

Framing Graffiti & Street Art

**Proceedings of Nice Street Art Project,
International Conferences, 2017 - 2018**

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Framing Graffiti & Street Art

Introduction

Where is Street Art?

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The ten papers published here were first released as presentations during the last two events of the Nice Street Art Project held in 2017 and 2018 in Nice, France: the conference “Framing Street Art” and the seminar “Street Art Europe”.

Framing artworks made in the streets for –and often with– the public is very problematic. However, frames are central topics in the living forms of art named graffiti and street art. When Banksy’s *Girl with Balloon* was shredded by its big golden frame at Sotheby’s London in October 2018, becoming *Love Is in the Bin*, who was found guilty? What was framed? If spilling over and trespassing are in the genes of graffiti and street art, so are the borders and frames: graffiti and street artworks need them to be able to violate them.

The ten chapters of the book, first released as presentations during the conference “Framing Street Art” (2017) and the seminar “Street Art Europe” (2018) all question borderlines, frames and framing. Written by various researchers and artists, young and seasoned, from different countries and cultural backgrounds, and from a wide range of disciplines and activities (Aesthetics, Architecture and Urbanism, Art History, Communication Studies, Contemporary Art, Cultural Studies, English-American Studies, Italian Studies, Philosophy, Psychology), they also address the *vexata quaestio* of what graffiti and street art are. Beyond terminological dissents among scholars and between the latter and non-academics, and taking for granted that each contributor frames his/her own definition, the overall conception of graffiti and street art is that of umbrella terms, for their boundaries are quite blurred and constantly changing.

According to such a basic definition, we found US-Canadian artist Edward Hillel and French artist Lucas Bernardeschi to fit very well in the event, although their works are not usually labelled as street art. The Homme-sandwich performance that Hillel set up in the end of the meeting (fig. 1)¹, part of Project 43 which is “always in-situ, always collaborative and always dependent on its reception by and interaction with local audiences for its completion”, as he writes, is intrinsically based on the urban environment and the people living there or passing by.



Fig. 1 (Joy Serradell, Kevin Gallet for Project 43 in Nice, France, 2017)

¹ The photographs reproduced on fig. 1 and fig. 2 were shot by Edward Hillel and José Gimeno. All others were shot by Edwige Comoy Fusaro. Many thanks to prof. Jeff Storey who kindly proofread this introduction.

Not so differently, but in other ways, Bernardeschi's *Gisants* set in the venue of the conference (fig. 2), who silently attended our talks and discussions, were exceptionnally extracted from their natural environment: the streets. Hosting Hillel's performance and Bernardeschi's installations was part of the questioning on the boundaries and the attempt to narrow down the core of street art. Framing street art meant, on the one hand, continuing the discussion on the nature and criteria of street art and, on the other hand, pushing lines.



Fig. 2 (Lucas Bernardeschi, *Gisant*, Nice, France, 2017)

Indeed, framing street art may appear as nonsense, but this immediate superficial incompatibility happens to stimulate and nurture street art. Isn't this what Banksy meant with his last coup on October the 5th of 2018, the shredded *Girl with Balloon* renamed as *Love Is in the Bin*? Significantly, the big golden frame was the weapon and the art tool. The first obstacle to combine frame with street art lies in the concept of a frame as a window, which allows the vision to focus and not to get lost. Leon Battista Alberti wrote:

First of all, I draw on the surface on which I will paint a rectangle with right angles, as big as I want, and I consider it as an open window from which I may contemplate what will be painted. [*Principio, dove io debbo dipingere scrivo uno quadrangolo di retti angoli quanto grande io voglio, el quale reputo essere una finestra aperta per donde io miri quello che quivi sarà dipinto*] (Alberti 1435: I, 19)

Similarly, in S/Z Roland Barthes wrote that, in a description, the enunciator

stands in front of the window, not to see well, but rather to give roots to what he sees through its frame [*se poste à la fenêtre, non tellement pour bien voir, mais pour fonder ce qu'il voit par son cadre même*] (Barthes 1970)

When Daniel Arasse commented on the above-mentioned famous quote from Alberti's *De Pictura*, he also noted that the window is open on an independent world, autonomous for the very reason that it is built up according to its own rules, artificially composed [un monde propre, autonome au sens précis qu'il est construit selon sa propre loi, artificiellement composé] (Arasse 1995: 23).

This quality of being closed allows the space of representation to be readable. The eyes and the mind can comprehend what is depicted in this space because it is enclosed on all sides and therefore has unity, becomes an entity:

The canvas is the system through which the thing which has to be known is synthesized, unified and construed. It brings together what used to be scattered [*Le tableau est le dispositif par lequel la connaissance est mise en synthèse, unifiée et interprétée. Elle ramasse ce qui était dispersé*] (Laïdi 2000: 12).

The frame is a moment, that of the start –or birth– where the beholder switches from his environmental chaos into the field of meaning –the field of painting [*Le cadre est un moment, celui du début –ou de la naissance–, où le spectateur bascule du bruit qui l'environne dans l'ordre du sens –dans l'ordre de la peinture*] (Rougé 1995 (b): 28).

The space circumscribed by the frame-window is a miniature cosmos. As such, yet, the art work is isolated from the environment, whereas street art is first and foremost an art *of the street*: *in the street*, *for the street*, and in many cases –when site specific, interactive and dialogical– even *by the street*. It is part of a universe, it is genetically not complete per se.

However, the frame as a device of “artification” (Heinich & Shapiro, 2012) is sometimes used by the artists themselves (self-artification), depicting a frame or using a ready-made frame-like characteristic of the prop, often architectural or simply visual (fig. 3). By framing the work, the artist claims artistic status equal to that of already framed works or other works labelled as art works and provides to the work all benefits of the physical frame.



Fig. 3 (Mosko et associés, Paris, France, 2015)



Fig. 4 (Banksy, London, UK, 2014)

The frame as a device of “artification” may also be used by others (hetero-artification), usually by placing a plexiglass on the work or cutting the work out from its initial environment in order to make it long-lasting (fig. 4) and perhaps transportable and salable. Then the process of “artification” happens after the production of the work. The frame slightly differs from the physical border that surrounds and supports the work, since it can either cover the whole work or consists of the edges of the piece of wall (or other prop) where the work was initially located. But is it still street art?

Preservation, either by placing a plexiglass on a work, extracting it from its natural site, or through photographs, implies framing the work, deciding where it starts and ends. Now, the limits of a street art work are undecidable and constantly changing, because a street art work, often site-specific, performative and transient, is necessarily participative, “conversational” (Hansen and Flynn 2015), “shared [partagée]” (Bertini 2015), open, public, alive. The Italian street artist NemO’s showed it with figurative works that evolve in time, showing the bones underneath the clothing and skin.

The non-framed part of the work might be restored with words, in a comment, nevertheless the work ends up being severed. Moreover, it is deprived of its nature as a contextual piece of art and as an experience, since neither the passers-by nor the urban context –always changing itself– can act on it anymore. If the Spanish artist Borondo’s little scratch-painted work (fig. 5) was extracted from its location in the street, framed and exhibited at eye level, it would lose a lot of its vulnerable beauty, also due to its size and placement.



