack of the ad in that space. Instead, the space becomes background noise to the other advertisements until it can be utilized again.

What “Banksy Billboard” does is highlight the peculiarity of not noticing the unused advertising space. Instead of letting the space sit unnoticed, it draws the viewer’s attention in to signify that there is a “lack” now in this space. Furthermore, the assertion of the piece is that once its viewers process the subject matter, they will realize that they enjoy this lack. While the sentence Banksy uses is very simple, it represents a very strong critique of consumer culture while also exposing the complex ideological structures beneath public advertising. “The joy of not being sold anything” does three things immediately upon being read. First, it highlights the fact that here sits a blank billboard. Whereas on this surface one would normally see a visual construction meant to get them to buy something, today they see nothing. Second, it gets the viewers to think about the fact that, yes indeed, there are a lot of advertisements blanketing the public space of their city, almost all of them aimed at getting them to buy some type of product. Third, it helps push the viewer towards the realization that, as exemplified by the blank billboard, they perhaps like not having to be sold something at every turn. “In fact,” one might think, “I take pleasure in the fact that I am not being sold anything while I look at this.”

This simple written message on an empty billboard works wonderfully to get any viewers that pass it to feel as though they have led themselves to the realization that there is pleasure to be had in not being sold something constantly. Instead of a work of art that might have simply screamed something like “consumerism/capitalism is bad,” thus presenting the desired point of arrival for the viewer, leaving them feeling as if they were being preached at, the “Banksy Billboard” instead presents the viewer with a simple statement and lets them come to their own realization. This way, as in Banksy’s other work, it acts almost as a conversation with the viewer; it invites them to consider its premise through unconventional and non-confrontational means. After drawing them in, it leads them towards grasping the underlying critique it represents.

Let us now look at the other, more complex, Banksy creation that also works at critiquing the all-encompassing nature of consumer driven capitalism, but with a slightly different technique than the “Banksy Billboard.” This graffiti, which I will refer to as “Tesco Flag” (Fig. 6), consists of two young children with their hands over their hearts looking skyward while another young child raises a Tesco plastic bag as if it were a national flag. It suggests that the other children are pledging allegiance to it. “Tesco Flag” is built around and incorporates a small pipe and communications box that Banksy uses to act as the flagpole for the Tesco bag flag. The implications would seem to be quite apparent, perhaps more so than the other Banksy pieces I have discussed thus far. It takes what was long considered to be the main foundation of the idea of what makes a “good citizen,” loyalty to one’s country, and turns it on its head. No longer are people measured chiefly by their fealty to a nation or their government, but rather by their loyalty to their economic system: capitalism. Banksy’s “Tesco Flag” seems to also hit at the increasing commodification of public space and public life and the growing ownership of these



realms by corporations. Just as many public parks are now owned by corporations, and our public buildings and events are “sponsored” by various corporations, so too has our political system and the complicated set of beliefs related to patriotism and loyalty been bought wholesale. “Corporations run our country and, thus, are our governing bodies now, and they desire your pledges of loyalty” the “Tesco Flag” graffiti argues.

This particular work stands out as one of the more overtly political creations out of the group I have chosen to analyze, with its message bubbling more closely to the surface. However, even if this is the case, its effectiveness lies in the fact that it is a somewhat lighthearted and fantastical visual construction. Banksy’s “Tesco Flag” is, on its surface, simply a bunch of children pledging allegiance to a plastic bag. It has a whimsical nature about it, with the impression that it could just be three children playing pretend, and the plastic Tesco bag is a stand-in for a real flag. It also seeks to make an emotional connection to any viewer that might see it, possibly stirring up positive memories of their own childhood, when playing fantasy-type games with their friends. It warrants a snicker, at least. There is then a deeper level where the work operates satirically, suggesting that this is a world where loyalty to governments and countries has been replaced with loyalty to consumerism and corporate brands. Under that layer, as is the case with good satire, there is the concrete critique that what is being lampooned is not actually that far off from what is happening. Why “Tesco Flag” works so well, as does Banksy’s other work, and ultimately functions as a good vessel for socio-political critique, is because he draws in the viewers to consider the nature of the graffiti without immediately hitting them with the underlying subject matter. Any activist or politician can expound on why rampant consumerism and the corporate takeover of our governmental structures is a bad thing. Any dissident can spray “eat the rich” or “down with capitalism” on a wall. In all of these cases,

however, this is a type of message that people, and the capitalist ideological system that is being critiqued, have come to expect. As such, blinders are put up and reservations are held when these subject matters arise and people tend to filter out what they have been trained not to hear.

I have established some of the visual tropes that Banksy uses to draw in potential viewers, rework the environments that his graffiti exist in, and to work toward challenging the viewer's understanding of the ideological paradigms being subtly critiqued. With these tropes established, we next looked at the way that Banksy employs them to critique some of the more ingrained and typically unassailable features of Western culture. Here, in Western societies, where there is relatively high levels of personal freedom and expression, as in London, and yet a strong taboo placed on the discussion of the underlying mechanisms of capitalism and the societal ills it breeds, I saw how Banksy manages to use carnivalesque techniques and fantastical subject matter to wrap the strong critiques of his pieces in palatable packages. Let us now turn to a discussion of how his work functions as a form of protest in areas where the power structures being attacked are much more rigid, much more apparent, and much more brutally enforced.

In 2005, Banksy traveled to the West Bank, Palestine in order to complete several large graffiti projects on the West Bank Barrier, a large separation barrier built by the Israeli government to supposedly help protect against terrorist incursions into Israel. Banksy stated that with the erection of such a large and encompassing barrier, "Palestine is now the world's largest open air prison and the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti artists" (Banksy 2007: 136). Keeping in mind how the use of graffiti challenges established power structures, such as the ideological identity of the Berlin Wall in the mid to late 1980s, the implications of Banksy's comment should be clear. He argues that a wall erected by a hegemonic force as a means to display and enforce ideological domination is the perfect target on which to create resistant

forms of art. This is because most graffiti is aimed at questioning the rights of governments to decide which spaces are appropriate for self expression and which are not, as well as challenging ideological structures by reappropriating them for counter-speech. The West Bank Barrier represents one of the largest and most high profile examples of a public space being used for the purpose of ideological dissemination and should be challenged by those with the means for doing so. Banksy is not the only person to have used the West Bank Barrier as a platform for protest; far from it. However, in keeping with my earlier assertions about Banksy's methods and the deployment of carnivalesque protest, I argue that he is perhaps the most high profile person who has challenged those who support the wall and perhaps with the greatest effect.

The West Bank Barrier consists of series of large stone slabs standing at eight meters high, over twice as high as the Berlin Wall, and running for almost fifty miles. That portion only makes up 10% of the total West Bank Barrier, but it is by far the most recognized and the most symbolic. Large monolithic structures like this are typically built for the sole purpose of imposing an ideological power structure upon a group of people and providing them with a forceful, looming reminder of their status as second-class citizens, even if presented to the general public as existing for different purposes. When one is confronted with the twenty-six foot high walls that stretch as far as you can see in either direction, forcibly creating an artificial barrier between people, it is hard to argue otherwise. One needs only look to the Berlin Wall, and the discrepancy between the presented reasons for its existence by the East German government and its actual function for the East German people, for another clear example. What I presented earlier in terms of an argument for the ideological function of walls within society, along with their ability to impose a certain sense of resignation toward the dominant power structures that control one's environment, could arguably apply doubly for this particular wall. That does not

mean, however, that the ideological function of the West Bank Barrier is not immune to attempts at reappropriation. All the graffiti that exists on the West Bank Barrier, and Banksy's most of all, speak to this truth.

The artworks that Banksy creates on the West Bank Barrier traffic in the same key tropes he uses in his other pieces: carnivalesque structure, an appeal to the fantastical, humor, a whimsical nature, and an indirect critique of serious socio-political problems. The first example that supports these assertions I will refer to as "Palestine Wall Cut-Out" (Fig. 7). The structure and content of this particular project is simple, but ideologically challenging, much like "Tank Elephant." It consists of a series of dash marks that make a large square on a portion of the wall. At the top of the series of dash marks there is a tiny pair of scissors. Combined, the dash marks and scissors are meant to elicit visual comparison to the dash marks that indicate where you are supposed to cut something out, like a coupon or the bottom of a form. What the cut out instructions do ideologically to challenge the power structure represented by the Barrier are numerous and simultaneous. First, as with Banksy's other creations, there is an element of humor to this graffiti. The fantastical suggestion that all one simply needs to do to remove part of the wall is to cut it out is supposed to be greeted humorously, much in the same way that overly simplistic solutions are suggested by a child. Second, it works to differentiate itself from the rest of the graffiti surrounding it by its employment of carnivalesque themes to highlight its own existence.

What "Palestine Wall Cut-Out" does to change its environment, as well as the ideological function of the wall, is something else altogether and much more undermining. Whereas the other graffiti on the wall reappropriates the surface there to act as a disseminator for protest messages, thus changing the function of the wall from merely an ideological representation of

the regime to a platform for resistance against it, Banksy's graffiti, which suggests the ease at which one could merely "cut a hole" out of the wall, undermines the ideological function of the wall as a barrier completely. Whereas the other graffiti uses the wall to project messages against it, Banksy's graffiti actually subverts the entire function of the wall and its appearance as daunting and unassailable by suggesting that it is easily removable. The other graffiti proposes to use the wall as a platform; Banksy's graffiti proposes the idea that you can instead break right through it. This is a terrific undermining of the entire function of the wall and what it is supposed to stand for. Banksy accomplishes this by using the same methods as before, asking his viewers to consider the surface he is highlighting (which is representative of a power structure that he is challenging) as something that is within their ability to change. The suggested permeability of the barrier and the ease at which it can be transgressed is also similar to the critiques made of structural barriers in "Road Sign." Banksy is able to deliver this message effectively because he couches it in carnivalesque tropes.

The second example from the West Bank Barrier operates in a similar fashion to "Palestine Wall Cut-Out." I will refer to this one as "Palestine Wall Pull Back" (Fig. 8). It depicts what appears to be some type of law enforcement official pulling back a section of the wall like a curtain to reveal an idyllic looking beach behind it. The function of this piece works in much of the same way as the previously mentioned one: to not only bring in a viewer with its humorous and whimsical appearance, but also to completely subvert the function of the wall by calling into question its very existence and effectiveness. Again the parallels to the permeable barriers of "Road Sign" are evident. As with "Palestine Wall Cut-Out," the ideological implications of depicting the West Bank Barrier as something as flimsy and as easily transgressable as a curtain works to suggest that it is not something that is unbeatable.

Banksy's third piece of graffiti also operates within these same tropes. I call it "Palestine Wall Ladder" (Fig. 9). It depicts a boy with a paintbrush who has painted himself a ladder up and over the wall that he seems quite pleased with. This parallels the "Island Boy" graffiti mentioned earlier; however, whereas in "Island Boy" the impression is given that the use of the fantastical can be employed to change your environment to suit your tastes, here it implies that it can be used to subvert the limits of your environment completely. Like Banksy's other work, it uses the fantastical notion of the ability to literally create your own conditions of escape, and it works to undermine the ideological effectiveness of the wall by asking its viewers to consider the possibility that they too can subvert the wall as easily as the boy.

All three examples of Banksy's work on the West Bank Barrier have similar themes in common that work in tandem to undermine the ideological impositions of the existing environment. Each project emphasizes the importance of the idea of transgression (surely an important idea to promote in a population that is currently hemmed in by a very real physical barrier), as well as the idea of the permeable nature of imposed barriers. Whereas a wall of that magnitude undoubtedly casts a very large ideological shadow on the psyches of the Palestinians who are subjected to living behind it, Banksy's use of carnivalesque visuals as a means of parody and protest invite viewers to take a lighter approach to the power structure it represents. A lack of seriousness in the face of the imposition of a power structure robs it of much of its force. If the impression can be given that the West Bank Barrier is indeed an imposed barrier than can be easily overcome, then the ability for the ideology behind such a structure to effectively impose itself on others becomes severely neutered. The wall might still physically be separating the Palestinians from the rest of the world, but Banksy's work there attempts to convince them that

the wall should not separate them mentally; that would be the actual victory the ideological wall is after.

One of the truly remarkable things about Banksy's use of the West Bank Barrier is not only a subject of socio-political protest, but also the platform from which he presents this protest, is that it manages to incorporate the literal "thing in itself" into the discussion that he is trying to get observers of his West Bank graffiti pieces to consider. As mentioned before, one of the key components of Banksy's work is to get potential viewers to consider critiques of social or political ideologies that typically stand as unthinkable to discuss by design. Capitalism is one of the key underpinnings of Western democracy, but it has flaws. However, the dominant ideology supports the idea that questioning the functions of capitalism is forbidden; it is just something that is not done. To get around this fact, and to get viewers to consider these typically unthinkable propositions, Banksy couches his critiques in whimsically carnivalesque subject matter in order to disarm the viewer before drawing them in to the underlying discussion. However, the surface that Banksy chooses to display his work on to begin these conversations does not have to be part of that equation, per se. When one is discussing the excesses of capitalism or the encroaching security state, there is not one specific thing Banksy can highlight. These subjects exist as overarching ideologies that are manifested in different aspects of the state. Therefore, in order to critique rampant consumerism, Banksy does not have to create graffiti on the side of a Tesco supermarket; he can put that piece anywhere. It is a subject that people can be brought to consider regardless of location because it stands as an ideological abstraction that can take on various concrete representative forms.

What is unique about Banksy's use of The West Bank Barrier as a staging ground is that the wall is the ultimate manifestation of the underlying critique. When people talk about the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the substandard treatment of Palestinians, the West Bank Barrier is one thing they point to in particular. Furthermore, discussing the subject of the West Bank Barrier among certain groups is much like discussing flaws within the capitalist system; it is simply not done. The ideology surrounding the creation of the West Bank Barrier also works to create an atmosphere where discussion of these underlying factors is something that is not even considered. By using the West Bank Barrier as the platform for his critique of the underlying policies that created the wall, Banksy is thrusting its existence into the center of the conversation. When one looks at the graffiti that Banksy has created on the wall and considers the underlying notions of transgressionism they espouse, one cannot look without also being confronted by the reality of the subject of those pieces: the wall itself. It is, in a sense, like holding an art exhibition about third-world starvation in an African village racked by famine; you cannot help but acknowledge the unmentionable underlying subject. When we consider the functionality of using surfaces as platforms for protest, we see the power in what they are able to accomplish. What is especially powerful about the use of the West Bank Barrier as a platform for protesting against the thing in itself is that, not only does exhibition of protest graffiti on the surface of the barrier change the ideological function of the wall from a structure designed to oppress into a structure that is protesting its own existence, but it also foregrounds the existence of the barrier and forces viewers of the graffiti to confront directly what is being protested.