Fig. 5 (Borondo, Rome, Italy, 2014)



Fig. 6 (Draw for Memorie Urbane, Gaeta, Italy, 2016)

Framing a street art work for preservation raises questions about the borders and nature of the work, about the role of the beholders and promoters, and about the authorship of street art. An image of an art work is not the work, especially when the work is constantly changing, which is why street art is not an “Internet Art”, unlike what Katja Glaser stated at the first conference of the NSAP (then in Glaser 2015). Is an image of the work maybe a part of the work? It could be in some cases, of example if we think about the German artist Bond TruLuv or the French artist Georges Rousse, whose works of art are the photos made afterwards: by the first with long exposure and an appropriate light, by the second with a unique viewpoint. In both cases, the painted piece of the work in itself (Bond TruLuv’s tag, Rousse’s installation) is not the work but only part of it.

The street art work is open in many ways: like in the Portuguese artist Draw’s piece in Gaeta where the scratched paint was applied on glass and the background is necessarily part of the art work (fig. 6). The non-art or *parergon* is integrated into the space of art or *ergon*.

The frame as «boundary to the art work» (Duro 1996) is incompatible with art works whose boundaries are uncertain because it identifies a clear distinction between what constitutes the work of art and what is around, between the intimate «internal space [espace intérieur]» (Rougé 1995 (a): 7), the readable miniature cosmos, and the external, unreadable exterior. The frame separates the art work as well as it protects it from the chaos of life:

The frame belongs to both spaces it marks out: its external moulded side is stretched out towards the world, its internal side, invisible and flat, sticks to the painting. [...] It stands between both and protects the art work from the world’s turmoil [*Le cadre participe des deux espaces qu’il délimite: sa face extérieure moulurée tendue vers le monde, sa face intérieure, invisible et plate, collée à la peinture. [...] Il s’interpose et protège le tableau de l’agitation du monde*] (Rougé 1995 (b): 28-29)

Indeed, the frame symbolically works as a reassuring nest for the beholder:

By surrounding the viewer’s gaze in this way, the frame provides landmarks, rebuilds the shelter of church, house, temple or cavern [*En enveloppant ainsi le regard, le cadre lui [au spectateur] offre des repères, reconstitue l’abri de l’église, de la maison, du temple ou de la caverne*] (Rougé 1995 (b): 28-29).

Instead, street art is as much street as it is art. As Ernest Pignon-Ernest put it, the street artist's materials are «time, space, symbolics [*le temps, l'espace, le symbolique*]» (Comoy Fusaro & Gaillard 2019: 58).

Nevertheless, the frame also works as a bridge between the inside and the outside, it also pushes to trespass. Street art is a form of art which goes over the line: not randomly spilling is one of its recurrent marks. This is why the frame as an object, with its clear lines that “make the work autonomous within the visible space [*autonomise l'œuvre dans l'espace visible*]” (Marin 1984), hardly fits it. Street art works often represent the trespass of frames, with metaphorical meaning: art pours into non-art, to the streets, to life, to reality. Far away from the concept of art work as a better, miniature cosmos, the street art work perceives borders as prison bars. But, far away from Simmel's concept of art work as “a whole per se, independent from any relation to the outside [*un tout pour elle-même [l'œuvre d'art], qui se passe de toute relation à un dehors*]” (Simmel 2003: 29), the street art work also needs the boundary to be able to go over it. And by trespassing it, it expresses the need for openness. Not randomly, the trespassed border is a *leitmotiv* in street art (fig. 7).



Fig. 7 (Unknown, Marseille, France, 2014)

The French expressions *Je ne peux pas le/la voir en peinture* [I cannot see him/her even in a painting] and *Je ne peux pas l'encadrer* [I cannot frame him/her] converge on the object of repulsion: the one whom I can neither see nor frame is the Other, as Bernard Lafargue wrote (Lafargue 1995: 59). The spilling of street art is openness to otherness and difference. What is this Other? It might be non-matter, since the transience and impossible preservation but altered of street art make it almost an immaterial art. It might be a non-place of art, since its limits are undefinable. It might be

non-authorship. According to some observers of the history of art, such as Carole Talon-Hugon, our current time is experiencing a turning point: what used to be considered as art is again being questioned and street art is a very good clue of this seminal change. Then maybe the Other is non-art.

At odds with the Kantian *parergonality*, the frame institutes what is framed as belonging to art, thus symbolizes the institutional acknowledgement that art it is. But art is everywhere, we just need to state that it is, and this is exactly what street art states: the street is art if we want it to be so. When Ernest Pignon-Ernest pasted frames on the walls all around the city of Nice, between 2004 and 2013, he meant that anything may be seen as art, using the frame as a device of disclosure of the artistic potential, that is to say as a device of “artification”. So did Buren nel suo *Paysage emprunté* (2001) or, in a witty sarcastic way, Dran in *Crosta* (2010). So did, somehow, Draw in Gaeta: by painting on the glass of a bus shelter, he integrated what is outside the frame, the *parergon*, inside the *ergon*, the work or, at least, the space of representation: non-art becomes art (fig. 6). And this new art is change, movement, life.

In Classical Antiquity, art was useful: it was what we would be rather called crafts today. In the Middle Ages, through a distinction between mechanical arts (needing manual work) and liberal arts (needing intellectual work: words and numbers), the term “artist” emerged (Dante, Par. XIII, 77-78). With Leonardo’s famous statement “*la pittura è mentale*” [painting is a mental process] (Da Vinci I, 27), plastic and graphic arts, which need a manual work as well as an intellectual one, were ennobled. In the 19th century, a new conception of art appeared and soon prevailed, that of Fine Arts: art had to be beautiful, useless, autotelic. At the same time, it became more and more transportable. The extension of the field of art expanded dramatically during the 20th century, bringing categories and hierarchies into question, until the sweeping processes of “disartification” first, then new “artification”. Would the 21st century about another “disartification”?

The conditions of visibility deeply influence the reception of art, therefore what is considered as art. The current trend is to encourage Mr Smith’s creativity (fig. 8), which tends to grant an unlimited conception of authorship, to a certain extent: what has been labelled as art is still isolated from the interaction with life, damage and decay (fig. 9).



Fig. 8 (elicitation to create, Columbus Museum of Art, 2017)



Fig. 9 (Why can't you touch the art? Columbus Museum of Art, 2017)

By taking over the public space, the street art work crosses the threshold and boldly exposes itself not only to anyone’s eyes, but also to anyone’s hand or spit. By doing so, it takes the deconsecration process to the extreme.

The frame as a window or a boundary is incompatible with street art as a contextual, public and living form of art. The frame refers to museum art, since it is supposed to protect, showcase and emphasize the art work. By enclosing the art work, it clearly separates it from reality, hence it makes it etymologically sacred, it makes it belong to another -superior-level of existence, that of holies. But as an art intrinsically open and alive, street art cannot fit into sacred boundaries. The enclosure of an art work makes it an autonomous world, which also contradicts the transgressive and participative poetics of street art. Nevertheless, there couldn't be trespass if there weren't enclosure, so the frame also allows street art to perform. No frame, no trespass: the street art work needs it to be able to deny it. Therefore framing street art implies criticizing frames.

The first four chapters of this book comprises two papers from the 2017 conference on "Framing Street Art" and two papers from the 2018 seminar on "Street Art Europe". They all address the question of the scope of street art. **Jacob Kimvall** distinguishes graffiti writing from street art, the latter being a soft, acceptable version of the first one, and highlights the decisive role of institutional constructions and sociocultural backgrounds. **Christophe Génin** questions the possibility of apprehending street art as an object of research, given that it is constantly changing, then assesses the part of social dynamics in establishing what street art might be. **Ulrich Blanché** explores the emergence of the first works of graffiti and street art in the context of the German 1970s, showing their intimate link to contemporary art and to the punk movement. He then observes how the Berlin wall combined the different types of proto-street art works and expanded the concept of authorship. **Edwige Comoy Fusaro** addresses street art as a *glocal* art (Faccioli and Gibbons 2007), in which global influences are combined with local characteristics, basing her study on the case of street art works that refer to art in Italy.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, previously released as presentations during the 2017 conference, deal with the status of street art between self-authorized gestures in the public space and institutionally framed works. **Hélène Gaillard** questions the classification of Jean-Michel Basquiat as a pioneer of street art, considering both his works indoors and outdoors. **Vittorio Parisi** examines the evolution of MOSA/Alexandre Bavard's oeuvre to discuss whether a form of art born as an art of non-places, ie places in the margins of the cities, then dislocated and altered as an art of institutional and mainstream places, may go back to its original status and ethos. **Ulrich Blanché** observes Banksy's play with the concept and the object of frames, then stresses the problematic status of photographs as both artificial physical frames and questioning the authorship of the street piece.

In the last chapters, coming from both the conference and the seminar, street art is seen as a tool of endorsement within communities. **Marjorie Ranieri** shows how JR has been trying to use street art to make the world a better place by involving the people in the process of creation. **Luca Palermo** refers to the positive outcome of a few projects in some areas of Campania, southern Italy, polluted by the mobs, where the involvement of the local populations allowed to fight against organised crime. Eventually, international artist **Edward Hillel** set up the Nice edition of his Project 43 based on "a poetics of engagement", as he puts it, with the collaboration of the young local artist from Villefranche-sur-Mer, **Lucas Bernardeschi**, who designed the costumes made out of mirrors –reflecting, thus involving the people– and burlap (his favorite material).



Fig. 10 (Lucas Bernardeschi, José Gimeno, Edward Hillel, Nice, FR, 2017)

The performance was made possible thanks to the voluntary collaboration of three students of Université Côte d'Azur, **José Gimeno**, **Joy Serradell** and **Kevin Gallet**. A fourth student, Maéva Setaro, also volunteered to help organizing the 2018 seminar. Many thanks to them and to the artists who kindly shared their experience and contributed to the events.

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Framing Graffiti & Street Art

The scope of G&SA

A Family Affair? Framings of the concepts ‘Graffiti’ and ‘Street Art’ in a diachronic perspective

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Introduction. Questions and methodological approach

Most research describes the relationship between the contemporary phenomena graffiti and street art as complex. For example, graffiti and street art have been described in terms of a development, where street art has developed out of graffiti, as well as closely related but different sociocultural contexts. However, the wider public discourses on graffiti and street art differ widely, and street art is, in contrast to graffiti, not stigmatized and rarely framed as primarily a criminal activity. Consequently, there are also many cases where graffiti and street art are framed as a dichotomy, where the latter is positioned as creative and beautiful while the former is described as unsophisticated and ugly. In contrast to such polarized understandings, ‘street art’ has also been used as an umbrella term, denoting various kinds of informal image production in the public realm – including pieces and throw-ups that in other cases would be defined as graffiti. Thus, while most research suggests that the terms ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ denote partially different phenomena, it is also difficult to pinpoint a clear delineation between them. This article departs from the assumption that the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ themselves should be regarded as a part of the studied cultural context, and as such, empirical material rather than preconditioned categories from where the research departs. The concepts themselves are thus viewed as cultural phenomena in their own right, and as such, negotiated in time and space, similarly to the content that they in a certain context denote.

The article thus focuses on how the relationship between ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ has been contextualized in various media from the mid 1980s to the mid 2010s, and departs from the following two questions: How have the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’, as well as the content they denote been described by contemporary research? How have the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ been used in the surveyed material?

The intention is not to find a final definition of the concepts, nor that the study will discuss every possible usage of these concepts, but to survey multiple meanings and usages in different cultural and historical contexts. The objective is rather to contribute to a critical awareness of the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’, and to advocate that such awareness is activated in the contemporary usage of the concepts. To some extent the approach is semiotic, in the sense that it follows Ferdinand de Saussure’s famous description of semiology as the study of “the life of signs within society” (Saussure, 1916/1966). A semiotic perspective however often implies a synchronic approach, and the article is interested in diachronic and historical dimensions of usage of the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ and how these concepts become productive and meaningful. The methodology is inspired by Johan Fornäs’ description of cultural meaning as the result of a triangular hermeneutic process of contexts, texts and subjects (fig.1, Fornäs, 2017). The study is hermeneutic in this sense on two different levels. First, in the material approach, looking at “contexts” (popular books, subcultural magazines, previous research) where “texts” (specific pictures and descriptions) on the “subjects” of ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ (as concepts denoting social phenomena) have been produced. Secondly, this triangular hermeneutic process has been used as a way of structuring the results of the discussion through briefly pointing out contexts, texts and subjects.

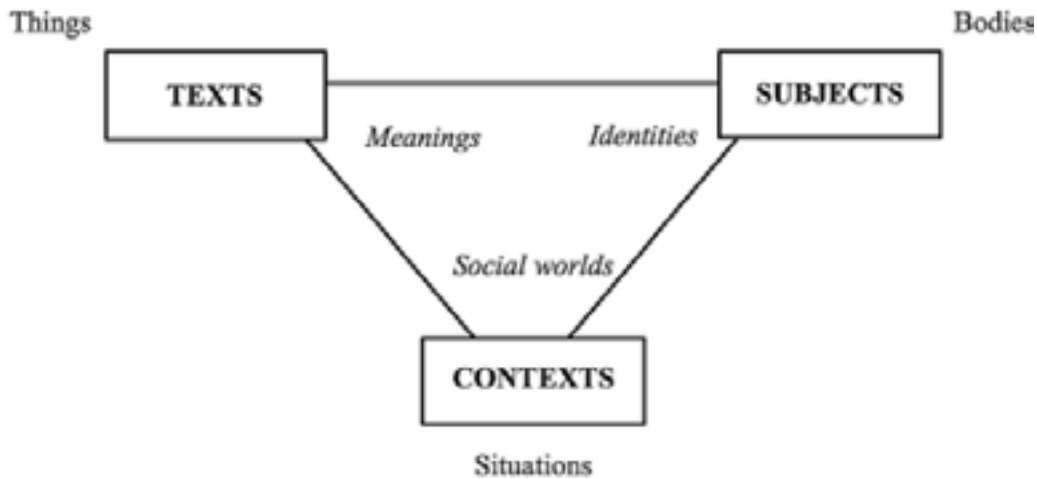


Figure 1: fornäs' "triangle of culture" (fornäs, 2017)

1. Visualizing conceptual ambiguity

In August 2014, the San Francisco based gallery Art People posted a photo of a painting on their Facebook-page (fig. 2). The photo shows a white-painted concrete wall with four distinctive visual forms – read from left to right three light-bulbs rendered in different size and degrees of realism, and furthest to the right a small splash of paint in the same yellow color as the light in the previous two bulbs. Under each visual form is a stenciled caption, suggesting a categorization of the form above as different aspects of art: “mural art”, “street art”, “graffiti” and finally just “art”. The posting contained little information about the context of the painting, disclosing neither its purpose nor where the painting was. The Facebook-caption simply stated that the painting was by Pichi, Avo and 3Fountains, three fairly easily identifiable artists. Despite the lack of context, the post seems to have struck the audience, rendering more than 14000 likes and 2500 shares¹. A more detailed search for the image reveals that the depicted painting was created during UtsirArt, a street art festival at Utsira, Norway, a small island and municipality with approximately 200 inhabitants.