I would argue that Banksy's employment of the visual and methodological techniques laid out in my earlier discussion of some of his work are employed in Palestine with an even greater effect than in the other examples. Whereas the first three pieces discussed ("Tank Elephant," "Road Sign," and "Island Boy") might seem to have different effects or different purposes than their West Bank counterparts, they in fact are all constructed with the same



premises and work to affect the same changes. The employment of carnivalesque visuals, combined with humorous depictions and fantastical reimaginings of everyday objects or events, all work to challenge the dominant power structures of a society in a playful manner while getting viewers to consider resistance in a new way. My analysis shows that the employment of these techniques within a much different, and arguably more oppressive, ideological environment might seem counterintuitive, but they appear to be equally as effective. Because of the carnivalesque, fantastical nature of his work, it manages to slip under the ideological defenses set up by the power structures to limit speech, as well as get through the disinterest any viewers might have in more traditional visual examples of socio-political protest. A picture of a girl floating over the Palestinian Wall by means of a collection of balloons (Fig. 10) might seem harmless to those that control the wall and humorous to those oppressed by the wall, but it carries a much more serious and dangerous message under its carnivalesque façade: that the wall is something that is easily breached and should not exist. Normal textual markers that proclaim a similar message might be ignored or erased. A whimsical, carnivalesque depiction of that sentiment has a much better chance of reaching its intended audience.

### ***3.1 Analysis and Critiques of the Carnavalesque***

In essence, what Banksy does in all of these different ideological cases (in a “neutral” urban environment, a purportedly “free” capitalist environment, and a clearly repressive political environment) is the same: he employs humor, parody, and the carnivalesque to create visually arresting pieces designed to get the attention of viewers to display his socio-political standpoint. He tailors the means of visual delivery to fit the given area, the surface, the surrounding environment, and culture. The purpose, however, of the pieces remains the same. The use of the carnivalesque as a visual technique for protest certainly has its strengths, as I have shown.

Whereas other forms of protest graffiti might be more direct in their aims, and a more overt act of resistance against a power structure, they suffer the real possibility of being relegated to the background by viewers who are faced with the oversaturation of similar messages. More “serious” messages also stand out as clear and easy targets for ideological regimes to erase, and often lead them to go after those who create such messages. Graffiti that says “smash the state” or “tear down this wall” are indeed direct and brave, and they speak to the affected in a community in a voice of solidarity. However, they exchange any longevity they might enjoy within the public space for that direct message.

As with the previously discussed example of the Orange Alternative movement in Poland, the initial anti-regime graffiti was covered up and its creators punished, but when they turned to putting up pictures of “elves” in place of the anti-regime graffiti, the Soviet structure in place did not know how to process them. The elves did not appear to be harmful attacks on the legitimacy of the state, like the graffiti before it was, so they left them alone. The people, however, knew what they represented, and because of their playful ambiguity, they managed to survive and help bolster the anti-communist movement. Banksy’s pieces operate in this same way, thus sharing the same strengths. Because Banksy’s work is playful, carnivalesque, and somewhat ambiguous, it is more successful at garnering attention and surviving. The carnivalesque nature of his pieces also helps to give them a prolonged, multi-platformed longevity. Reproductions of his graffiti are often disseminated all over the internet, only heightening their profile and, by extension, exposing a larger audience to his socio-political critiques.

There are, however, drawbacks to the use of the carnivalesque, parody, and humor as tools for constructing visual examples of protest. The chief among these concerns is that the

ambiguity that allows the artwork to sneak its way under the skin of the dominant power structures, without being immediately seen as a threat, also opens the door for the possibility that it can be misinterpreted by their intended audiences. As Gring-Pemble and Watson (2003) rightfully point out, there is always the distinct possibility that an audience could either miss the point of the satire completely or, in other cases, take the satire to be a reaffirmation of the thing that is being parodied.

There have been definite cases of the misinterpretation of protest themed graffiti by the public, often by those who are younger, who take it to be just a cool way to “be different,” and who never consider the underlying socio-political context that the graffiti might be espousing. Although there is not much academic literature written on the subject of Banksy’s work, a look at the discourse surrounding his graffiti and its reception can give an idea of how often he is received properly and how often some people miss the mark. In a pseudo-documentary film about Banksy, but really a critique about the commodification of art, Banksy occasionally talks about how some people miss the point of his work. Often they collect or circulate it based on its aura of “coolness” without considering its underlying ideological implications (Banksy 2010). In typical Banksy fashion, though, his discussions of this phenomenon are not blatant or unmasked, but couched instead in sarcasm and humor, leaving the audience to infer the underlying points he is trying to make, much like his work in graffiti. The point that Banksy makes in this film is that a segment of the population will always be deaf to the underlying call to challenge power structures and to question the dominant paradigms they find themselves in. The great irony is that so many of these people take his works, often anti-capitalist pieces that function to ridicule the notion of commodification, and attempt to turn them into commodities themselves, as something to be bought and sold in an auction house (Banksy 2010).

There is a second possible limitation that can occur from the use of the carnivalesque and satirical parody as a method for creating protest graffiti: they can be misunderstood to the point that they are thought to support the very power structures they are attempting to resist. There is also the worry that, because of their humorous nature and artful design, they change the surface they exist not in a way that changes it into something aesthetically pleasing, and thus ideologically palatable, so that the very efforts to undermine the surface are themselves undermined. In a collection of some of Banksy's work entitled "Wall and Piece," Banksy recounts a discussion he had with a Palestinian man soon after completing some of his graffiti there. After finishing one of his pieces an old man walked up to Banksy and said, "You paint the wall, you make it beautiful." Banksy, thinking the man was pleased with the transformation of the wall into something other than a symbol of oppression, thanked him. The man then proceeded to rebuff Banksy, telling him, "We don't want it to be beautiful. We hate this wall. Go home" (Banksy 2007: 142).

Here in this short exchange between Banksy and an anonymous Palestinian man, the problem of the possibilities of interpretation and transformation by carnivalesque visual protest are encapsulated. Arguably, Banksy felt that the employment of carnivalesque themes, humor, and an appeal to the fantastical as a means of creating visual socio-political protest could be effectively employed to undermine the ideological structure of the wall. If the wall was looked at in a less serious manner (much like the graffiti that covered the Berlin Wall attempted to do), then people could be brought to view it as not so ideologically imposing and, thus, feel the possibility of its change. The counter argument to that, pointed out by the Palestinian man, was that this beautiful looking graffiti serves instead to change the wall into something pleasing, thus making the Palestinians more ok with its existence. If people like how the wall is being used as a

platform to showcase their grievances, then they will in turn come to accept the wall as something aesthetically and ideologically positive. This is a definite possibility and one of the dangers of the employment of the carnivalesque as a means of visual protest: some people might actually end up liking what you have so artfully attempted to break down (Gring-Pemble & Watson 2003). It would seem, however, that this consideration has been balanced with the thought that, although there is the possibility that carnivalesque visuals will inadvertently work to strengthen the ideological stance of the surface they exist on, there is more of a possibility they will instead destroy that ideology behind the surface, leaving only a surface that is now free for the population to do with as they please.

Between these various examples of public street art created by Banksy, I think a decent understanding of his visual style and a clear typology of his work has been laid out. The content of Banksy's work draws heavily on notions of the carnivalesque and on fantastical themes, absurdity, and whimsicalness. He employs these themes to first draw the attention of viewers toward his pieces by having them stand out from the rest of the visual landscape by virtue of their unique appearance and humorous implications. Once his graffiti has the viewer's attention, it works to disarm their resistance by couching these messages in a whimsical and carnivalesque wrapper. His pieces are also very specific to their location, the culture or society that they are created in, and the power structure they are designed to critique. However, even though each work of art is built to function in differing sites of resistance against different power structures, the methods with which he attacks these structures remains the same. Banksy's visuals might be different depending on where he is; the visual composition of his graffiti or its placing in relation to the environment might also change to suit the specific message he is trying to disseminate, but the tools he employs remain consistent.

Banksy employs these carnivalesque tropes to challenge his viewers to consider their environments, and by extension the ideological trappings that constrain them, in a different light. His graffiti, which emphasizes a humorous take on our environment and encourages an open skepticism, works to actively deconstruct the power structures they seek to critique by presenting them in a parodied light so that viewers might see the original for what it is: something subject to question. His graffiti also works toward ideologically changing reappropriated surfaces, either by presenting them as something unfamiliar or by challenging the dominant ideology behind their structure, thus opening them up to critique and, ultimately, discrediting their existence as a power structure altogether. While the process of socio-political critique by means of carnivalesque protest, satire, and parody are not without their risks, chief among these either being misunderstood or somehow reinforcing the ideological structures one seeks to challenge, I would argue that the benefits of employing these methods in support of visual manifestations of protest on reappropriated public spaces far outweigh the potential pitfalls that might develop out of their use.

Banksy's pieces, chiefly because of their carnivalesque nature, humorous undertones, and suggestions of fantastical possibilities, have rocketed towards the forefront of cultural knowledge about street art in the last decade. This has not only increased awareness about Banksy and his work, but it has also increased awareness about resistance movements against existing power structures. Banksy's street art, while not solving any problems in and of themselves, get people talking and, by extension, gets them looking at the social inadequacies that he points to, humorously of course. Finally, Banksy encourages people to do the most important thing of all when it comes towards working for social and political change: he gets them to begin to consider alternative constructions of their social spaces and the possibility that they can construct their

worlds in a different way. Changing a mentality to see the world as how it could be constructed, and not just how it is presented, is perhaps the most effective tool for socio-political change there is, and this is something that Banksy's work seeks to do by using carnivalesque techniques and humor to suggest that serious looking power structures are little more than props susceptible to change.



Figure 1. 'Tank Elephant'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk

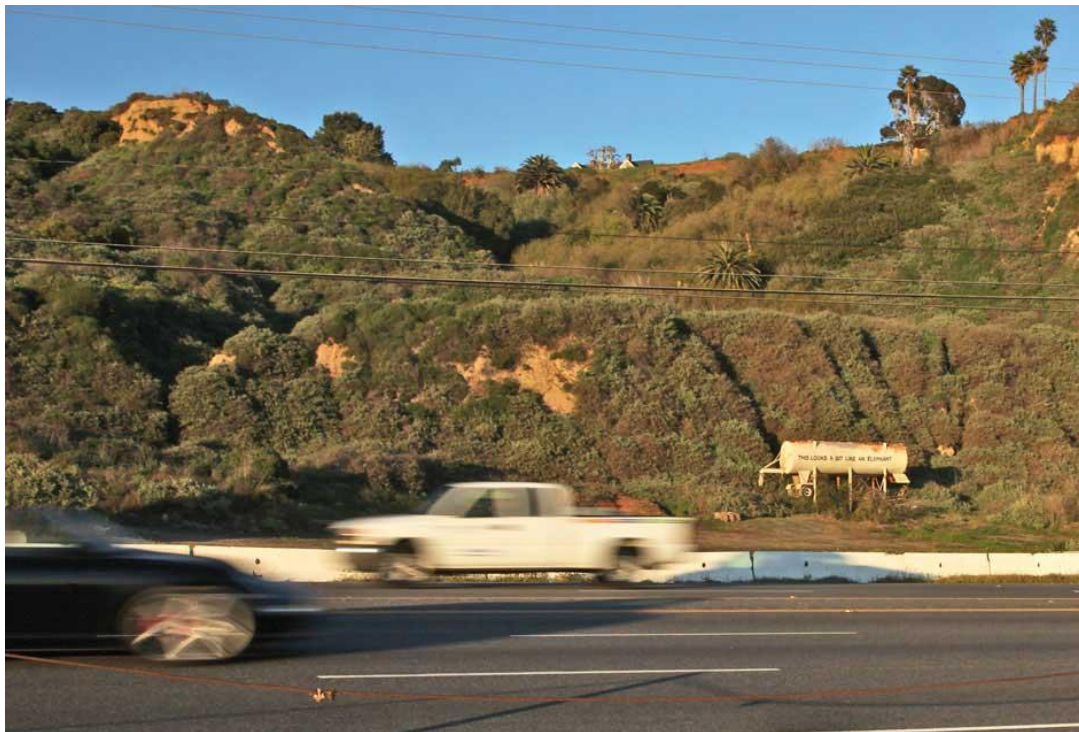


Figure 1a. 'Tank Elephant' Zoomed out  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk





Figure 2. 'Road Sign'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 2a. Actual Road Sign  
Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 3. 'Island Boy'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 4. Ostcctv  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 5. Banksy Billboard  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 6. Tesco Flag  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 7. Palestine Wall Cut-Out  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 8. 'Palestine Wall Pull Back'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 9. 'Palestine Wall Ladder'  
 Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 10. Balloon Girl  
 Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk

## Chapter 4:

### **The Case of Nestlé's Facebook Wall: Digital Public Space and Socio-Political Protest**

“The internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow.” –Bill Gates

“Right now, with social networks and other tools on the Internet, all of these 500 million people have a way to say what they're thinking and have their voice be heard.” –Mark Zuckerberg

In the previous chapter, I discussed the use of graffiti as a means of socio-political protest within physical public space. My argument was that the work of the graffiti artist known as Banksy follows in the philosophical footsteps of many of the ideas established during the beginnings of modern graffiti. Banksy works to create areas of artful expression by means of reappropriating portions of public space to showcase vibrant graffiti pieces. Beyond that, he also follows the established paths of graffiti writers like LEE and employs most of his graffiti work as a means to critique some of the underlying aspects of Western capitalist society that he finds troublesome. Banksy's personal twist on this is to couch these critiques in his signature carnivalesque style, often employing fantastical or whimsical subject matter in his graffiti pieces in a disarming way to draw viewers in to consider the deeper, more serious, meanings of his work.

Banksy's approach to protest within the confines of modern society is not the only approach out there, however. Nor is his approach the only one that adheres to the techniques and ideas about the utilization of public space put forth during the rise of the modern graffiti movement. Indeed, while Banksy finds the use of carnivalesque tropes in his graffiti to be the most effective method for himself, other protesters and activists see the same problems that he does but take a different, equally novel, approach to confronting power structures. As I have discussed previously, open, legal access to physical public spaces for critical discussion have been increasingly curtailed for much of the population. While some protesters and activists, like

Banksy, have decided to continue trying to work in this space regardless of the challenges put in front of them by hegemonic power structures, others have begun to look online towards virtual communities and public spaces. The rise of the internet and the growth of new social media websites has changed the landscape of how we interact with each other and, with that, how people work to protest against the various power structures they disagree with.

Nevertheless, just because some might prefer utilizing digital public space over physical public space as platforms for protest, this is not to say that the realms of digital and physical public space are totally different. There are similarities between the construction, functions, and utilizations of both physical public spaces and digital public spaces, such as the walls of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, since these public spaces can be seen as having similar functionalities, they can also be seen as having the same potential to be reappropriated and used as platforms for protest. I argue that the walls of Facebook and Twitter can be seen as digital mirrors of physical walls and that they are capable of serving the same purpose for activism. This chapter will examine the use of digital public space as a sort of egalitarian structured commons and its potential to be used by protesters as a space to engage in levels of anti-hegemonic communication that would normally be much more difficult to perform within physical public space. Specifically, I will look at the techniques that protesters use within digital public space by means of unauthorized displays of communication as seen in physical displays of graffiti. My example will be the ways in which activists began an online protest on Nestlé's Facebook wall against the Nestlé Corporation for their palm oil harvesting practices. In order to understand not only why this was such an effective approach, but how it mirrors similar activities undertaken by protesters within physical public space, we must first become familiar with the background leading up to the beginning of these protests.