When the painting, produced in a rural village, has been remediated as a digital photo and posted online, it has reached thousands of beholders all around the world. The image is thus an instructive example of how Internet functions as a central vehicle for distribution and archiving of pictures in graffiti and street art contexts (Neef, 2008; Glaser, 2016).



Figure 2: screen-shot from art people [retrieved 2015-08-04].

The image could with W.J.T Mitchell concept be classified as a metapicture – “a picture about pictures” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 301). In the context of this article it is an intriguing visualization of the possible relationships between ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’, framing the two concepts as siblings or close relatives, and also related to the concepts ‘mural art’ and ‘art’. The scope of the present paper does not allow a detailed interpretation of the work, but apart from the framing of these four concepts as related, it is also important to point out that, as in any kind of distinction between concepts involving sociocultural practices, it also implies a possible hierarchy. In fact, issues of hierarchies and values – social, artistic, aesthetic, cultural, historical, etcetera – are implicitly and explicitly present in many discussions regarding the definitions of ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’. This is something that probably most people who have been engaged in these areas have experienced. This has also been addressed in previous research, for example the different social status. Peter Bengtsen frames graffiti and street art as partly different sociocultural contexts - and points out that graffiti (in contrast to street art) “has long been heavily stigmatized as a social problem” (Bengtsen, 2014, p. 116). Cameron McAuliffe (2012) suggests that the separation between the two concepts and the cultural contexts they denote are partly arbitrary, and that it “has allowed an embrace and even valorization of the power of ‘street art’ to activate space, at a time of increasing criminalization of ‘graffiti’” (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190). The intriguing aspect of Pichi’s, Avo’s and 3Fountains’ image however, is that the order in the hierarchy remains uncertain, and I would suggest that the public appeal of the image has its foundation in this uncertainty. The uncertainty lies both on a typological and an axiological level; typological since it is unclear whether the possible strata may be social, qualitative, chronological, developmental, artistic, logical or conceptual (or perhaps several of these possible typological discourses at the same time); and axiological since the possible ratio remains undefined.

The image of the light-bulb, used in comics and visual illustrations to indicate how someone gets a creative idea, or finds a solution to a central problem, is here used to visualize a conceptual ambiguity. Paradoxically, it does not suggest any solution or logical explanation to the ambiguity, but rather underlines the uncertainty, and thus primarily offers a moment of playfulness. The beholder is invited to partake in a play that with Sigmund Freud’s words is associated with possibility “to withdraw from the pressure of critical reason” (Freud, 1905/1960, p. 126). It is thus possible to see the artwork as a visual joke, almost as a kind of a gag cartoon. This is also an example of how the definitions of the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ are not only issues within academic research, but also engage many practitioners of and audiences in the fields of graffiti and street art.

2. ‘Working definitions’ of graffiti and street art

Even if issues of how to define ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ are not restricted to academic research, the ambiguity has special implications in these contexts, as academic research demands reflective and often consequent usage of concepts. Many scholars in the area address the issue by adopting pragmatic working definitions, and at the same time acknowledging that these definitions are far from definite. Ulrich Blanché presents such a working definition that he points out as not being conclusive, where street art “consists of self-authorized pictures, characters, and forms created in or applied to surfaces in the urban space that intentionally seek communication with a larger circle of people. [...] It differs from Graffiti and Public Art” (Blanché, 2015, p. 33). Blanché also differs between graffiti as an older expression and contemporary subcultural graffiti that he refers to as ‘Style Writing’ (Blanché, 2015, p. 32).

When lecturing on graffiti and street art, I often similarly make a simplified distinction rooted in the concepts of ‘context’ and ‘visuality’. Street art is often defined contextually since it is primarily a set of artistic tactics situated in public realms, and is identified as street art by active beholders in such spaces. As an artistic practice street art is post-medial in the sense that very few street artists are identified with a singular medium (even if there of course are specific mediums, such as the stencil, that are deeply associated with the concept). Besides an older and less ambiguous meaning (unauthorized messages written or drawn in public realm), the concept graffiti denotes a visual subculture that is dependent on a set of visual elements and codes such as the tag, the throw-up or the piece. As an artistic practice graffiti is often identified with a few particular media – primarily painting and calligraphy. I always acknowledge that these contrasting definitions to some degree are simplifications, but they are meaningful – to some extent indispensable. They create a common ground in a situation where many participants have little knowledge about these artistic contexts. But even if distinctions such as these are necessary in many situations they contain two types of problems. Firstly, the most obvious: many artworks don’t really fit in either category of such a distinction. Secondly, such definitions tend to dodge the complexities and ambiguities in the social usage of the terms: the kinship, the admiration and the proximities as well as the distance and the tensions, one often meets discussing the terminology with graffiti practitioners and street artists as well as their often engaged audiences.²

The first problem is far from unique for these sociocultural contexts and perhaps partly inescapable. All conceptual distinctions contain a certain degree of simplification, or even stereotypification (Mitchell, 2005, p. 296). I would however claim that the effects of the first problem might be amplified by the second, which I suggest has to do with that the concepts themselves have a history in the artistic contexts and are connected to social and cultural identities. The issue of cultural identity is in turn also why the question of terminology becomes an issue also among practitioners and audiences. Before going into a discussion of the concepts in a diachronic perspective I will discuss how ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ have been addressed in contemporary research.

3. Framings of ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ in contemporary research

I have already mentioned some conceptualizations of the relations between graffiti and street art in earlier research, but a slightly wider survey of the research suggests even more complex relations. Several researchers describe the relationship in terms of a chronological cultural development, where street art is developed out of the graffiti context at around the turn of the millennium. Anna Waclawek for example frames street art as “evolution of” or “rebellion against” graffiti (Waclawek, 2008, p. 3). Waclawek also points out that the chronological relationship is not only artistic, but social as well since many street artists have begun by writing graffiti (Ibid). A similar social relationship, but with slightly less emphasis on developmental aspects, are suggested in the aforementioned article by McAuliffe, that pointed out that the separation between graffiti and street art was partly arbitrary – one of his arguments for this arbitrariness is that street art often is made by people that “are or have been involved in the graffiti subculture” (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190). McAuliffe’s as well as Waclawek’s basis for a separation between the concepts (and the cultural contexts they denote) are similar to the conceptualizations presented earlier, where graffiti is described as a limited set of visual styles, and street art shows a wider range of different expressions. Like Blanché, McAuliffe claims that street art often has an ambition to address a wider public, while graffiti is tightly connected to a subcultural context (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190).