Starting in early 2010, a curious thing started to happen on the Facebook profile of the large multi-national corporation Nestlé. In increasing numbers, people were posting on Nestlé's Facebook wall, questioning the company's business practices and, in particular, criticizing it for the methods that they had been using to gather palm oil. According to the protesters, specifically members of the eco-protest group Greenpeace, rapid deforestation in Indonesia and other regions created from the harvest of hardwood in order to make way for oil palm plantations was sending massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Eccleston 2007). An increasing concern over the environmental impact of the palm oil plantations, as well as the plantations leading to a decrease in the population of orangutans in the area, led many people to begin writing, *en masse*, on Nestlé's wall, criticizing the company for its role in the perpetration of this environmental travesty (Smith 2010).

At first Nestlé just tried to delete the postings on their wall, or block various users from posting material. However, as more people joined and the protest grew, it became impossible for Nestlé to stop the deluge of critical comments appearing on its Facebook wall from being seen (Magee 2010). Eventually Nestlé tried engaging the protesters in the comments on their wall, but it was quickly clear that they were losing the battle of attempting to play down the company's role in palm oil farming and that the protesters who were bombarding their page were beginning to back Nestlé into a corner (Theodorou 2010, Beaubien 2010). Finally, after large-scale public embarrassment, Nestlé stated that it was inviting "The Forest Trust," a nonprofit group, to audit its supply chain, and they promised to cancel contracts with any firm found to be chopping down rainforests to produce the palm oil it used in its products (Tabacek 2010). Greenpeace welcomed the agreement, promising to monitor it closely.



What was unique about this protest against Nestlé (a company that is definitely no stranger to periodic outcries over some of their business practices) was that these activists chose to target Nestlé online rather than in the physical world (Orr 2006; Solomon 1981). They worked to take over the digital content of Nestlé's Facebook wall with posts critical of their palm oil harvesting practices. This approach proved to be wildly successful and stands as one of the earlier concrete examples of the potential for online activism by way of the reappropriation of digital public space. Now that I have briefly summarized the events surrounding the digital protest against Nestlé's palm oil harvesting practices, I can begin a more detailed analysis of how this protest unfolded and how the reappropriation of digital walls as a means of protest mirrors the ways that public space and walls are used within the physical world for the same purposes. Central to this analysis is the use of the Facebook wall, a public space for interaction that everyone has access to on the social media website.

The Facebook wall is often utilized to mimic the idea of "the commons," a public space where everyone has the opportunity to speak their minds equally; Nestlé, however, sought to control the dynamics of any conversation that took place within the communal space of its Facebook wall. For Nestlé, this space was meant to be a place where consumers could interact with Nestlé in a manner that Nestlé approved of, while Nestlé was also able to disseminate positive messages about their products and the Nestlé brand to those same consumers. Protesters took advantage of the inherently open structure of the digital public space provided by Nestlé's Facebook wall and instead worked to use it as a space where they could critique Nestlé and their business practices. This had two positive benefits for the protesters and, by extension, two negative ones for Nestlé. The first benefit for the protesters was that they were provided with an open and direct line of communication with the Nestlé Corporation by way of its Facebook page.

This is something that would have been extremely hard to attain in the physical world where genuine communication opportunities with large corporations are much scarcer. Second, by nature of the design of Facebook's communal public space experience encapsulated in their walls (a feature Nestlé sought to use to their own benefit), practically all communication was open and direct. Not only could someone post whatever they wanted on Nestlé's wall, but everyone else could see these posts and engage with them as well.

Within this construction of digital public space was the predicament for Nestlé in the use of their Facebook wall. The open nature of the public space and public walls of social media is meant to provide increasingly more open access between people as well as between people and entities like corporations, governments, or other powerful groups. This is a benefit to these large powerful entities because they are able to reach people at a deeper, more personal, level than they would otherwise be able to within the more traditional communicative channels that have been built within the physical world. However, this increased access and interaction is a two-way road. Just as corporations like Nestlé can reach individuals more easily, individuals can now reach them with increasing ease. Open flows of information work both ways, and one cannot shut out those trying to engage them without also shutting themselves off from those people. This was something that the protesters seemed to understand but (as it became apparent) Nestlé did not. Nestlé had no interest in being confronted about their palm oil harvesting practices and, when protesters began to attempt to speak about this on their Facebook wall, they tried to squelch their critiques. While Nestlé was free to delete the protesters comments, the protesters were equally free to easily post more to replace the ones that were deleted. Indeed, protesters could post as many comments as they wanted on Nestlé's wall. The protesters could also encourage others to do so as well in an attempt to overwhelm Nestlé's attempts at barricading

their critiques. Also, Nestlé not only had to keep try to keep pace with the amount of negative comments being written on their walls, but they had to try to outpace them. They had to attempt to have such a level of control over their wall that they could block the appearance of protester's comments the moment they appeared. As it became evident, Nestlé could not.

In addition to the aforementioned changes (both functionally and ideologically) to Nestlé's Facebook wall stemming from its reappropriation by the palm oil protesters, there is something fundamentally visual that occurred on their walls. Much in the same way that Banksy's approach to socio-political protest within physical public space is built around the idea of incorporating the space itself as an integral piece of the visual composition of his critique, so too did the reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall by protesters rely on a similar technique. The act of posting critiques of Nestlé's palm oil harvesting practices on as public and open a space as their Facebook wall worked to not only change the ideological function of the wall, but it also, vitally, incorporated the wall itself as a part of the visual components that comprised the overall act of protest against Nestlé. Once this occurred, the wall was no longer a structure meant to passively reflect the power of hegemony, but it was changed into a space that actively combated those power structures. Beyond that, the mere fact of the protesters creating and exhibiting anti-Nestlé messages on Nestlé's Facebook wall exposed the function of the wall as an ideological tool used for information dissemination. This worked to make the viewer aware of the subtle mechanisms that typically occur on a webpage when it is used as a platform for the display of visual and textual messages. In essence, this worked to "pull the curtain back" on the ideological function of the wall. This can be thought of as a sort of parallel to the effects of some of Banksy's work such as "Ostcctv." That Banksy piece, by nature of its incorporation of a component of the ideological landscape that by design is supposed to go unnoticed, worked to

bring to the attention of its viewers the hidden ideological functions of the public surfaces that encompass much of our landscape.

It should be noted that there is something very important occurring in the phenomenon of a viewer visually engaging with an anti-hegemonic message displayed on a space normally used for pro-hegemonic dissemination. What happened when these protests occurred on Nestlé's Facebook wall was not just that potential viewers/consumers were exposed to a counter-hegemonic message in a space normally used for the opposite purpose, but they were viewing these messages at the same time that they were supposed to be viewing pro-Nestlé messages. Indeed, it was actually the case during some points of the palm oil protest that viewers were seeing anti-Nestlé messages more frequently and often in lieu of the type of favorable information Nestlé would have preferred to be disseminated from this public space (Magee 2010). This visual display and prominence of placement works to lend a sort of validity to the posts of the Nestlé protests (and, by extension, the content of those posts) and thus provides the critiques of the protest with some ideological heft. For further proof of the psychological and ideological importance of placement of objects within a visual field, one needs look no further than the philosophies driving such industries as advertising, newspaper composition, or any other field that works with highly visual products (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russell 2010; Goodrich 2010).

When we look at the progression that the course of events took in the palm oil protest of Nestlé and analyze them within the aforementioned frame of the posts being visual artifacts on Nestlé's wall that held psychological and ideological importance due to their prominent display within Nestlé's public space, a definitive pattern that illustrates this visual importance of place emerges. First, the act of viewing the anti-Nestlé messages displayed virtually side by side (or, as Facebook actually formats it, on top of each other) with any messages supportive of Nestlé

worked to give the anti-Nestlé messages equal footing within the minds of people viewing Nestlé's Facebook page. Second, the conclusion could be drawn from this initial assessment that if the anti-Nestlé messages began to be seen in lieu of any pro-Nestlé messages (by virtue of Nestlé's wall being overtaken by them, so that any positive messages would be lost in the feed), then that worked on behalf of the protesters. This evolution can be read in terms of a relation between Nestlé's reactions to the protester's posts and the growing effectiveness of the protester's critiques of Nestlé's palm oil harvesting practices. This progression of events goes from Nestlé not letting the posts exist on their wall at all (denial of their legitimacy), to allowing them to exist concurrently with, and eventually in the place of, pro-Nestlé posts (acknowledgement of the critique's merits), to acquiescing to the protesters demands. Of course, this acquiescence ultimately can be understood as an admission on Nestlé's part of the superiority of the protester's message over their own. From this, it begins to become clear as to how dangerous it actually was for Nestlé to allow critical posts from the palm oil protesters to exist on the digital public space of their Facebook wall. Like the previous discussions of displays of socio-political protest within public space, the real effectiveness of the anti-Nestlé messages is in their ability to be seen and interacted with in an unmediated fashion by the general population. Once the choice was made on Nestlé's part to allow the critical posts on their wall to stand uncensored, it was an essential admission of failure to nullify the protester's critiques.

Beyond the importance of the mere existence of the anti-Nestlé posts within the visual space of their Facebook wall, there is another important visual element that was integral to the function of the palm oil protests against Nestlé that merits discussion. While the textual components of the anti-Nestlé Facebook posts were indeed important (this is where the essence of the critiques were displayed, after all), there was a separate visual component accompanying

the textual posts that carried great importance as well. One of the defining features of Facebook is the ability to display a “profile picture.” These pictures tend to be one of the main anchors of any Facebook page. While most people normally choose photos of themselves as these profile pictures, you are not limited to only displaying photos of yourself. Indeed, one can choose to have any photo they want as their profile picture or no photo at all. In essence, these profile pictures can be thought of as a digital version of the idea of the graffiti tag. Like a graffiti tag, one can choose to make their profile picture as unique and distinctive as they want so that it will not only garner attention from other Facebook users during interactions, but also be recognized as signifying their identity. Furthermore, these profile pictures accompany any post that one makes on a Facebook wall; a tiny thumbnail of the photo is displayed to the side of the text display. This feature gives an added amount of uniqueness and individuality to any Facebook post.

The importance of this feature and its relation to the effectiveness of the palm oil protesters can be understood when we see what types of profile pictures these protesters were using when they began to post critical messages on Nestlé’s Facebook wall. Many protesters changed their pictures to ones that were created to either promote the general movement against Nestlé’s palm oil harvesting practices or that were made to be critical parodies of popularly recognized Nestlé’s brand names. Screenshots that were taken of Nestlé’s Facebook wall during the palm oil protests show that many protesters had profile pictures that accomplished such things (Datamonitor 2010). One protester’s profile picture reworked the very recognizable logo of Nestlé’s “Kit-Kat” chocolate bar to read as “Killer,” no doubt a indictment against the reports of large amounts of orangutan deaths as a result of Nestlé’s palm oil harvesting tactics. Another protester had a profile picture that reworked “Nestlé” into “Nasty” (Datamonitor 2010). These

profile picture parodies of Nestlé's popular and very recognizable brand names worked as a type of culture jamming. They took Nestlé's original creation and reworked them to critique instead of promote Nestlé. This added an extra layer of critique to the palm oil protesters' operation beyond the very overt messages of condemnation they were posting alongside these photos. In essence, we can view this pairing of the somewhat humorous visual reworkings of Nestlé brands with open statements of critique as a sort of splitting of the fused techniques that Banksy would use in the graffiti pieces that he displayed within physical public space. Whereas Banksy would couch his serious critiques within a carnivalesque shell, the palm oil protesters had the shell on one side and the naked message on the other, leading to a sort of two pronged attack.

It should also be pointed out that the use of these profile pictures had a greater effect beyond just adding an additional visual element to the palm oil protests. These profile pictures were not just seen by anyone checking Nestlé's Facebook wall during the protests; instead, they could be seen by anyone who was friends with one of the protesters. This expanded the reach of their message beyond just Nestlé's wall and into the domains of Facebook's greater digital public space. This no doubt worked to alert more people to the cause of the protesters and their complaints about Nestlé's palm oil harvesting techniques, drawing them into the discussion and widening the effect of the protests. On top of that, a more damaging aspect for Nestlé (and by extension, a favorable one for the protesters) was that these friends could choose to adopt those profile pictures as their own. Like ripples in a pond, this worked to widen the range of the palm oil protests even further beyond the core group of protesters engaging in the actual reappropriation of Nestlé's wall. At the center of this, you had the protesters directly critiquing Nestlé; beyond that were the protesters' friends who were aware of their critiques by simple virtue of being able to view their profiles and activities; and beyond even that, these friends

could alert their friends, and so on ad infinitum. This potential for growth, fueled by the easily disseminated nature of things like anti-Nestlé profile pictures, worked to make the palm oil protests much larger and, thus, much more effective than they would have been otherwise.

Already in these first few points of analysis we begin to see several areas of overlap and parallel operations between the use of physical public space and walls as a means of socio-political protest and the use of digital walls for similar purposes. We see in both areas the underlying ideology dictating the function of public space as a place of communication and discourse between different groups. In physical public space this function has been taken over almost exclusively by the hegemonic forces that run any given society. As a result, physical public space has been constructed to be a one-way channel of discourse. It becomes an apparatus through which dominant ideology can be disseminated, with no official channel for reply. Of course, as I have argued, the entire point and function of graffiti on physical walls is to attack that apparatus. It is meant to be an attempt at countering the hegemonic control of ideological discourse within public space by means of forcible reappropriation. In that sense, graffiti can be seen as an attempt to pull public space back to where protesters feel it should be: a space where everyone has equal opportunities at communication. Digital public space functions slightly differently, but it still operates on these same basic premises.

Digital space and digital walls, as noted previously, were set up to function as a sort of egalitarian vision of the idea of what public space and surfaces should be: a communicative space where there was equal opportunity and equal level between all participating members of a community. This started with the development and use of things like online forums, message boards, and chat rooms. This idea was further expanded by the advent of social media. Within social media, everyone shares equally within the experience of digital public space and they all



share the same opportunity to communicate freely with each other. Beyond that, everyone within digital public space has their own “walls” where that opportunity for equal discussion is centered and encouraged. This is the world that corporations like Nestlé entered into when it established a presence within digital public space. They entered into a somewhat idealized but fully functioning version of public space mirrored on the ideas of physical public space. But instead of hegemonic entities or corporations like Nestlé having control over the means of dissemination in this space (as they would in physical public space), they found themselves on the same level, as it were, as the rest of the “regular” individuals who already had a presence there. Digital and physical public spaces are structured upon the same ideas, but digital public space has actually had a better opportunity for their implementation, and therein lays the key difference between the two spaces and the key to the success of the Nestlé protesters. What the protesters were doing on Nestlé’s Facebook wall was no different than what a graffiti writer does on a physical wall: they are both using public space as a platform for communication and, more importantly, as a place to openly voice critiques. In physical public space, hegemonic forces have made that either highly discouraged or outright illegal, deeming the communicative acts of lone individuals as “unauthorized.” In digital public space, those same rules do not seem to apply.