Both Waclawek and McAuliffe also use the term ‘post-graffiti’ as an alternative to street art, a term that further underlines the developmental and chronological aspects. If not explicitly stated, the latter also seems to function as a concept on a more analytical level, while ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ are concepts in the field.

²There are innumerable collaborations as well as more or less serious conflicts between graffiti and street art. One playful conflict is conflict that also entails kinship, is recorded in the book *Playground Sweden* where two brothers, one defined as street artist and the other one graffiti writer, arrange a battle between their respective artistic technique. See “Stencil Vs. Graffiti”, in Ivar Andersen; Kristian Borg; & Sverker Ohlsson, 2007. *Playground Sweden, Dokument, Årsta*. More severe examples of such conflicts are for example discussed by Eric Deal in “Graffiti vs. Street Art” [www.at149st.com](http://at149st.com), June 9, 2010 <<http://at149st.blogspot.com/2010/06/graffiti-vs-street-art.html>> [retrieved 2018-06-20]

There are however also researchers who use the concept street art as an umbrella term, encompassing a broad array of artistic practices. Visconti et al. acknowledge six “ideal-types” of street art: 1. Tagging 2. Stylized writing 3. Sticking (pasting drawings and symbols in public spaces) 4. Stencilling 5. Poetic assault (“...emerging practices [...] writing of poetry on dull public spaces...”) 6. Urban design (“...an aesthetic practice applied in favor of the beautification of public architecture...”) (Visconti et al, 2010, p. 514). The ideal-type “stylized writing” reminds of Blanché’s term style writing, but it is less wide and judging from the examples in the article more or less equivalent to the concept “piece” in subcultural graffiti (Kinvall, 2014, p. 208). It is thus obvious that some of these types with the working definitions above would be defined ‘graffiti’. A similar approach is to be found in Cecilia Andersson (2006) who defines street art as “images that are created by, primarily, young people, pictures pasted up or painted on the streets and house walls” (Andersson, 2006, p. 27)³. Andersson uses street art as an umbrella term that incorporates graffiti, but similar to for example Waclawek she sees a “development of, or sideways from, the classic graffiti”, and she explicitly points out that her usage is slightly unconventional since the concept ‘street art’ most often excludes graffiti. It is however relatively clear that both these latter research projects use the terminology primarily as an analytical tool.

To summarize this brief survey of previous research: the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ denote two closely related, partly overlapping, but at the same time different sociocultural contexts, encompassing a wide range of artistic tactics and practices. The separation is partly arbitrary, and to some extent graffiti and street art share spaces and social worlds, but differ in their way of addressing the audience. They also differ when it comes to sociocultural status: graffiti carries a stigma that street art does not. Many researchers frame street art as a development out of subcultural graffiti during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Street art has however also been used as an academic umbrella term, and as such including artistic tactics and practices that by other researchers would be referred to as graffiti.⁴

4. The concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ in a diachronic perspective

Most of the research that explicitly discusses graffiti and street art as different but related sociocultural contexts has been produced during the last decade. Even if they present diachronic or chronologic perspectives on the artistic contexts, and often acknowledge that graffiti and street art are cultural areas in constant change, they often have a synchronic perspective in relation to the actual terminology. In order to get a diachronic perspective on the usage of the concepts I have surveyed a number of academic as well as non-academic but specialized publications on graffiti and street art, published between circa 1980 and 2010. Some sources are books produced as introductions to these sociocultural contexts, while others are fanzines or Internet publications reporting on them. I have been looking for words defining the practices ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’, and their limits. I have also been interested in implicit and explicit subject positions – or, to be more specific, in how ‘street artists’ and ‘graffiti writers’ are presented, described and contextualized. As most of the previous research has pointed out, subcultural graffiti is the main focus in the textual sources before the turn of the millennium. There are however traces of practices that with the working definitions I have presented above, today probably would be referred to as street art. Art historian Staffan Jacobson defines graffiti as a practice that has existed for several thousands of years of “texts, images or both, carved, written or painted, usually unlawfully in public places”, and distinguishes this from what he refers to as “Spraycan art”, a subcultural graffiti developed during the 1970s in the forms “tags, throw-ups, pieces” (Jacobson, 1992)⁵. This is obviously close to the working definitions of graffiti presented above. In the text Jacobson however also briefly mentions what he refers as “serigraffiti”, which is “made with stencils and belongs to another tradition” (Jacobson, 1992)⁶. This statement indicates that one of the artistic practices today associated with word street art – stencils – existed during the 1980s in the outer margins of the graffiti context, but that these at the time were perceived as an entirely separate sociocultural context, different from graffiti.

⁴ Going through contemporary non-academic material – texts and images in various media – I have also been able to find examples of all these types of relations. There are examples where the concepts are constructed as a) synonyms (interchangeable terms for the same cultural context), b) antonyms (as terms for opposite cultural phenomena), c) different but related cultural contexts, and d) hyponyms/hyperonyms (as umbrella concepts, sometimes graffiti as the umbrella concept including street art, and other times vice versa). ^{3 5 6} Translation from Swedish

The contemporary research and literature on street art point out that there are a number of ‘pioneers’ or ‘predecessors’ who were working with what today is called street art, already in the 1970s and 1980s. Names that often are mentioned are Blek le Rat and Miss.Tic from Paris, and John Fekner from New York. These artists’ activities are however not discussed in terms of a movement, or as belonging to a wider cultural or artistic context. For example, Blanché claims that street art became a movement at the turn of the millennium, and that before there were only “single artists who did what we now retrospectively call Street Art” (Blanché, 2015, p. 33). So on one hand it is not strange that Jacobson, writing on graffiti in the 1980s and early 1990s, takes notice on neighboring phenomena such as works by these artists. On the other hand, Jacobson does not mention any single artist, but frames the stencils in “serigrafitti” as a different ‘tradition’, which implies a multitude of practitioners and a wider cultural context. The artistic practices today denoted by the word street art are thus most likely significantly older than the concept itself, and is probably not a question of a few individual solitary artists but a wider sociocultural and artistic context. Perhaps this was a context without the same type of specific history and fairly coherent identity associated with the subcultural graffiti with roots in New York City’s subway system – and thus without the public attention from specialized literature.

Surveying the literature it is also obvious that the words ‘street art’ and ‘street artist’ existed in the subcultural graffiti context already in the 1980s and 1990s, but without the contemporary denotation as a different sociocultural context. The term street artist is for example used in Craig Castleman’s study *Getting up – Subway Graffiti in New York* (1982). From the context it is not clear what it actually denotes, but it is most likely used as a synonym to (graffiti) writer, the term Castleman uses for subcultural graffiti practitioners (Castleman, 1982, p. 127). Another example can be found in Henry Chalfant’s and Jim Prigoff’s book *Spraycan Art* (1987) where “United Street Artists” from Amsterdam are one of the featured graffiti crews (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987, p. 68). A third example is the Dutch graffiti fanzine *True Colors*, which carries the subtitle “Street Art Megazine” (fig. 3).