Now, just because the digital public space of social media seems to operate in a more egalitarian fashion than its physical counterpart, that does not mean that the hegemonic entities that have begun to stake out spheres of influence within this space do not seek to curate or manage, if you will, the flow of communication within these spaces. Here is where we come to another point of analysis in Nestlé’s initial response to the protesters on their Facebook wall and its relation to the use of public space for similar goals. Use of the term “reappropriation” in regards to public space and protest has been employed fairly frequently in this thesis and with

good reason. As I have noted before, the act of reappropriation in terms of the use of public space as a platform for protest is integral to the entirety of this whole idea of public displays of dissent. The reappropriation of this space (instead of, say, the mere use of previously allotted space) is the basis of the whole idea because if this space were free to use in the first place, if open channels of communication existed, then the need to take over space in an unauthorized manner would be nonexistent. Instead, we have hegemonic forces that attempt to very tightly control the use of public space and its function as a disseminator of dominant ideology. To open this space up to equal use would dilute their power over it, and with that their influence. So instead people have to reappropriating these spaces themselves. This is especially true if they want any possibility of discussion with or action against hegemonic forces. Thus, if there is a digital space that is being constructed and controlled in a way to maximize benefits for a hegemonic entity, that also means that it can be reappropriated in the same manner as physical public space would be, even if the initial ease of access to the two spaces are somewhat different. It is this point of similarity that brings us to the analysis of the reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall by the palm oil protesters.

What is significant about the reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall by protesters as a way to critique Nestlé's palm oil harvesting techniques is how similar it is in its foundation to the way that surfaces like walls, or perhaps more similarly billboards in this case, are reappropriated within physical public space. As I noted previously, the operators of Nestlé's Facebook wall sought to very specifically control the parameters of its utilization so that it would only be used as a space for the positive dissemination of messages pertaining to Nestlé. While Nestlé had no direct control over what was posted, or the benefit of any rules that might have worked in their favor by stipulating what "appropriate" content should consist of, there seemed to be a general,

unwritten, consensus about what one used a corporation's wall for: namely, points of conversation that were supportive of said corporation. The palm oil protesters, recognizing the potential that the open nature of Nestlé's wall presented them, opted against using the space of the wall in a way that Nestlé had hoped for and instead reappropriated it to be used for their own purposes: as a space where they would openly critique Nestlé, not compliment them.

While the underlying idea of reappropriation for one's own speech acts is the same here as it is when one displays traditional graffiti on a physical wall, the most overt analogy to the use of physical public space in this manner is the practice of culture jamming. The specific aspect of culture jamming that this relates to would be the practice of reappropriating billboards to display messages subverting the purposes of the billboard's original content. Take, for example, the reappropriation of an AT&T billboard that the culture jamming group Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) undertook in 2008 to protest AT&T's cooperation in government ordered warrantless wiretapping (Singel 2008). They changed a standard AT&T ad (meant to tout the company's coverage area) which usually read "AT&T works in more places like [insert the city the billboard is located in]. Where the name of the city usually went, the BLF pasted the words "NSA (National Security Agency) Headquarters:" a very overt allusion to the recently revealed news of AT&T's involvement with the wiretapping. The original purpose of the billboard was to increase awareness of AT&T and promote its brand. After the billboard was reappropriated by the BLF, the advertisement that it contained was no longer something that supported AT&T but instead worked to critique AT&T's assistance in warrantless wiretapping cases. Suddenly, the billboard was not operating as AT&T intended, but was instead now functioning as a platform for a critique against the telecommunications company.

The reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall functioned in a similar manner. The Facebook wall was supposed to be Nestlé's chief platform for positive, controlled, interactions with consumers. This meant it was a semi-open forum with high visibility. It was instead being used by the palm oil protesters to showcase discontent with some of Nestlé's more shady business practices, something that Nestlé was no doubt quite anxious to not have discussed in such an openly public manner. Beyond the high visibility of Nestlé's wall, which ensured that the messages of the protesters would be viewed by a wide audience, another one of the especially effective aspects of this reappropriation lies in the somewhat egalitarian construction of the digital public space itself. The public space of social media is not only constructed to make this sort of interaction and confrontation that we see between Nestlé and their detractors easy to achieve with even a small group of dedicated protesters, but because the cultural ideas surrounding proper interactions within digital public space are different than they are for physical public space, this form of protest is not something that is as readily dismissed by the average person. I have already established that societal perception and the perceived parameters of "socially acceptable" discourse within public space is different between the physical and digital world. What merits scorn from some people, such as attempting to use physical public space as a platform for protest, is not only not looked down upon in the confines of digital space, but the messages supported by the action within these spaces are more likely to be considered seriously by outside viewers (White 2010). This leads to my third point of analysis: Nestlé's response to the protesters and the public perception of the entire act.

The importance of the perception of an act within public space is definitely related to not only the probability of its success but the level to which people are willing to consider its points relevant. In this, we can see shades of Marshall McLuhan's argument that "the medium is the

message,” specifically that the form of a medium embeds itself within the message is displays, creating a relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived (McLuhan 1964). While the act of hacking undertaken by some digital protesters may be in the service of the same goals as the protesters that confronted Nestlé on their Facebook wall, hacking is usually considered illegal and thus often has a negative cultural connotation attached to it. The act of reappropriating Nestlé’s wall in order to change the flow of discourse as a means of socio-political protest, however, is neither illegal nor necessarily thought of poorly. As such, because the protesters were trying to achieve their goals by presenting their critiques in a public space that was amenable to such an act, the responses that might have normally greeted attempts to confront a corporation like Nestlé by similar means in public space were not applicable in this case. This can be seen in many of the reactions from protesters and other commentators on Nestlé’s Facebook wall while the palm oil protests were occurring. There seemed to be a general consensus among many of them that Nestlé was operating in a fundamentally different realm than they would be in the physical world and that their attempts to talk down to or censor protesters showed they did not understand the rules. As one commentator bluntly put it on Nestlé’s wall, “the first rule of social media is that it’s the consumers who are in control, not you” (Theodorou 2010). A journalist covering the exchanges between Nestlé and the protesters noted that “it [was] another case of a company trying its hand at social media and failing miserably, trying to impose its rules and censorship on a free platform for which it has no control” (Magee 2010).

Nestlé found that they not only could not stop these protesters from writing critical messages on their walls, but they could not ignore them either. If these protesters were trying to picket Nestlé’s headquarters in the physical world, or reappropriate the surfaces of their building

with graffiti, then they would have probably faced arrest, in addition to scorn from much of the public, while Nestlé would have come out of the confrontation without having to account for any of the protesters points. This proved to be impossible within the digital public space that the protesters were utilizing, so Nestlé was forced to engage the protesters on their terms. This did not work to Nestlé's advantage. Not only was Nestlé forced to try and (unsuccessfully) defend their palm oil harvesting practices, but they had to do it within the highly visible public space of their Facebook wall, where everyone could view their exchanges with the protesters. This public scrutiny led Nestlé to concede rather quickly to the protester's demands for reform and change their palm oil harvesting techniques, even going so far as to have The Forest Trust monitor its supply chain, as I noted in the beginning of this chapter. This is an outcome that would have taken much longer to achieve had it been attempted within the parameters of physical public space, if it would have been achieved at all. Susan White's article on the rise of online protest states as much when discussing the palm oil protests against Nestlé, noting that the online campaign against palm oil was much more effective than the "face-to-face" protests were that occurred simultaneously (White 2010).

What is remarkable about the success of the protest is not only the speed (a matter of mere weeks) at which the protesters managed to get Nestlé to capitulate to their demands to change their environmentally harmful business practices, but also the manner in which the campaign spread globally, quickly attracting protesters from all over the world to participate in the reappropriation of Nestlé's Facebook wall. Protest in physical space often spreads much more slowly. Take, for example, the protests against Nike's labor practices during the 1990s. While the campaign was somewhat successful in getting Nike to change its business model, it took much longer than comparable protests have managed to take with the utilization of the

digital wall and its inherently global capabilities as a protest tool (White 2010). What made the Nestlé protest so successful was the fact that Nestlé, in the constructed common space of the digital wall, was forced to interact with the population in an equal manner; they could not be ignored.

As we have seen in this analysis of the online protests against Nestlé for their palm oil harvesting practices, many of the same ideas used in reappropriating physical space are seen here in this study. In digital public space as well as in physical public space, there is still a desire for confrontation with hegemonic forces; there is still the drive for equal channels of communication and a desire to gain recognition of the validity of one's critiques. Most importantly, in both these spaces, there is the recognition by protesters and others of the potential to use hegemonic platforms meant for ideological dissemination as platforms of socio-political protest instead. We can think of digital public space and the digital wall as having the potential to operate as a semi-idealized manifestation of what early graffiti writers were looking for within their own public space and on the walls of their cities. They were looking to create a space where they all had an equal voice and the ability to confront the ruling structures of a society with their complaints, if needed. Because of the more "open" construction of digital public space and the digital wall, as well as cultural perceptions that favor that sort of function, I argue that it is somewhat easier for one to more directly engage in protest within digital public space than physical space, with more potential for some success, because digital public space is more readily open to be reappropriated for these purposes. Less finesse, so to speak, is thus needed in engaging in protest online than would perhaps be necessary in physical public space or on physical walls.

#### ***4.1 Analysis and Complications: The Digital Wall as Protest Medium***

As I have shown, the idea of digital public space and the digital wall can be thought of as functioning much in the same way as their physical counterparts. By extension, they both have the potential to be used as effective tools for socio-political protest. In the case of the Nestlé's palm oil protests, protesters used Nestlé's Facebook wall as a digital commons area to effectively question the business practices of a multi-national corporation. In this particular case, the methods used by protesters reflected the methods that are often employed on physical walls: challenging their targets by reappropriating space that was typically used by the existing power structure to disseminate favorable ideology and instead using it to display counter-hegemonic critiques; communicating with others in the population to raise knowledge of their protest; and displaying their messages on a communication platform that simultaneously provided direct access to potential viewers and one that could not be easily controlled by the power structure being challenged.

There are many similarities between the digital wall and the physical wall. There are, however, are a few differences worth noting. One of the advantages that the digital wall holds over the physical wall as a communication platform is that, because of the borderless, globalized nature of the internet, the messages posted on the digital walls have the potential of reaching a far greater audience than messages on the physical wall alone could hope to reach. Thus, these messages have the potential to garner even greater support from others. The globalized nature of the digital wall, while having the positive attribute of reaching further, does come with its own drawback. While there is the potential for broad support, the support has the potential to not run as deeply as it would in cases where the protest is a regional or local matter (Davis 2010). You might be able to get people to care about your cause halfway across the world, but they aren't



going to have the same conviction as those in the actual, physical protest do. This is not necessarily a fatal flaw, but merely something to consider.

There are similarities between the construction and use of the digital wall and the physical wall, specifically ideas of who “owns” the surfaces and what repercussions there are for the transgression of displaying critical messages on them. However, there is another advantage that the physical wall holds over the digital wall. In the case of the digital wall, there is undoubtedly more safety and more reach when using it as a platform for protest. But, one must remember who owns this digital space. Everything has a physical backing somewhere. Even something as ethereal as the internet, when it comes down to it, is located on some company’s servers somewhere in the physical world. While the dynamics of the interaction between power structures and the general population are definitely changed for the better with the advent of the digital wall and its socio-political uses, one must remember that at the end of the day digital protesters, like their physical counterparts, are still playing in “the master’s house.” That is, these spaces, like their physical counterparts, are still owned by corporations or governments. Although populations are given much more freedom to interact and challenge those within the digital commons, they are still operating in a world that at the end of the day a telecommunications company or a government can pull the plug on.

The use of physical walls as a space for protest comes with its own drawbacks of course. If you are caught creating counter-hegemonic messages on the physical walls of public space, you can be arrested or (depending on where you are) worse. However, the upside to this danger is that they have to physically catch those that do this and, furthermore, they cannot take away the physical wall from being accessed by the population without destroying the ideological institution that it is supposed to serve. One is generally thought to be safer in the use of the

digital wall. The anonymity of the internet provides more to hide behind than when using the physical wall. But, as noted before, because the physical infrastructure that supports digital public space (server farms, fiber optic lines, etc.) is essentially by power structures much like the ones that various protest groups are attempting to fight, the game is still somewhat in their hands, making protest within digital public space still a dangerous undertaking in some places. While a government might not be able to prevent people from posting and sharing counter-hegemonic messages within digital public space, they can certainly arrest them at will within the physical world based on various “crimes”, thus disrupting their access to digital space. Socio-political protest on the physical wall solves this at the cost of physical danger; with the physical wall, hegemonic forces still own the space, but they can’t “pull the plug” on a physical building without causing damage to their own ideological structures in the process.

As a final thought, I think it is important to address criticisms leveled at the use of social media as a tool for protest. In light of the failed realization of the Green Revolution in Iran, many of those that commented on the events claimed that social media like Twitter or Facebook lacked the gravitas of proven, more “old fashioned” protest tools from the past (Gladwell 2010; Baumann 2010). These criticisms claim that the ability of those to protest had been established long before the rise of social media and they were quite effective before then. Anyone who thinks that social media is the protest of the future, they argue, is sorely mistaken. What critics like Gladwell and Baumann miss (or outright refuse to see) in their dismissal of the potential of the digital wall for protest is that the utilization of this new digital public space is not meant to replace the old methods, but rather augment them with the addition of new technologies to help enhance their effectiveness.

## ***4.2 Conclusion***

As I have argued in this chapter, the digital public spaces of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter mirror in many important ways their physical counterparts. Most importantly, these digital public spaces are often used as mediums and tools for the purpose of socio-political protest and have proven to be quite effective to those ends. There are some technical differences from the physical wall in both the way that the digital wall operates as well as the impact that it has in terms of its effectiveness as a protest medium; however, both have been shown through use to be quite effective. Despite the arguments coming from its detractors, it is clear that the advent of the digital wall as a viable place for protest has come and it is firmly established. In response to Gladwell's dismissal of the role of Twitter in the Iranian revolution, the founders of Twitter responded saying that, in fact, Gladwell and others like him got it wrong; Twitter is not the revolution, but it can be used as a tool for revolution (Halliday 2010). The digital wall is a tool for protest, just like the physical wall. The wall itself is not the revolution, but it helps foster it.

In order to continue the struggle between those that control society and those that seek to exist more equally within it, the use of the wall within public space has been a valuable tool for generations. As we advance into the future and we see our world become increasingly interconnected through the emerging technologies of the internet and social media, our ability to communicate with each other, share each other's concerns, and fight for each other's causes has grown. Digital public space and the potential employment of their "walls" as spaces for communication within them can be thought of as the latest manifestation of the idea of the commons, a space for equal communicative opportunities between different facets of society. In the example of the Greenpeace led protests against Nestlé's palm oil harvesting practices, we can

see how these new public spaces can be used in this fight for socio-political justice as well. Digital public space and the digital wall can be thought of as operating similarly and having similar potential to the physical walls of our societies in that they provide an open and unmediated format for the dissemination of protest messages. Digital public space comes with the added advantage of a global audience and increased potential of interaction with those in power. It is important to remember, however, that only by using these tools together, digital public space and physical public space, can people work towards effectively making a difference for the underprivileged or the underrepresented in society.

However, I do not want to give the impression that one approach (physical versus digital protest) is better than another. Rather, I would argue that they have different abilities to approach problems in different arenas. Nevertheless, what many are beginning to understand is that truly effective protest cannot always be done just in the physical world or just online. Sometimes an approach that seeks to utilize both of these public spaces concurrently for the purposes of creating protest is the approach that works best. On the ground, within one's local area, undertaking protest within public spaces and using the walls of society to combat repressive elements is still an excellent technique for creating socio-political change. Additionally, the concurrent use of the digital wall to gather further support, to expose your messages to a global audience, and to attack hegemonic power structures on another front where they cannot easily fight is an important new tool that cannot be ignored. For examples of this synergy between the physical and the digital one can look at the case of the Zapatistas in Mexico, who wage their resistance to the Mexican government on the ground but gather support globally through social media. Naomi Klein called the Zapatistas the first "post-modern" revolution (Klein 2002: 208 ). For another specific example of the effectiveness of this practice, we can look at the melding of

graffiti as protest and social media as an exporting tool that occurred within the Palestinian West Bank communities several years ago. This attempt to meld physical protest with digital protest was seen operating via the now concluded activist experiment “Send a Message” ([www.sendamessage.nl](http://www.sendamessage.nl)), a Palestinian activist group supported by the Dutch activist organization Palo Dutch Concept Factory (PDCF). The purpose of the partnership was to highlight the struggles of Palestinians in the West Bank for an international audience, thus eliciting their concern and support (Liphshiz 2007). Send a Message’s website took requests from anyone interested (within reason) to display messages on the West Bank Barrier for 30 Euros a piece. They would graffiti your message somewhere on the wall and send you the pictures after they were completed. This had the double effect of increasing global awareness of the Palestinian people’s plight, as well as continuing local efforts to protest the West Bank Barrier. The money contributed to this would then go to support Palestinian NGO’s dedicated to building needed facilities for Palestinian youth. This project, beyond raising international awareness and funds for Palestinian children, also worked to remind the Palestinians themselves that they had not been forgotten by the world; there were people who cared about their fate. This stands as a good example of activists and protesters taking an “all of the above” approach to socio-political protest. That approach will be the central point of analysis in the following chapter which deals with similar approaches taken by protesters during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.

## Chapter 5:

### **Analysis of the Egyptian Revolution and its Use of Physical and Digital Public Space for Socio-Political Protest**

“The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.” -Karl Marx

“Revolution is not something fixed in ideology, nor is it something fashioned to a particular decade. It is a perpetual process embedded in the human spirit.” –Abbie Hoffman

“Muslims, Christians, we are one. The people demand the downfall of the regime.” –Popular chant of the protesters during the Egyptian Revolution

In the previous chapters, I have examined two different case studies that have utilized the concept of reappropriation of public space as a means of socio-political protest. In both cases, the examples analyzed confirm that many of the techniques and underlying principles that comprised the beginnings of the modern graffiti movement developed along a continuum and could be found in current examples of protest. While both the examples of Banksy’s carnivalesque graffiti and the online occupation of Nestlé’s Facebook wall by protesters share some similarities (both involve the reappropriation of space for counter-hegemonic activities, for example), the point can be raised that these two examples stand as two different exercises in protest across two different platform types. The question would arise that while these case studies stand as clear examples of effective work within public space and digital space respectively, are there are common threads to draw them together? Is there anything to show a relation between protest within public space and protest within digital space, or are they two different realms working towards different ends with similar tactics? The answer to that question lies in the specifics of my third case study: the

use of digital and physical walls as sites of protest during the first phase of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.

Whereas chapter three discussed in detail the work of Banksy within physical public space and chapter four analyzed the functionality of protest within digital space in regards to the Nestlé palm oil protest, this chapter will look at how protesters and revolutionaries worked to not only reappropriate physical space as a means of protest against the Mubarak regime, but also very aggressively used the digital space created through social media as a means of protest in conjunction with their activities on the ground. I argue that this combination of reappropriated physical space for protest, paired with effective reappropriation and occupation of digital space, worked to compound the effectiveness of their message and protest by extending exposure to their popular revolt online and, as a result, across the globe. Beyond the synthesis of physical and digital protest by means of reappropriated public space, there was a further layer to the reappropriation within the Egyptian Revolution that merits analysis, and that I will argue was a large contributor to the successful efforts of the revolutionaries in disposing of the Mubarak regime. Egyptian revolutionaries did not just reappropriate walls and surfaces as platforms for protest graffiti; they reappropriate much of the iconic public space of the city for this goal as well. In conjunction with this widespread reappropriation of the entire cityscape, it should also be noted that the protesters did not merely utilize the traditional graffiti on walls or other surfaces to further this goal, they also used many various objects at their disposal to reclaim the ideological spaces of Cairo in service of their anti-hegemonic protests, the most important of which included themselves. This chapter will explore all of these points in detail, starting with the synthesis of the physical and digital protest methods employed by protesters during the Egyptian Revolution and then exploring the ways in which the revolution stands as an example

of the wider potentials of both the practice of reappropriating space and the employment of graffiti as means of socio-political protest.

Before I discuss how the employment of protest tactics within both physical and digital public space worked together to enhance the effects of the protests, it would be beneficial to establish the preliminary events that led to the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution in late January, 2011, before moving on to a discussion of the chronology of the revolution itself. The Egyptian Revolution was part of a larger, currently still ongoing regional popular uprising against the numerous autocratic regimes that held sway over a majority of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. This regional uprising was dubbed “The Arab Spring.” The Arab Spring started with the large scale revolt against the autocratic dictator of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in late December 2010, culminating in his fleeing the country and removal from power on January 14, 2011 (Ryan 2011). There are various conflicting theories about what spurred the beginning of these protests. Some analysts theorized that information detailing the kleptocratic lifestyle of Tunisia’s ruling family in leaked diplomatic cables started the unrest. Others point to a generation of young Arabs educated abroad and familiar with the freedoms and opportunity afforded to the working and middle classes elsewhere who, upon returning home, were unable to find work or make a living in a system as corrupt as the ones in their countries (Ryan 2011). It is generally agreed upon, however, that the Tunisian Revolution began in earnest after the death by self-immolation of a young produce vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi from the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid (Abouzeid 2011; IBTimes 2011; Simon 2011; Whitaker 2010).

It cannot be understated how singularly important the death of Mohamed Bouazizi was to the beginnings of the Arab Spring, especially when it came to the uprising in Egypt that immediately followed Tunisia’s revolution (Worth 2011). Mohamed Bouazizi was the sole wage



earner in an extended family of eight people. He made his living by operating a small produce vendor cart in his home city of Sidi Bouzid. As was typical under the corrupt regime of President Ben Ali, Bouazizi was often the target of harassment by local police officers who had allegedly targeted and mistreated him for years (Ryan 2011). The police would arbitrarily confiscate Bouazazi's produce cart with regularity with the purpose of extorting "fines" from him in order to get it back. The typical fine was usually cost 10 Dinars (roughly 7 U.S. dollars), the equivalence of a day's wage for him. Although this harassment and corruption was demoralizing for Bouazizi, he had no other way to make a living so he continued to work as a street vendor (Ryan 2011). On December 17, 2010, Bouazizi was once again targeted for harassment by a local police officer who seized his produce cart. Bouazizi tried to pay the 10 Dinar fine to the police officer who seized his livelihood, but this particular police officer was not interested in merely letting him off with paying the fine. In response to Bouazizi's attempts to pay for his produce cart, the police officer insulted his deceased father, spit on him, and slapped him (Ryan 2011). Humiliated, Bouazizi decided to then go to the provincial headquarters in an attempt to complain to local municipality officials and to have his produce cart returned. He was refused an audience. Following the refusal to see him, Bouazizi was quoted as saying "If you don't see me, I'll burn myself" (Abouzeid 2011). True to his word, he acquired a can of gasoline from a nearby gas station and returned to the municipal office. While standing in the middle of traffic, he shouted "how do you expect me to make a living?" (Abouzeid 2011). He then poured the gasoline over his body and set himself on fire.

Word of Mohamed Bouazizi's act of self-immolation (after which he was hospitalized with severe burns) in front of the municipal government headquarters spread fast and protests over his treatment began to erupt mere hours after he set himself on fire (Thorne 2011). The

protests, which began in Sidi Bouzid, grew for weeks after Bouazizi's hospitalization. The local police and security forces responded aggressively to the protesters, confronting them with tear gas, rubber bullets, and beatings in an effort to quell the growing unrest. Fueled by social media, word of Bouazizi's fate traveled around Tunisia and the larger Arab world (Al Jazeera English 2010). A connection was being built in the minds of these Arab viewers between corrupt Arab regimes and the brutal existence of many Arabs. In an interview with Reuters, Bouazizi's sister was quoted as saying, "What kind of repression do you imagine it takes for a young man to do this? A man who has to feed his family by buying goods on credit when they fine him [...] and take his goods. In Sidi Bouzid, those with no connections and no money for bribes are humiliated and insulted and not allowed to live" (Noueihed 2011). This sentiment seemed to typify what many others living under similar circumstances in the Arab world felt at the time as well. When Bouazizi finally died from his wounds on January 4, 2011, the protests had begun to reach a breaking point. An estimated five thousand people attended Bouazizi's funeral procession, with many chanting "Farewell, Mohammed, we will avenge you. We weep for you today. We will make those who caused your death weep" (Falk 2011). Ten days later President Ben Ali fled Tunisia, signaling the end of his regime, the success of the Tunisian Revolution, and the first phase of the larger Arab Spring protests.

Egyptians watched the events in Tunisia with particular interest. Most Egyptians who followed Tunisia's revolution got their information through social media sites rather than state owned television stations, for obvious reasons. Much of what was going on had been uploaded to sights like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook and were shared liberally among Egyptians who were themselves growing increasingly disaffected with their own corrupt, repressive, government. A few days after Ben Ali fled from Tunisia, many Egyptians, when asked,

described their “great admiration” for the Tunisian people and their surprise that they had the fortitude to rise up and change their own country for the better. Some even described the toppling of Ben Ali’s regime as something like “a fairy tale” (Ezzat 2011). Furthermore, Bouazizi’s act of self-immolation, which had been elevated by the Tunisian revolutionaries and others into an act of “heroic martyrdom,” influenced other people facing similar bleakness to attempt to do the same as an act of protest. A man named Abdo Abdel Hameed, taking his cue from Bouazizi, set himself on fire in front of the Egyptian Parliament building as an act of protest against the Mubarak regime and the poverty that seemed to go along with it (Ahram Online 2011). His act, as in Tunisia, helped provide a spark to ignite the long simmering feelings of resentment against the Mubarak regime among many of Egypt’s citizens, leading many to begin openly protesting in the streets.

The official start date of large scale protests in Egypt occurred eleven days after collapse of the Tunisian regime on January 25. Although protests were widespread and occurred in practically every major city in the country, the main focus was centered in the capital city of Cairo. Youth protest organizers, mainly through the channels of social media like Facebook and Twitter, managed to gather great momentum for their initial wave of protests. There were reports of tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of Cairo and other major cities to protest the regime of their longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak (Haas 2011). Initial reactions from the regime, as expected, were heavy handed. Large groups of “security forces,” including Egypt’s notorious plain-clothes security thugs, and uniformed police tried to block marching protesters by firing rubber bullets and tear gas at them, beating them with batons, and arresting those they could catch. But the attempt at a violent crackdown was met with increased intensity and determination from the protesters. In many areas protesters managed to overwhelm

the security forces and send them fleeing, and by the end of the first night the protesters had occupied the large main square in Cairo, Tahrir Square.

On Friday, January 28, things took a turn for the worse for the regime. Protests increased exponentially, and more attempts at clamping down on the protesters were met with increased resistance. That night, protesters marched on the headquarters of the ruling party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), and burned it to the ground. Several thousand other protesters made advances towards the state TV headquarters, more or less the mouthpiece of the regime, intending to possibly do the same. It was reported by journalists on the scene during the protests that the security forces arriving by the truckload to protect the building were told, “If they attack, kill them” (Wedeman). There were reports that police stations and other NDP regional offices were burned down in cities such as Alexandria and Suez. All the while an increasing mass of protesters converged on and held Tahrir Square, demanding the downfall of the regime. Tahrir Square, already a very famous square and cultural focal point within Egyptian and Cairene society, became the focal point of the growing revolution. As long as the protesters were in control of that area, it was said, Mubarak’s grip on Egypt would steadily erode (Al-Bishri 2011).

The revolution continued, building on the momentum of the first intense days that saw clashes between Mubarak’s security forces and groups of Egyptian protesters. Gradually, the protesters took and held more of the city, and the security forces exercised control over less and less. Beyond the physical occupation of parts of Cairo, these protesters used graffiti on the walls of the city to spread their anti-Mubarak messages, reappropriating spaces of the city that once reflected Mubarak’s strength, but afterward reflected the erosion of his regime’s power. When the army was called in to “monitor” the situation, protesters marked their tanks and vehicles with protest graffiti, reappropriating them as symbols of the movement that the Mubarak regime could

not effectively counter by virtue of the fact that the soldiers saw no interest in stopping or erasing the graffiti on their tanks and vehicles, and the security forces loyal to Mubarak had no control over the area where this was occurring. All across Cairo protesters were tearing down representations of the regime. Many portraits of Mubarak existed throughout the city, some just small prints, others rather large and on the sides of buildings or on billboards; photographs from the revolution showed people tearing these pictures down, defacing others, and lighting some on fire. A tweet from an international journalist covering the revolution spoke of a boy on a subway car that crossed out “Hosni Mubarak Station” on one of the subway station maps; he was met with cheers (Wedeman). Anti-regime graffiti increased in frequency all over the city, and a proliferation of pictures and videos found their way to Facebook and Twitter, providing point by point documentation of the revolution. Protesters also took to Twitter to provide live accounts of the events on the ground, detailing the progress of the protesters as well as what actions the regime and its security forces were taking against them. As the power of the revolutionary protesters grew, and more people joined their ranks from across all aspects of Egyptian society, the Mubarak regime finally collapsed on February 11, 2011, punctuated by a short speech given by his recently appointed Vice President who announced that Mubarak had stepped down from power. The protesters were ultimately successful in overthrowing the Egyptian government in only eighteen days of largely non-violent protest.

The Egyptian Revolution represents a clear example of the interconnectivity and synthesis of the reappropriation of both physical public space and digital public space. In the use of both, protesters were able to not only effectively spread their anti-regime messages around Cairo, the center of the revolution, but they were also able to communicate and organize with other arms of the revolution in other parts of Egypt. The employment of digital protest tactics in

tandem with physical ones afforded the Egyptian revolutionaries the ability to highlight the protests internationally by providing greater access to information about them to viewers and policy makers worldwide. There were many Facebook pages created by either protesters or Egyptian expats aligned with the goals of the protesters in order to share information with others about the reality of the situation in Egypt, as well as provide a digital public space in which protesters could articulate their messages in an open environment. These Facebook pages and the potential to use their walls as a commons-like space by the protesters, where anyone could correspond with anyone, provided a valuable digital public space where protesters could talk openly to the benefit of the growing anti-Mubarak movement. Furthermore, it provided a space where outsiders who wished to learn more about what was going on inside could do so as well from an unfiltered source. The most notable of the Facebook pages set up for this purpose was the “We are all Khaled Shaïd” page operated by Egyptian expat turned revolutionary supporter Wael Ghonim, who came back to Cairo from working for Google in Dubai in order to support the Egyptian Revolution (England and Saleh 2011). The significance of naming his Facebook page after Khaled Shaïd was not lost on Egyptians participating in the anti-Mubarak protests. Khaled Shaïd was a young Egyptian man who was arrested and beaten to death by Mubarak security forces in June of 2010, some eight months before the official beginning of the Egyptian Revolution. The post-mortem images of Shaïd’s severely disfigured corpse quickly spread around the internet and gave further fuel to the brewing disgust with the Egyptian security apparatus and the Mubarak regime that supported them (Preston 2011).