There are however also some traces in the literature from the 1980s and 1990s with a usage of the terminology that is similar to the contemporary customs. Joe Austin (2001) points out Allan Schwartzman’s *Street Art*, released in 1985, as a book documenting a crossover and an “important exchange between [graffiti] writers and traditionally trained artists” (Austin, 2001, p. 190). This is an early account of the term used to distinguish a context related to, but separate from graffiti. Another interesting usage is to be found in Bernhard van Treeck’s book *Graffiti-Lexikon: Street-Art – legale und illegale Kunst im öffentlichen Raum* (English: *Graffiti Lexicon: Street Art - legal and illegal Art in Public Space*, 1993). In the title of the book, graffiti and street art are constructed as synonyms. In the preface however, graffiti is used as the umbrella term for the described phenomena, and ‘street artist’ (*Street Art Künstler*) as an umbrella concept for an array of different subject positions: “there are taggers, train painters, stencil artists, freestyle and many other directions from America, France and Germany” (Treeck, 1993, p. 5)⁷. In this context ‘street art’ and ‘street artist’ seem to be used as specialized umbrella concepts – similar to the usage found in the more contemporary research by Andersson (2006) and Visconti et al (2010) described above.

⁷Translation from German: “Es gibt die Tagger, Zugmaler, Pochoristen, Freestyle und viele andere Richtungen aus Amerika, Frankreich und Deutschland”.



Figure 3: covers of the dutch 'street art megazine' true colors, circa 1993-1995



Besides being surveys, introductions and reports on (sub)cultural phenomena, books such as van Treeck's are produced to be sold on a wider market. A plausible reason for the usage could be that graffiti has been perceived to be a concept with fairly clear identity and a certain public appeal, while the term street art at this time has made it possible to broaden the scope of the book – many of the aspects dealt with fall outside of a narrow definition of subcultural graffiti. In fact, several of the books describing street art as a separate sociocultural context during between 2002-2008 use the word graffiti in a similar way, either in the title or in the subtitle. Tristan Manco's book *Stencil Graffiti* (2002) is often mentioned in the scholarly literature on street art and seems to be an important early contribution in the field of street art, and interestingly enough through its title frames street art as a type of graffiti, and thus graffiti, if indirectly, here becomes an umbrella concept encompassing street art. Two other books on street art utilizing similar approaches are Claudia Walde's *Sticker City: Paper Graffiti Art* (2007) and Cedar Lewisohn's *Street Art: the Graffiti Revolution* (2008) (the latter book also served as catalogue to Tate Modern's acclaimed exhibition *Street Art 23 May – 25 August 2008*). Thus, on one hand, some of the artistic practices that with contemporary parlance would be referred to as 'street art' exist earlier than often acknowledged in contemporary research. On the other hand, the terms 'street art' and 'street artist' do exist as sub-concepts within, or pseudonyms to, subcultural graffiti during the 1980s and 1990s – before the word gained its contemporary meaning. As street art was slowly obtaining its contemporary meaning, primarily denoting a context different from graffiti, it was initially often presented as a kind of graffiti.

This points to the possibility that the contemporary cultural formation of graffiti and street art as different sociocultural contexts might be the result of a hybridization between already existing artistic practices, and cultural contexts, as well as changes in terminology, categorization and identity, just as well as street art being a development out of graffiti. Such a process of hybridization is of course not necessarily in conflict with the contemporary definitions presented above, but may help us to nuance them – and explain the complexity of the terminology.

In order to see implicitly if street artists and graffiti writers are contextualized differently, and if so how this difference is constructed, I have compared the structure of three books on street art published between 2002 and 2007 – the aforementioned *Stencil Graffiti* and *Sticker City: Paper Graffiti Art* as well as *Playground Sweden* (2007) – with the two books often mentioned as the most important in the globalization of subcultural graffiti: Martha Cooper's and Henry Chalfant's *Subway Art* (1984) and Henry Chalfant's and James Prigoff's *Spraycan art* (1987).

There are similarities but also striking differences. All five books share an educational and introductory approach, for example by explaining central concepts. Both *Stencil Graffiti* and *Sticker City: Paper Graffiti Art* explicitly situates street art in relation to subcultural graffiti, and as a development out of the latter – similar to the development described by researchers such as McAuliffe and Waclawek. The primary structural principle in *Subway Art* is thematic (surveying a number of different concepts) and in *Spraycan art* geographic (primarily surveying places around the world where subcultural graffiti with origins in NYC had been adapted during the mid 1980s).

The three books on street art published between 2002 and 2007 also have a thematic structure, but a central structural principle in these three books is the concept of artist biography. Each presents between 20 and 30 artistic subjects, often an individual artist, but sometimes a duo or collective, whose artistic style and/or main tactics are presented on one to four pages, often with basic biographical data. These artist biographies function as small chapters, or subchapters, in the overall structure. This way of using the artist biography as a structuring element is common in art history writing, a tradition stemming back to 16th century Italy and Giorgio Vasari's book *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (English: *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 1550; 1568) (Elkins, 2002).

This is a striking difference between these three books on street art, and the two introductory books on subcultural graffiti – *Subway Art* (1984) and *Spraycan Art* (1987). Even if number of artistic subjects are presented also in these two earlier

books, the concept of artist biography is entirely absent. Admittedly, compared to the traditional artistic biographies the data presented in the street art books is sparse, and the artist often remains anonymous, but nevertheless: in these sources the 'street artist' as subject is framed as a biographical artist in a structure that is in line with conventions within art historical writing, while the 'graffiti writer' is framed as a subcultural subject without any clear biographical data.⁸

However, since previous research has pointed out a social overlapping between the contexts of graffiti and street art, and that many street artists began as graffiti writers, the graffiti context should probably be present also in the street artist's biographies. And it is. For example, *Playground Sweden* contains 30 artist biographies, where subject that from the context of the book should be considered as 'street artist'. Nine of these are however described as graffiti writers/artists or as former graffiti writers/artists, and another five are indirectly framed, or in other parts of the surveyed material described, as graffiti writers or former graffiti writers. This supports the observation by for example Waclawek and McAuliffe that graffiti and street art are overlapping social contexts, and even more the latter's claim that the separation between them is partly arbitrary. If ever so arbitrary, the separation is nevertheless real in the sense that the two concepts most likely produce different types of public identities: the street artist comes through as a biographical subject, while the graffiti writer often remains a subcultural persona. This could in turn be connected to the difference in sociocultural status between graffiti and street art, pointed out by Bengtsen and McAuliffe, where artists presented with biographical data will most likely gain a superior position in relation to subcultural subjects without such specificities.

Conclusions

This analysis started by looking at 'graffiti' and 'street art' as ambiguous concepts, as well as how they had been framed in previous research, and concluded that they are perceived as two related, but at the same time different sociocultural contexts, with different social status. Many researchers see street art as a development out of subcultural graffiti and situate this in time around the late 1990s and early 2000s. The cultural contexts the two concepts denote partly overlap and the separation is to some extent arbitrary, as many practitioners are working in both fields. By adapting a diachronic perspective on the very concepts 'graffiti' and 'street art', the present study has been able to confirm the overall structure of this development, but has also problematized it.

At least some of the artistic practices that with contemporary parlance would be defined as street art existed earlier than often acknowledged in contemporary research. Furthermore, the terms 'street art' and 'street artist' existed within subcultural graffiti contexts during the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, rather than street art being a chronological artistic development out of graffiti, the results indicate that the contemporary cultural formation of graffiti and street art as different sociocultural contexts might be the result of a hybridization between already existing artistic practices, and cultural contexts. It also suggests that the changes in terminology, categorization and identity have been just as crucial, as the more practical aspects addressed in previous research, for example development of new artistic tactics, forms and ways of addressing the audience.