There were other prominent Egyptian protesters who operated several other anti-regime Facebook or Twitter pages that sought to operate as digital public spaces where protesters could disseminate their messages against the Mubarak regime to a wider audience. The importance of

how these digital public spaces were utilized within the parameters provided by social media websites cannot be overstated. A feature of Twitter that was greatly beneficial in the dissemination of the protesters messages was the ability to track tweets by way of “hashtags.” A hashtag on twitter is a way of organizing tweets by way of shared subject matter. All one had to do was put a hashtag in their tweet, something like #Egypt or #Cairo, and anyone searching for tweets pertaining to the Egyptian Revolution could search by those hashtags for relevant tweets. The use of hashtags to organize and group tweets pertaining to the Egyptian Revolution was extremely important to the ability to affective disseminate the protester’s anti-Mubarak messages. Hashtags like #Egypt, #Cairo, #Jan25, or #Mubarak were used heavily by protesters and others alike, creating an abundance of revolutionary information that could be easily shared or further disseminated. Beyond the thousands of posts by protesters on these pages, or the spread of the information contained on them by way of either “sharing” the content via Facebook or “retweeting” it via Twitter, there are many protesters, both online and on the streets of Cairo, who cite these spaces as instrumental in their struggle (Parvaz 2011). Further proof of the importance of Facebook pages like Gohnim’s “We are all Khaled Shaid” can be seen in the response that the Mubarak regime had towards the operators of these pages. When the identities of many of the proprietors of the anti-regime Facebook or Twitter pages were discovered by Mubarak’s security forces, they were often tracked down, beaten, or arrested (sometimes all three) by regime operatives. Gohnim himself was secretly arrested and held by Egyptian security forces for eleven days, during which he was repeatedly interrogated over his creation and involvement with the anti-regime “We are all Khaled Shaid” Facebook page (Associated Press 2011).

The utilization of Facebook and Twitter walls as spaces for dissemination of protest messages worked to coordinate the messages of protesters on a wide-scale and it also allowed them to effectively communicate to others, both inside and outside Egypt, about what was really going on within the revolution, what the goals of the protesters were, and what types of tactics the Mubarak regime was engaging in against the protesters. Most importantly, the use of digital public space to spread these messages created the possibility for protesters to disseminate their messages with little interference or mediation from the Mubarak regime. While the Mubarak regime repeatedly attempted to block access to the internet itself, something that protesters continually managed to find ways around, they could not block or censor any of the content they were posting. This ability to post unmediated information within digital public space with little response from the Mubarak regime allowed the protesters to provide an unfiltered look at the reality on the ground during the Egyptian Revolution. There has been much made of the utilization of digital public space during the Egyptian Revolution and its pivotal role in disposing of the Mubarak regime. The Arab newspaper *The National* noted that social media usage during the Egyptian Revolution was up by 29 percent compared to the same time period the year before, with “nearly 9 in 10 Egyptians [saying] they were using Facebook to organize protests or spread awareness about them” (Huang 2011).

As noted, there was a simultaneous operation to reappropriate physical public space as a means of socio-political protest at the same time that many protesters were working on using digital public space for the same purposes. Oftentimes, physical spaces and digital spaces were used by many of the same protesters as part of one cohesive approach to effectively execute the Egyptian Revolution. The reappropriation of walls and other surfaces (which were often covered with anti-regime or pro-revolutionary graffiti) within Cairo and elsewhere worked to



communicate to those within the city about the relative strength and conviction of the protesters as well as popular distaste with Mubarak. This airing of pro-revolutionary, anti-Mubarak sentiment through the medium of graffiti on the city's walls worked to do two things: it challenged the hegemony of the Mubarak regime while simultaneously disrupting and supplanting the regime's messages, showing the weakness of the regime and the strength of the protesters, while also communicating directly to the people of Cairo in a way that was not possible through the more traditional communication channels, which had long been controlled by the Mubarak regime. The widespread reappropriation of Cairo's walls for the purpose of anti-regime protest graffiti showed the general population that not only was disgust with the Mubarak regime extensive, but that they were safe to voice this dissent themselves. Furthermore, it also showed that if they could not voice this dissent through the state-owned media, then they could do it in the streets and on the walls of the city: spaces on which the regime would find it more difficult to stifle their messages.

There are other advantages to the use of digital public space as a platform for protest beyond its generally apparent function as an open, globally accessible, space used to articulate messages (such as ones in support of some type of protest or a revolution). Chief among these advantages is the ability to store and share media such as video clips and pictures, and in this case clips and pictures taken directly by the protesters. While the ability to speak openly to a global audience about the revolution in Egypt and the various crimes of the Mubarak regime was undoubtedly important, the ability to share uncensored images and videos of exactly what was happening on the ground could be considered even more vital. The video and pictures captured on mobile phone cameras by protesters that were uploaded to Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube accounts gave extra weight to the messages protesters were disseminating online by

accompanying them with real-time examples of what they were experiencing. Similarly, on the ground in Cairo and elsewhere, many of the protesters that were marching in the streets or, more importantly, employing graffiti as a protest tool, understood the vital importance an expanded global audience, created by the use of social media's digital public space, could have on the effectiveness of their revolution. Many protesters spray-painted simple messages like "Facebook" on walls around Cairo, not only giving credit to the role that the social media platform was playing in bringing public attention to their struggle, but also highlighting its importance (MacDiarmid 2011). Other graffiti directed people to Twitter, for undoubtedly much the same reason as protesters were emphasizing Facebook (Crisp 2011). An academic paper by University of Washington's Philip Howard and others went as far as to call the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter "pivotal" to the success of the Egyptian Revolution noting that there was high interconnectivity between actions online by protesters and actions on the ground. Howard and his colleagues stated that "social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. A spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground. Social media helped spread democratic ideas across international borders" (Howard, et al 2011)

There were other examples of the porous border between the creation of protest graffiti within public space and the proliferation of images of that graffiti within digital space. Many protesters, beyond just uploading videos of protesters marching or encounters with security forces, also uploaded pictures of graffiti they were seeing around Cairo. These pictures of the graffiti were shared among Facebook users between their respected walls and circulated to new viewers via "retweets" on Twitter. As some of the more salient examples of Cairo graffiti reached new audiences, many protesters became inspired by what they had seen on the internet,

leading them to either copy some of this graffiti outright or create similar graffiti that was inspired by what they saw. This represented a veritable complete circulation in terms of dissemination of the protest graffiti, going from reaching viewers from a wall in Cairo, to viewers within the confines of social media's digital public space, back to physical walls elsewhere after it had been picked up online. This sort of back and forth entanglement, as it were, between the protesters on the ground reappropriating public space and protesters online doing the same within the digital public space of social media illustrates the level of interconnectivity the two spheres of "protest by reappropriation" had during the Egyptian Revolution. The online protests were bolstered by the ability to show footage, captured by protesters themselves, of what was happening at the moment in Cairo and elsewhere and not just merely talking about it. The protesters operating within physical public space were bolstered by the ability to share what they were doing with a global audience, as well as fellow protesters across Egypt, via social media. This not only ensured that their message would be heard by potentially the maximum amount of people willing to pay attention, but that, despite the Mubarak regime's attempts to the contrary, their repressive actions against the pro-democracy protesters would not go unseen.

As I alluded to in the beginning of this chapter, there was more happening during the Egyptian Revolution than just the synthesis of physical and digital reappropriation of public space for protest. The Egyptian Revolution, as many revolutions tend to be, was more than just an activity of reappropriating public space with standard graffiti to disseminate messages of protest. It was also an exercise in reappropriating the entirety of a cityscape itself and working to change it from something that worked for the regime to something that worked for the protesters. This was done by more than just reappropriating walls with anti-regime graffiti; it was done by occupying the whole of the public space of the city: things like bridges, buildings, squares, and

homes. And this act of total occupation was achieved with more than just writing on walls, it was done with the physical presence of the protesters themselves.

As previously noted in the literature review of this thesis, graffiti can be thought of as more than just spray paint on a wall, but rather as any type of “unofficial” or unsanctioned display within public space. I believe it is a safe argument to make that the presence of unsanctioned displays of protest by people against a regime or acts of physical occupation by protesters can also be considered as a sort of “unofficial graffiti.” These protest gatherings of people often work towards the same socio-political goals as many displays of protest graffiti. Furthermore, these public displays are often reacted to very harshly by the hegemonic systems that they seek to protest against. For proof of this, one needs look no further than the often brutal crackdowns imposed on demonstrators during any sort of anti-hegemonic protest during much of modern history. The most recent examples can be found in the anti-austerity protests in Europe or, more appropriate to this chapter, the pro-democracy protests of Egypt as part of the Arab Spring. Furthermore, as previously noted, Sklair argues that there is a deeper function to the components that make up our cities (buildings, monuments, public space, and walls); they are not merely passive structures and surfaces, they are active parts of a larger ideological apparatus that operates to disseminate ideological ideas that are in conjunction with the desired operations of the dominant hegemony of a society. A building is not merely a building; it operates as an ideological totem, an anchor of sorts, eliciting certain feelings and mentalities from the citizenry of a society that pushes them to think and act in a certain way. Moreover, walls are not merely surfaces, but rather platforms through which further ideological dissemination can occur. My argument is that, in tandem, we can think of the cityscape and walls as being part of an “ideological factory.” They operate in such a way that they help reproduce, disseminate, and

encourage a digestion of the dominant ideology of a society. If we look at the architecture of cities and the walls in public space in this regard, as places of production, then we can begin to see protests and revolutionary activity in the public sphere in a different light.

To illustrate this point, I am reminded of a recent trip to Paris. While there I was struck by the presence of French military personnel armed with sub-machine guns casually strolling around the large open courtyard in front of Norte Dame. They were there underneath the Eiffel Tower too. It was quite late at night; both the sites were closed and tourists were gone, so I wondered who exactly they were aiming to protect. It occurred to me that these guards were not there for the people that frequent these sites, but rather to protect the sites themselves. They were there to protect them for the same reason that someone would want to attack them: because they represent something beyond just a physical building. They operate as a space where the manifestation of an ideology can be disseminated. To attack the structure is to attack the backing ideology that it represents, to protect it is to ensure its ability to continue to represent this ideology. These guards, and the guards at other structures and areas of similar importance, are there because those that run their governments understand, at a base, unconscious level, that a city is not “just” a space or a collection of buildings, but rather it is an area constructed, woven together, and harnessed in the support of continually maintaining and reproducing a dominant ideology that works to encompass the people of a society under the auspices of the dominant hegemony in place. Norte Dame is not just a church, but a representation of the ideology that is “French-ness.” The same goes for the Eiffel Tower. The Empire State building is not just office space, it evokes an idea of “American-ness.” The Pyramids evoke “Egyptian-ness.” Structures not only represent abstract ideological notions of nationality; they can represent ideological notions of social structures too. The World Trade Center did not just evoke “American-ness” but

also stood as an ideological manifestation of “capitalism.” That is one of the chief reasons why it was targeted on 9/11.

When we consider iconic architecture not just as a simple building or structure, but as part of a larger ideological construction, we can begin to see cityscapes in a different light: as ideologically constructed environments that operate cohesively to disseminate information in favor of hegemony. When these ideological factories are reappropriated, they can be used to counter dominant ideology. Tahrir Square, the nucleus of the revolution in Cairo, was not merely a public square; it was also an important cultural site within Egyptian society with deeper ideological functions. The same can be said for the National Democratic Party (NDP) headquarters, or the State Television building, both seized and ransacked by the protesters in the first few days of the revolution. These public structures and others helped play a pivotal role in the perception of the Egyptian Revolution and the struggle between the Mubarak regime and the protesters not only in Egypt but around the world. Thus, we can view the act of physical occupation of a space (like a square, a road, a bridge, or a building) as the same type of reappropriation of public space accomplished by written graffiti: both are unauthorized acts aimed at seizing a space and using it to disseminate information in support of one’s own ideology. In this light, I argue that we can look at protests not just as social acts against ruling regimes, but rather through the classic Marxist idea of the seizure of the means of production from the ruling classes for the use of the proletariat in order to move forward with a revolution. The Egyptian Revolution was a popular uprising that centered around this idea of the seizure and occupation of public space, of taking it away from the regime and using it as a tool to fight against them. The Mubarak regime that controlled Egypt at the time understood the ideological

importance of controlling these areas and tried to stop the protesters from taking them over, but ultimately they were unsuccessful.

The previous discussion of the rather intense first few days of the Egyptian Revolution serves as a good point to being analyzing the way that the revolution was executed and how this execution mirrors Marx's ideas of seizing the means of production in order to "jumpstart" the revolution. For the purposes of this comparison, I will focus on three distinct aspect of the revolution: the burning down of the NDP headquarters and police stations along with the marches on the state TV building, the occupation of Tahrir Square, and the destruction of Mubarak portraits and use of anti-regime graffiti on the walls and surfaces of Cairo. Let me start my analysis by looking at the destruction of the NDP headquarters in Cairo along with the torching of police stations. The NDP headquarters and the police stations were physical bastions of regime power, but they also acted ideologically as iterations of Foucault's "panopticon" (Gutting 2005). Because of what these buildings represented—repressive state control and the threat of an unseen but watching state presence—they reproduced and fed to the public the ideological notion that Mubarak and the NDP controlled Egypt and Cairo. Their ideological control was anchored by these iconic buildings in the city. Like Sklair's argument that the Sydney Opera House represented "Australia-ness" and ultimately "capitalism," these buildings represented "Mubarak-ness" and ultimately state repression and lack of freedom (2010).

When the protesters decided to attack the police stations, the state TV building and the NDP headquarters it was because of the ideological cache that these buildings held and what they represented in the collective minds of Egyptians. To destroy them was to destroy some of the regime's control and show everyone else that they were capable of being overthrown. This was one of the first and perhaps biggest advantages that the protesters managed to have over the

regime ideologically. It worked in their favor to weaken the ideological efforts of the regime and strengthen their own position among the population as a force capable of serious revolutionary action. It should be noted, however, that while the Mubarak regime suffered ideologically (and thus the regime itself suffered) by the destruction of these iconic buildings, not all iconic buildings or spaces in Cairo stood as representations of the Mubarak regime. There were buildings in Cairo that represented more of an idea of “Egyptian-ness,” some type of trans-historical pan nationalistic appeal beyond the confines of any one party or regime. Protesters, before the army took over the job, made very sure to protect the Egyptian Museum so that it would not be attacked by looters or Pro-Mubarak thugs hoping to pin damage on the protesters. They formed a human chain around the museum during the first few days of the revolution in order to protect it for its “Egyptian-ness” value. Just as the destruction of the NDP headquarters served to bolster the revolution, the protection of the Egyptian Museum served to bolster the people as well.

The holding and occupation of Tahrir Square by the protesters mirrors the “unauthorized” seizure and occupation of the factories after the expulsion of the capitalists in Marx’s writings on the mechanics of social revolution (Marx and Engels 2006: 40). Holding the square gave the protesters an ideological edge over the regime. It managed to show, like the destruction of the NDP headquarters did, that in fact the regime did not control the city; it was the people of Cairo that controlled Cairo. The occupation was meant to show that they would no longer allow the regime to exploit them. The holding of Tahrir Square also spoke to the rest of the population. It showed the relative strength of the protesters in relation to the increasing weakness of the Mubarak regime. As the protests went on, more people showed up to Tahrir Square to be with the protesters; more people came out to the streets; more people closed businesses or started



strikes in solidarity. This increased solidarity between the initial group of protesters and the rest of the population mirrors Marx's discussion of the workers getting the rest of the lower classes to join them in their fight against the ruling classes. It also worked to begin changing the ideological function of the city from a "factory" that Mubarak controlled, where everyone that lived there were just cogs in machines, to one that worked for and with the protesters. The longer Tahrir Square was held, and the longer it worked to disseminate a counter ideological message that Cairo was theirs, not Mubarak's, the more people began to accept that idea. Journalists reported that by the fourth day of the revolution people were already talking about Mubarak in the past tense. When asked, various Egyptians said that Mubarak "had been fired by the streets. He is no longer wanted" (Gohnim).

If iconic buildings and spaces can be thought of as ideological anchors, things and places meant to seduce or subject, walls are the surfaces where the real undercover ideological work occurs. While iconic architectural buildings have a certain visibility that is used in the service of ideological dissemination, walls operate so effectively because they present themselves as blank passive spaces when they are anything but. Cairo, like many other Egyptian cities, had large amounts of portraiture on display depicting a benevolent looking Mubarak looking down on his "subjects" from the lofty perches of billboards, sides of buildings, or even just sign posts. Some of these portraits were just the size of regular pictures, some were large murals, and some were huge depictions of Mubarak that covered buildings; these were some of the first things that protesters removed and defaced. Pictures of Mubarak were torn down, trashed, or burned all over the country by angry protesters. What could not be torn down was defaced or painted over. Anti-Mubarak and pro-revolutionary graffiti went up all over the city, especially around Tahrir Square.

As noted earlier, even tanks and other army vehicles were graffitied by the revolutionary protesters in a bid to declare them as also being reappropriated by the protesters against the Mubarak regime (Wedeman). Of interesting note was one interaction between pro-Mubarak demonstrators and the protesters that involved competing graffiti. After the clashes were subdued and the Mubarak loyalists were chased away, the revolutionaries noted that the loyalists had written pro-Mubarak graffiti on statues and other surfaces in Tahrir Square in an attempt to try and reclaim the space for the regime. The removal of pro-Mubarak portraits and the replacement of them with anti-regime graffiti or simple messages of support for Egypt (or even in some cases nothing at all) on the surfaces of Cairo worked to change the ideological function of those surfaces. Much like the previous example of how graffiti on the Palestinian separation barrier changed the ideological function of the barrier from being a symbol of Israeli occupation to being a symbol of the resistance to it, the walls and surfaces of Cairo changed from platforms that disseminated regime ideologies in tandem with the rest of the ideological cityscape to platforms that declared the fall of the regime and the control of the people of the public space. Even by the very idea of the regime not being able to control the surfaces of the city, it became clear that the regime did not control the people or the country either. If they could no longer produce and disseminate ideology from the “factory” that was the public space of the city, then they could not do anything.

From the combination of these three elements (i.e., the destruction of the “iconic” buildings of the ruling NDP by the protesters, the occupation and holding of Tahrir Square throughout the revolution by the protesters, and the reappropriation of the walls and surfaces of Cairo to act as platforms for the anti-regime revolutionary message) we can see how the use of these by the protesters worked together to change the ideological function of the city and make it

operate as a place that exuded the notion that it belonged to the revolution, to the people, rather than to the regime. To offer further examples of this, one can look to journalist accounts of the change in the actions of the people of Cairo towards their city. Cairo was known as being a rather dirty, chaotic city that most people could not bring themselves to take pride in appearance-wise. This mirrored an apathy that most people had when it came to voting or dealing with the Mubarak regime; they knew that the structures of their society were rigged against them so they had given up trying to change them or care. The beginning of the revolution and the reappropriation of the city by the protesters changed this mentality within the people. In order to protect themselves and their neighbors from possible attacks by looters or thugs, neighborhoods put together watch teams to help protect each other, rejecting the police and taking the job on themselves. Ordinary people provided security for their fellow citizens at Tahrir Square during the occupation and made sure to toss out any troublemakers and protect the weaker among them. People took up brooms and began sweeping and cleaning the area around Tahrir Square, leading one revolutionary to remark that it was the cleanest he had seen the streets of Cairo in years (Gohnim). Finally, after the revolution brought about the fall of the regime, a journalist remarked with awe at seeing protesters repainting a curb near Tahrir Square in order to make it look better. Egyptians had finally taken pride in their city because they had, led by the protesters, finally taken back the city from the ideological clutches of the regime and made it work for them again, putting out the ideological notion that Cairo was once again a city owned and operated by the people, not the regime.

### ***5.1 Conclusion***

This chapter examined the fundamentals of the Egyptian Revolution and the pivotal role played by the many protesters who participated in it. As I endeavored to show, the 2011

Egyptian Revolution stood as an example of the melding of the previous two examples of the act of reappropriation of public space for the purpose of socio-political protest (physical and digital reappropriation). This amalgamation of the different reappropriation and protest techniques into an interlocking machine of sorts worked to produce much more effective results than they could have done separately. Furthermore, as I attempted to illustrate, there is a wider perspective that we could view the Egyptian Revolution from. This broader perspective works to tie the activities of all the protesters together, cementing them within a larger spectrum of ideas in regards to what exactly the scope of public space is and what the reappropriation of it can really be. I argued that just as graffiti can be thought of as more than just spray paint on a wall, the construction of the cityscape can be thought of as something beyond just an arbitrary collection of buildings. Instead, it is a cohesive unit with a strong ideological undertone. The pairing of certain “iconic” architectural structures with the open platform for information dissemination that are the walls and public surfaces of society combine to operate as a sort of “ideology factory,” working in tandem to help disseminate a certain ideological perspective among the general population of a society. Ultimately what this combines to do is to create an ideological atmosphere where citizens think that their city (or country or society) is not something that is publicly and collectively owned by all; instead, it is a space owned and operated by the ruling classes that they are allowed to exist in at the regime’s discretion. The cityscape is structured by regimes, whether they are benign capitalist ones or repressive autocratic ones, as a place where an ideology that favors the dominant hegemony can be reproduced and disseminated as long as people believe that these spaces are not theirs. However, as I have argued, if the cityscape can operate as an ideology factory for the regime, then it can be seized, occupied, and made to work for the people instead, particularly in the case of social upheaval or revolution. If an entire city can be thought

of as a space designed for the dissemination of ideology, then it too can be reappropriated to counter that practice. The reappropriation of a city, the unauthorized occupation of its squares and streets during protests can be thought of operating in the same way as the unauthorized reappropriation of a wall or surface by a graffiti writer, and with much of the same goals. In this sense, the protesters of the Egyptian Revolution who were out on the streets and in Tahrir Square became a sort of “human graffiti,” existing in spaces they were not welcome in while attempting to communicate a message they were kept from articulating elsewhere.

Thus we can view the Egyptian Revolution as a sort of “total package” in terms of the use of graffiti (broadly defined) and the reappropriation of public space as a means of protest. The revolutionary protesters drew on many aspects of the ideas initially espoused by graffiti writers during the beginning of the modern graffiti movement, most notably the idea that “writing” on an area operates to proclaim your ownership of it, and that you too have a stake in its existence. The protesters also worked to utilize the semi-egalitarian communication structures of digital public space created by the advent of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as a further means of communicating not only with each other but against the Mubarak regime. Furthermore, the protesters recognized the benefits of using these two approaches of public space reappropriation in tandem with each other, so that activities undertaken within physical public space could be bolstered by activities within digital public space and vice versa. But beyond all else, the tactics used during the Egyptian Revolution represent a sort of realization of the ultimate goals of the modern graffiti movement: to have the ability to have a voice within a society that seeks to delegitimize individuals; to have a stake in the confines of the city in which individuals live in; and to be recognized as sharing communal ownership of their society and its cities. The protesters of the Egyptian Revolution worked to achieve these goals through the reappropriation

of the entirety of their ideologically constructed landscape by taking back the walls and surface of the city, by using the digital public space to further enhance and free their voice, and by going out and reappropriating the entirety of Cairo and beyond for the whole of their society, not just for those that sought to rule it.

## Chapter 6:

### Synthesis and Conclusion

“Imagine a city where graffiti wasn’t illegal, a city where everybody could draw wherever they liked. Where every street was awash with a million colors and little phrases. Where standing at a bus stop was never boring. A city that felt like a party where everyone was invited, not just the estate agents and barons of big business. Imagine a city like that and stop leaning against the wall—it’s wet.” –Banksy

“Freedom is never something that is voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.” –Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the small central London neighborhood of Marylebone, tucked away between Regent’s Park to the north and Oxford Circus to the south, a new graffiti piece by Banksy recently appeared. The piece, which now sits under a protective Perspex cover (no doubt put there to save it from an anti-graffiti councilmember’s wandering paintbrush), was stenciled on the side of an auto garage, just across from a small pub close to London University. The piece consists of a simple message written in red paint: “If graffiti changed anything, it would be illegal” (Fig. 11). The quote is a play on a well known quote by the famous Emma Goldman, a political activist and anarchist active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: “If voting changed anything, they’d make it illegal.” The imagined rationale behind the quote was that Goldman believed that the electoral system in democratic countries was so corrupt, flawed, and skewed towards maintaining the existing structures of power and keeping the elites of society right where they were (i.e., in charge of everything) that if the voting system were to ever become an effective tool of political change for the general populace, then the ruling elites would have it banned outright, recognizing it as a threat to their continued existence. However, as the seriously rigged system stood, the social and political elites that dominated the governing systems of Western countries (particularly in the U.S. where Goldman was quite active) felt little need to fear any serious change or challenge to their ruling infrastructure. Thus they were content

to let people continue participating in the fantasy that being able to vote meant they had a say in how the system was run. Were any serious threat ever to arise from the general population through voting, of course that method of societal engagement would be stripped from the general public post-haste.

Of course, the irony of the statement in Banksy's graffiti, and thus its entire point, is that graffiti is indeed illegal, often outrageously so. While some more enlightened city officials have tried to take an even handed approach to graffiti and socio-political expression within public space, they are more often the exception rather than the rule. Virtually every major city in the world has laws on the books dealing harshly with anyone caught participating in graffiti. The punishment ranges from jail time to steep fines, to even corporal punishment in some of the less forgiving places, such as Singapore. In the U.S., various city police chiefs, mayors, and other public officials have saved some of their harshest criticisms for graffiti writers, often referring to them as "vandals," "criminals," or, even more aggressively, as "trash" or "thugs" (Mailer 1974). John Lindsay, the Mayor of New York City during the graffiti boom of the 1970s, was particularly aggressive in his condemnation of graffiti writers, at one point calling them "insecure cowards" (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 58). The man that followed John Lindsay as mayor of New York, Ed Koch, referred to graffiti as "disgusting" and an act perpetrated by "animals" who he claimed were "destroying the city" (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 23).

This is to say nothing of the often deadly proposition it is to write graffiti (or protest in general) in more repressive countries around the world. During the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, there were many accounts of protesters who were caught writing graffiti that were subject to beatings, arrests, or worse by regime security forces. The typically heavy handed response to graffiti, graffiti writers, and other protesters begs the



question: why such a forceful response against these acts and their participants if there is not some type of danger within them to challenge and change the structures of the system they protest against? Banksy's graffiti, in providing a twist on an old political adage, seems to answer that question. Graffiti and socio-political protest within and on public space can actually change things, and that is exactly why it is feared by so many within positions of power across the political spectrum. If there was no chance that these acts might stir something within people to question the ideological structures of the systems that they find themselves in, then there would be no need to be so forcefully opposed to them.

There is a second component to the aforementioned Banksy piece in Marylebone, London. Below the scrawled red text of the Banksy graffiti there stands a small stenciled rat looking back up over his shoulder at the piece above. The rat has a small amount of red paint on one of its paws, implying that it is the "creator" of the above graffiti. The rat has been a staple of Banksy's work for many years now, appearing in various guises in practically every city where he has created graffiti. Often these rats are humorously dressed up to look like regular people engaging in various activities like running to work, playing basketball, getting married, or creating graffiti themselves. Banksy has commented at various points why he likes using the visual image of a rat, succinctly summing up his notions on the idea by stating that, "They exist with permission. They are hated, hunted, and persecuted. They live in quiet desperation amongst the filth. And yet, they are capable of bringing entire civilizations to their knees. If you are dirty, insignificant, and unloved then rats are the ultimate role model" (Banksy 2007: 95). It is no small irony that at various times both graffiti writers as well as various protesters and revolutionaries during democratic uprisings have been referred to as rats, most famously perhaps by Libya's

Muammar Gaddafi, who referred to the protesters in his country as “rats and dogs” during their 2011 revolution (Sorcher 2011).

There is a second use of the metaphor of the rat that reverberates in Banksy’s use of them in his graffiti: the “rat race.” A common Western colloquial phrase used to describe the daily grind of living and working in a capitalist system, where a mindless repetitive job sucks the life out of you with no visible benefit to yourself, least of all a decent living. The use of rats in Banksy’s pieces, in particular the use of one to write a statement about the power of graffiti, is telling. The message seems to be that most of us are rats in one way or another; we are either the discarded or the rundown of a society, constantly running on a wheel that moves nowhere. In parsing Banksy’s sentiment, we see that he means to compare the downtrodden, the serially abused, and the overworked among a population to the lowly rat, but to also assert that they have a great power within society should they choose to use it. And indeed, in Banksy’s graffiti, the rats have taken notice of their capabilities and have begun to fight back against an unfair system. So too, it would seem, have the people that Banksy positively compares to rats come to realize their own power and begun to use it in public space for protest, often to great effect.

We have seen through throughout this thesis that many of the people who partake in the types of protest that I have analyzed also realize the dangerous potential of “graffiti” as an act of opposition to the ideological structures of the status quo. Proof of this idea can be found in examples of the very first writers of modern graffiti in New York who reappropriated public space and subway cars to say, if nothing else, “I exist. I have an identity and a say in this system, just the same as anyone else; I will not be invisible.” It can also be seen in the creations of later artists who took this idea of public space as an unmediated platform to communicate with others (not just a place for hegemonic forces to disseminate ideology down a one way street), proclaim

their existence, and speak to others about what mattered to them. Banksy continued this tradition with his carnivalesque graffiti pieces. His graffiti and other creations have often worked to change the conversation surrounding seemingly taboo aspects of the ideological underpinnings of Western society (such as capitalism and the security state) by wrapping his underlying socio-political points in a humorous or whimsical subject matter which draw in viewers to consider their meaning and, perhaps, start a dialogue with others.

Online activism has worked to bring this idea of reappropriation of public space as a means of protest to the realm of digital space and social media. Social activist groups like the “hacker collective” Anonymous have reappropriated websites of corrupt regimes in the Middle East or unaccountable corporations and used their pages to display messages of protest against their “criminal” actions. Meanwhile, grassroots movements consisting of activists combined with ordinary people with similar concerns have worked to occupy the digital public space of corporate social media websites in order to convey messages of dissatisfaction with their practices and the effects they have on ordinary people. The example of protesters overwhelming Nestlé’s Facebook wall with message of protest in order to confront them about their palm oil harvesting practices stands as an excellent example of the success of these tactics, but it is hardly the only one. And finally, we saw in the example of the first phase of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution how all of these various aspects of protest within reappropriated public space could be used together to shape and amplify a message, communicate with others, and work towards achieving their goals. Egyptian revolutionaries not only participated in reappropriating walls within the public space of Egypt’s cities as platforms to showcase anti-regime messages, but they also reappropriated public space itself: taking over buildings, occupying squares, and, in general, controlling the space of the city as a way to combat the Mubarak regime’s hold on the country.