The methodological approach to the analyzed material has been inspired by Fornäs' triangular hermeneutic process, which involves looking at contexts (popular books, subcultural magazines, previous research) where texts (specific pictures and descriptions) on the subjects of graffiti and street art (as concepts denoting social phenomena) have been produced. This triangular hermeneutic process will now be used in order to conclude the article by structuring the results describing them in terms of contexts, texts and subjects (fig. 4).

⁸This might of course have changed since these books were published.



Figure 4: graffiti and street art cultures after the millennium (after fornäs, 2017)

It is possible to identify several potential contexts produced in the surveyed material, but the most obvious are the particular graffiti subcultures and street art scenes (as these are often trans-local structures these could probably also be described in singular). But other contexts addressed and/or invoked are institutions such as academia and museums, and the police. The texts produced in these contexts are artworks, illustrations, descriptions, and photographic documentation – made public in public realms or various mass media. Finally and most importantly in the context of this article we have the subjects of graffiti and street art in the form of identities ascribed in the material on the practitioners of graffiti and street art. Here the two concepts/contexts seem to produce different types of public identities.⁹ Both are often anonymized but where street artists are contextualized as biographical subjects in a manner that is in line with conventions within art history, graffiti writers are framed as subcultural subjects or personas without any clear biographical data. The street art context also often addresses assumed everyday beholders, and both contexts have the attention from publicists and researchers. So while most previous research points out that the contexts of graffiti and street art overlap, and are populated by partly the same individuals – the surveyed material paradoxically suggests that the contexts and texts at the same time produces and actualizes distinctively different sociocultural subjects – differences with effects in for example social status and potential agency. Therefore I suggest that scholars in the area work use the concepts ‘graffiti’ and ‘street art’ with a critical awareness, and suggest that we engage in the task of inventing new analytical concepts in order to frame and analyze the artistic and cultural endeavors in these contexts.

⁹I am aware that the identifiable identities in books such as the ones I have surveyed not necessarily reflect the internal (sub)cultural identities among practitioners in these contexts, but still assume that these are identities that the individual nevertheless have to relate to.

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Supervision by research: a betrayal of the street art spirit ?

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1. Vandalism

Street practices, whether they are part of an assumed interventionism or a primal gesture, readily claim to be a counterculture of “vandals”, “rebels”, “savages” or “Zulus”, thus multiplying the qualifiers supposed to counter the conformity of academic or institutional practices. In fact, scientific research, whether by universities or schools, is part of this academicism. In this sense it is suspicious of bringing back the irreducible to the agreed according to its pre-established schemas and it is objected that it would be necessary to think fresh new and unusual situations according to a research-action, a research-creation or a research-culture, new research modalities that lead to knowledge of social, artistic or cultural practices.

Such a confrontation could be grounded on a mutual misunderstanding. Indeed, scientific research is not a registration chamber whose function is to justify the established authorities, in what way it would be only ideology. As a heuristic critical schedule, it has the paradoxical mission of thinking against itself to overcome preconceptions, including its intestinal prejudices, or against prejudices conveyed by non-reflexive practices.

Symmetrically, the “vandalism” claimed or prohibited only meets its objective punctually. Indeed, initially, in 1794, Father Grégoire produced the concept of vandalism to blame the Republicans who sacked the buildings of the religious and political authorities. Vandalism was the result of a *civil war* over monuments representing a condemned regime. He sought to destroy the signs and evidence of an established authority, to avenge himself economically and ideologically by appropriating the riches and symbols of an old regime.

But the “vandals” of street art, blasted as ransackers of “France scum”¹, are very far from this degree of material and symbolic violence. By vandalizing visuals of major brands, Zevs had to make quick amends. Vandalizing road signs in Japan, Clet Abraham, quickly worried by the Japanese police, had little effect. Perhaps only Kidult, attacking luxury shops with impunity, can pretend to be a Vandal, even though his actions hardly affect the power of LVMH, Kering or L’Oreal. For the thousands of tags and graffiti that adorn the thousands of kilometers of railroad tracks do not affect the political or economic system in place. Subjectively, they can overshadow or disturb travelers, but objectively they are rather an economy of the supplies for artists, as evidenced by the economic success of the graffiti artist KR, inventor of the Krink (Kr-ink), ink that made his fortune. The moral wound is without force against the market for the material or the works.

¹See the cover of the news magazine Valeurs actuelles, February 25th 2016.

A painting by the ruinist Hubert Robert² shows vandals in action in 1793. To observe the characters, we see that they do not destroy a monument but they deconstruct it piece by piece for re-use. We find in street art this double dimension of deconstruction of an established order by dismantling its symbolism, and of reusing by appropriation of an urban material passing from the shadow of the old regime to the light of the new. This seems obvious in Clet Abraham who by diverting the material of the traffic signs just draws our attention to this regulation of the code of the road to decode the surreptitious conditioning. In this sense, street art is less a counterculture, for what it was given or taken initially (Sommer, 1975; Baudrillard, 1976), than a *culture of transition*. Or more exactly, in the context of a liberal neo-capitalism, the counter-culture follows the marked path of “consummate revolt” (Heath, Potter, 2004): refractory practice, then commercial niche, finally profitable trend. Hippies were alternative before becoming mainstream, the new bohemian converts to gentrification, and the street art of the lowlands becomes emboggled and becomes a visual gimmick of the design. In this respect, Keith Haring’s rare interventions in the metro are symptomatic: heirs of the *underground* culture (the subway and the alternative press) they end up being *overground*: a consculture on order, for commercial purposes, reduced to a design marketing.

Worse still, in this last decade the craze of the art market and the public for the “graffiti culture” and the street art makes it possible to renew the market offer by a street culture as extensive as indecisive. It is the same for the “affinity tourism” which sees in the *street community* a renewal of the cultural offer by organizing excursions, visits, pilgrimages about street art as in Berlin, Paris, London, etc. In this last decade the craze of the art market and the public for the “graffiti culture” and the street art would tend to make believe that these are new phenomena disturbing the genres and categories. Yet the manifestations of urban art or urban interventionism do not date from yesterday. Is there still a need to refer, by example, to situationism?

2. Researcher or cheater

A paradox is that academic research on these domains and objects is too often without any memory and is aligned with art criticism whose discourses may be interested in economic or political motives. The fact remains that in the midst of street art - a heterogeneous set composed of contradictory sub-environments -, there are still many who express an obsession with betrayal and recovery through the *establishment*.³ Framing is taken for an enrolment that is detrimental to the “genuine” street art. First, the material framing, that restricts an expression, its extent and its extension by the standard of the gallery, the market of art, sticks and picture-rails; then, the intellectual framing, or commenting and interpreting practices to reduce their strangeness. This double boundary appears to betray the cause of an unclassifiable, inalienable, unsurpassable street life.

Hence a lawsuit in inauthenticity, a controversy of the “real” street artists, marginal ones, against the usurpers who counterfeit their actions, but under other conditions, or who deprive them of their freedom of speech.