In addition to these tactics within physical public space, they also expertly utilized the digital public spaces of social media to coordinate protests with other Egyptians, warn each other of impending danger, and alert the outside world to the realities of the revolution through an unmitigated communication channel that the regime could not effectively control, thus keeping the regime from being able to effectively brutalize the public without backlash and ending with its overthrow.

As I have endeavored to show in this thesis, graffiti should be more broadly defined than simply as something being writing on a wall. While the use of graffiti has existed across the ages, in this study I reviewed the evolution of the practice in the U.S. from the rise of modern graffiti in New York and Philadelphia in the late 1960s to the rise of street art and other forms of socio-political protest within reappropriated public space. I also analyzed the emerging use of similar tactics for protest within the new and emerging realms of digital public space and social media. Finally, we can also look to the examples of the present where all these different aspects of protest within public and digital space are often used in tandem by protesters, revolutionaries, and other counter-hegemonic forces to create a synthesis of the strengths associated with the various platforms and mediums and where they use these tactics to further their goals of protest and engagement. These assorted examples, which employ various facets of one overarching idea, show that public space can indeed be reappropriated for protest. They have also shown that sometimes the most effective measures of countering dominant ideology and hegemonic control within a society lie outside the normal channels of communication and instead can be found within the common space that we all interact within instead.

The case studies that I analyzed in this thesis are hardly the only examples of the effectiveness of the reappropriation of public space, both physical and digital, for socio-political

protest. Instances of protest continue to arise, especially now that we seem to find ourselves in the midst of increasing global dissatisfaction with the hegemonic constructions of our current social and political systems. Following the seizure and occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, protesters in Bahrain, during their own attempted uprising in 2011, physically occupied the iconic Pearl Roundabout in a show of protest against the repressive ruling Shiite minority monarchy. Although these protesters ultimately were beaten by the regime (both literally and figuratively) and removed from the Pearl Roundabout, the brutal response from the regime there against the mere presence of protesters within an iconic public space spoke both to the power of the underlying ideological function that public space can have and the weakness that is revealed within a regime when they lose control of these spaces. The official government response to the protesters seizure and reappropriation of this space with their “unauthorized” presence was telling. The Bahraini regime bulldozed the area, set it on fire and, ultimately, tore down the large Pearl monument that was at the center of the roundabout. The regime, through a state television broadcast, stated that the Pearl monument had been “defiled” and the area “needed to be cleansed” (Al Jazeera English 2011). The Bahraini regime had lost control of the ideological meaning of the space to the protesters and the only way they felt that they could effectively counter that was by destroying it, depriving both sides of its utilization.

Another example of this would be the pro-union protests that erupted in Madison, Wisconsin during the beginning of 2011, which roughly coincided with the onset of many of the Arab Spring protests. In the case of Wisconsin, the pro-union supporters occupied the state capitol in Madison as means of protest and ideological challenge to the administration of the newly elected Governor Scott Walker that was trying to pass, by their measures, a very harsh anti-union bill with the hope that the general population of Wisconsin either would not notice or

would not care (Kroll 2011). This occupation by the physical “unauthorized” bodies of the protesters in what should have been considered truly public space (the capitol building), as well as their reappropriation of the walls of the interior of the capitol building, mirrored very closely the same type of occupy and reappropriate strategy that was employed in Cairo. The results, at least among much of the general population, were similar too. The occupation of the state capitol challenged the ideological notion put forward by the Walker administration (and indeed, many other administrations at all levels of government) that the capitol building, even though it is discussed in hollow terms as belonging to “the people,” really belongs to those running the government. When the protesters occupied the capitol, going as far as to have sit-ins and sleepovers to maintain a continuous presence, they shattered the, until then, largely unchallenged ideological conception that it was a place that belong to “the governors” and reasserted within the minds of their fellow citizens that it was in fact the property of “the governed;” the legislators were there at their prerogative, not the other way around.

The surfaces of the inside of the capitol building played an integral role as both a platform for ideological dissemination for the government as well as a reappropriated space for the dissemination of a counter-ideological push from the protesters. The interior walls of the capitol and their use can be considered parallel to the public walls and surfaces of Cairo and their use as a platform for furthering the dissemination of ideological control by the Mubarak regime. The walls of the capitol building were adorned with portraits of notable legislatures and the governors of Wisconsin, working to facilitate an ideological assumption of who the state capitol building “belonged” to, much in the same way that the practice of placing large portraits and posters of Mubarak on the walls and billboards of Cairo worked to further cement the ideological notion that Cairo, and Egypt, belonged to Mubarak. While the protesters in the state capitol did

not take down or destroy the pictures of the legislatures already displayed, unlike the fate that befell the Mubarak portraits in Egypt, they did hang many of their own signs of protest alongside these portraits, in an attempt to reappropriate the space for their own purposes. The reappropriation of the walls within the state capitol transformed from being spaces that blankly reflected the ideological assumptions of those in charge to spaces that actively disseminated messages of support for public workers (and, by extension, the people protesting for them). In other words, the use of the capitol walls as spaces to protest against the proposed anti-union bill further cemented the ideological transformation of the capitol as a space that worked to reify the dominant ideologies recirculated by the government to a space that worked to promote a counter-ideology: one of people power against a ruling body.

Following a similar path, there was also the Occupy Wall Street protests that were formed to protest the worst excesses of global capitalist systems. During the latter half of 2011, protesters in the U.S. started a movement called “Occupy Wall Street” to protest the excesses of corporate America, the rampant corruption of the American political system by outside corporate interests, and, most of all, the continuing spiral of increasing income inequality that had been occurring since the late 1970s. Taking their cues from the protests in the Middle East and Wisconsin, these protesters combined all three of the aforementioned tactics that were so successfully employed in Egypt. They held an area of public space; they wrote messages on the walls and surfaces of the city around them; and they used the public space and walls of social media as a way of not only coordinating among themselves, but amplifying their message and opening another front of protest against the corporate structures they were fighting against. These actions thrust the Occupy movement into the national dialogue, bringing people to discuss their grievances against corporate America and the political system it bought (Minton 2012). After the

initial Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City came to be seen as such a success, other Occupy protest movements sprang up all across the U.S. and Europe. The political dialogue in the U.S. was particularly affected as discussions of corporate excess, political corruption, and income inequality became high-visibility political concerns, whereas before they were relegated to the sidelines in discussions (Sawhill 2011).

Beyond groups utilizing public space for explicit socio-political protest, there has been increasing movement towards advocacy for the allowance of the use of public space simply for simple acts of public expression by the general populace. While there are many “public spaces for public art and expression” advocacy groups across the U.S., there is one in particular in Atlanta known as Living Walls that stands as an excellent example of people arguing that public space, especially walls and surfaces, should be used as platforms for public and artistic expression. Living Walls is centered on the idea that the walls of a city are a place where artistic expression and public discourse should take place. As such, they have worked to bring together street artists and graffiti writers from all over the world to work in Atlanta and transform the city’s walls. As Living Walls states on their website, “Along with changing the urban landscape, the Living Walls conference set out to highlight a number of problems facing the city. Living Walls did not just showcase art, but also built a platform for much-needed dialogue in the city. [...] Our intentions are simply to broadcast to the attendees a wide spectrum of ideas about public space, hoping that everyone leaves the event looking at the city, its walls, and how we interact with space differently” (Living Walls 2011). Their general sentiments about the artistic potential of public walls and city surfaces, and the idea that these spaces should be open to all, not just the few that control the city, harkens back to the first writers of the modern graffiti



movement in New York and Philadelphia who thought of how much more beautiful their city could be if everyone got a say in what to put on its walls.

The surfaces and public spaces of a society have almost always been the main place in which the ideological debates over definitions of identity and purpose have taken place. This is because these surfaces are what a society sees first, and thus it plays a large part in how not only people relate to each other, but how a population relates to the state. From this the surface can be seen as the foremost physical representation of the ideological underpinnings of a society's values. It must be remembered that there is always going to be dialogue between those who wish to define a society's population and those who are being defined. Sometimes this is a peaceful exchange and the identities associated with these surfaces change without much turbulence. However, when the traditional channels of dialogue break down or are closed, people need to be able to express their opposition somewhere else. In the ongoing contention between those that control society and those who seek to exist more equally within it, the use of the wall within public space has proven to be a useful tool in furthering the ends for those who feel they have no voice within the system they seek to change.

The use of "unauthorized" graffiti on these surfaces, in all its forms, works to take them back from hegemonic forces and again place them and what they represent in the hands of the people. By changing these surfaces they are communicating to the forces that oppress or neglect them and to each other that they, not them, have the right to define how they live. They are communicating that these public surfaces belong to everyone, not just the elite, and that, most importantly, they are not alone in thinking this. As our societies advance into a future world that is becoming increasingly interconnected through new technologies like social media and the internet, our ability to communicate and empathize with each other, as well as fight for each

other's causes, has grown. While the ways that people work to foster change within unjust systems has changed dramatically over time, there is still a core foundation driving the philosophies of many of those that work for socio-political change. The basic underlying tenets of this fight have not only persevered but grown along a continuum into the future, being appropriated and integrated by each generation of activist, protester, and fed-up citizen as they have each looked in turn for the most effective way to address their grievances.



Figure 11. Banksy Wall  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk

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## Appendix

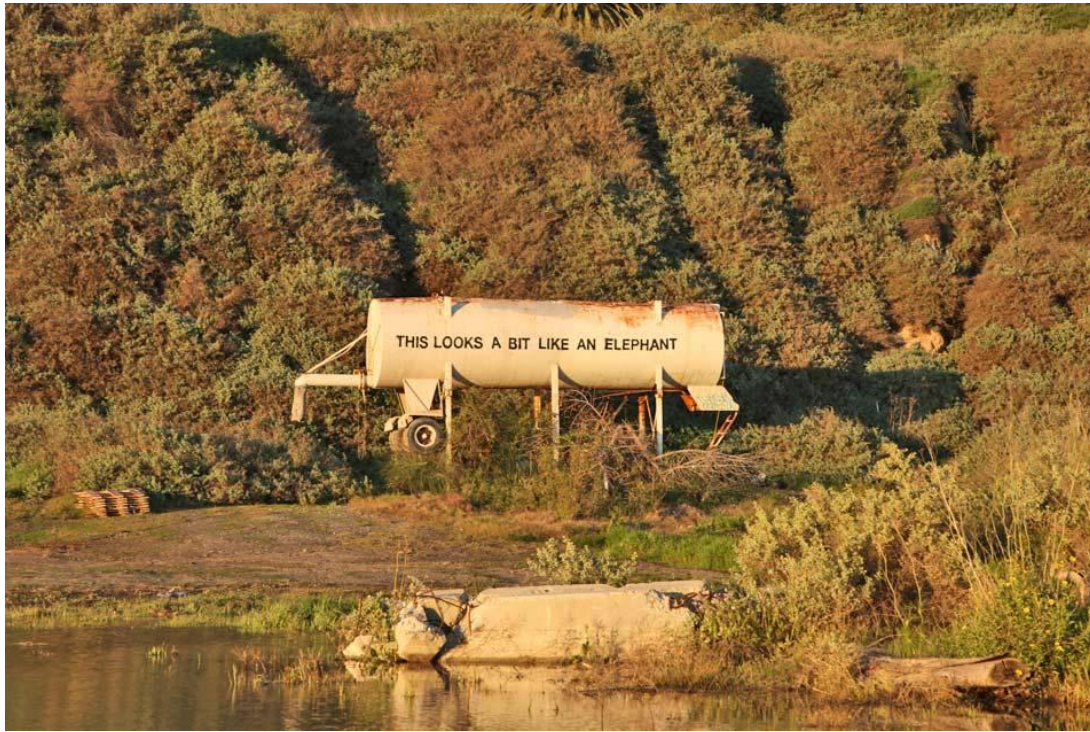


Figure 1. 'Tank Elephant'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk

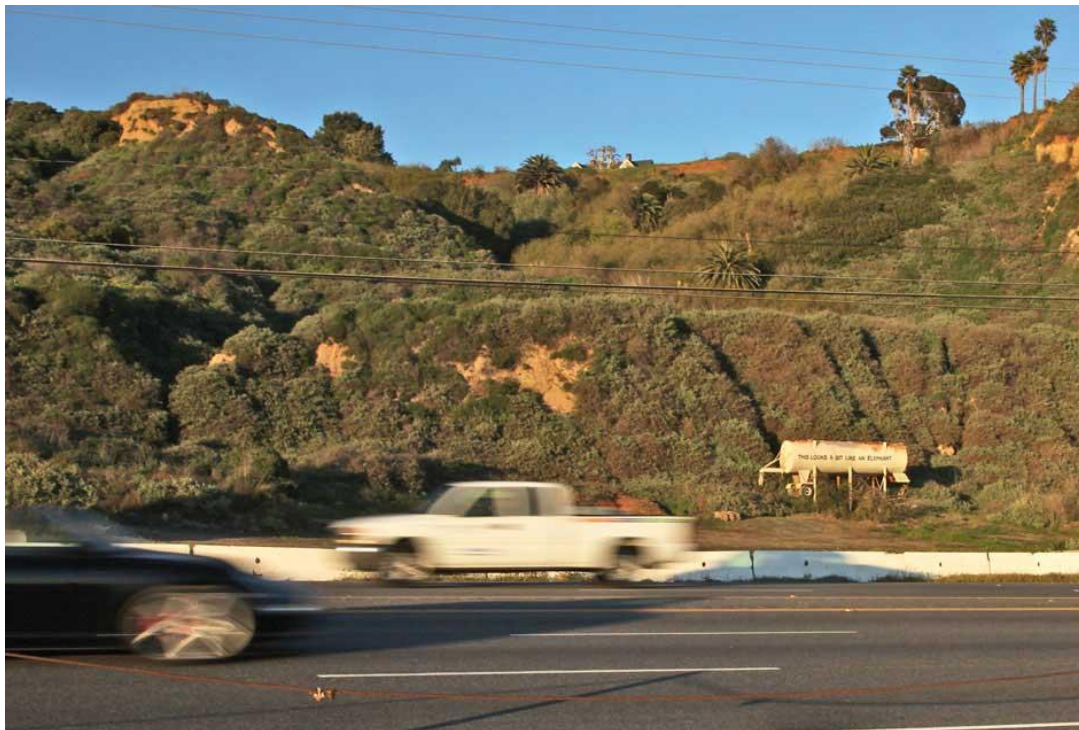


Figure 1a. 'Tank Elephant' Zoomed out  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 2. 'Road Sign'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 2a. Actual Road Sign  
Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 3. 'Island Boy'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 4. Ostctv  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 5. Banksy Billboard  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 6. Tesco Flag  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk





Figure 7. Palestine Wall Cut-Out  
 Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 8. 'Palestine Wall Pull Back'  
 Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 9. 'Palestine Wall Ladder'  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 10. Balloon Girl  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk



Figure 11. Banksy Wall  
Courtesy: Banksy.co.uk