To the researchers, or more generally to the speakers of the established discourse (art critic, curator, auctioneer, historian and philosopher of the art), is addressed the classic reproach emitted by the misologists: the thinkers wave words but do not know the field or the practice. Some artists or practitioners are afraid of being deprived of their word, of their intention, and are therefore talkative. Hence some artists refuse judgment, especially critical judgment or value judgment. From then on, street art research gives artists the right to speak by listening to their notes of intent.

²Hubert Robert, *La violation des caveaux des rois dans la basilique Saint-Denis en octobre 1793*, 1793, oil on canvas, Paris, musée Carnavalet.

³By example, in October 2016, during a seminar organized by the Ministère de la Culture at La Villette (Paris), the artist Lokiss quarreled to the curator Hugo Vitran.

The epistemological problem appears when the research remains in the commentary of a listening, to a hermeneutic of a presupposed word true or at least indisputable, then giving up the critical examination to reveal contradictions, inaccuracies, interrogations. It is the ordinary conflict between self-awareness and lived experience, supposed to be the very truth of an individual, and on the other hand the critical external analysis that identifies leaps and failures (*saltus and hiatus*) between claimed behaviors and actual behaviors.

The situation is still more complex because street practices give rise to various appreciations, but especially to confused identifications. If at night everything is gray, in the street everything today could be recognized as street art: graffiti, tag, graffiti, poster, mosaic, muralism, urban decor, sound and light, etc. The notion of “urban art” has ended up mixing all the practices and their meanings in the indistinct horizon of the public space, and everything becomes a gallery, whether it is an open sky or a white cube. The municipal or departmental councilors, the gallery owners and the artists themselves play on this indistinctness which allows some to obtain a social peace with a popular urban setting in which the populations recognize themselves, or to ensure a cultural heritage and a cultural tourism, and others to negotiate contracts and increase their notoriety and rating.

3. Goals and method

Our purpose will not be historical, even if the reactivation of a memory of the practices and the concomitant research is necessary. It will not be sociological, even if observations of terrains and environments are required. Research in sociology has often focused on street production among others, the tags and graffiti of the suburbs of major urban centers, both to analyze their motives and modes of action and to legitimize their political significance when even their actors would not have a declared political goal.

We will attempt to sketch an epistemology of a street art aesthetic. Our communication is thus a sort of reflexive and critical program: research on street art research or on the constitution of speeches on street art by art critics, art history, cultural studies, aesthetics. It would be necessary to do, more than an inventory of research, a genealogy of the concepts of graffiti, post-graffiti, street bombing, street art and urban art to understand the embarrassment to identify an object or a practice. The different uses and translations of the notions involved (*arte de la calle*, *arte urbano*, *Strassenkunst*) show a terminological flutter. The Japanese says *dorogeijutsu*, “the art of interpreting the roads” (*jutsu*: technique, *gei*: interpretation, performativity, *doro*: the way 道路芸術).

Producing a research on street art therefore requires respecting methodological requirements such as distinguishing research from testimony, differentiating the essay from the album, subordinating *pro-domo* advocacy to critical examination, and converting self-awareness into reflective gnoseology to understand the prejudices that have occulted these practices as, symmetrically, the misinterpretations that can promote its expansion.

If the speech must be adequate to its object, how to do when the object is labile or mobile? Is it necessary to produce a dynamic writing to be analogous to the movement of its object? If the discourse seeks to be unifying (to release common principles, a unitary identity), how to face without reductionism a multiple, even conflicting object? How to account for the unity of the diverse without denying the singularity of each of its elements, or the disparity of intentions or practices gathered in the common space of the street? In a word, does something like street art exist or is it just an artefact of art market, research or marketing? Can the research seeking to frame street practices through notions, censuses and taxonomies, underpinned by implicit axiologies, be suspected of betraying a mode of operation radically refractory to any setting to make it an occasion for aesthetical delight?

For this reasons, logically and chronologically it is advisable to agree on the words which, beyond their conventional polysemy, can be clarifying and categorical concepts.

4. The concept of graffiti

The term *graffiti* is equivocal (not to be confused with the *graffito* which is a mural technique used in the Renaissance).

In *history*, particularly in the history of art, archeology and epigraphy, he designates rock, parietal or doliar signs of various meanings and statuses, understood or misunderstood. It can be mystic symbols or obscene drawings, king or peasant signatures, stonemason marks or children's games, words of love (as in Monet's *Breakfast on the Grass*), etc. For example, Garrucci noted the *graffiti* of Pompei, Leroi-Gourhan analyzed prehistoric *graffiti*, Griaule, graffiti Abyssinian. This generic meaning combines all kinds of inscriptions, invoices and different purposes, but identically seen as period documents. It is advisable to be at least very cautious when one makes comparisons between archaic signs and contemporary inscriptions by producing hasty genealogies: besides the fact that the archaic intentions remain unknown, the contexts of production and reception are heterogeneous (tattoos or aggregation of plastic arts, industrial ruins or military-scientific sites, etc.).

In *art* it seems recognized that the modern sense of graffiti, as a popular mode of appropriation of the walls of cities in modest neighborhoods, even dilapidated, by simple graphics related to writing or schematic representations, goes back to Brassai's, at this time. famous article of 1933 published in *The Minotaur*. Almost at the same time Desnos (1937) caught our eye on the decrepit walls.⁴ With Brassai the Parisian school of humanist photography (Boubat, Izis, Doisneau, Ronis) is committed to photographing the walls of Paris and the suburbs re-registering graffiti in a daily practice, ordinary, banal, fun, and primarily infantile, i.e. appropriate by children's games in the streets. At the same time other photographers are paying the same attention to popular graffiti like Helen Levitt⁵ or Nigel Henderson⁶. Long before Cy Twombly's graffiti, Dubuffet's or Fautrier's works involve scratches, erasures and other writing on poor media. It is the same with the lacerations or writings of Villégélé. Graffiti as a visual motif, as a popular practice, as a plastic vocabulary, as an innovation of the medium and the place of exhibition, is therefore clearly received and well received by modern and contemporary art: painters, photographers, and others. The artist's view of a popular street practice thus makes receivables and suitable productions whose intentions, media, and modalities can be heterogeneous.

In *law*, graffiti is an illegal listing subject to prosecution and punishment. They are all the stronger as the attachment to the right of ownership is marked, the political consciousness is weak, the street is not tolerated as a space of protest. This is *why*, on the contrary, the anarchists do not hesitate to stain the panels, doors and walls of their graffiti.

Everything was gathered so that in the North American context a plastic street practice, writing, is identified as graffiti with artistic and legal meaning: a poor art that contravenes the law. It has an alleged origin, the hobos monikers (circa 1930) during the crisis of 1929 or the GI's signatures during the Second World War. It has its properties: a signature of large format, stylized, reiterated, responding to community codes, unauthorized.

Hence six orders of graffiti, which can receive a pejorative or laudatory meaning depending on the legal or political context. Because what is illegal under the law of a country (which contravenes a prohibition) can become lawful by law reform according to a change in morals and a new political orientation. It seems to us that focusing on the legality or otherwise of graffiti is not a good reference in the sense that this law is only a moment in a changing and relative social history. Graffiti is caught in a dynamic of recognition or resistance, the receiving party may eventually amend the law.

⁴« Sous les crépis multiples du mur tombant un à un sous les outils perfectionnés, que diront aux ethnologues de l'an 3000 les graffiti modernes (pour nous) qui se trouvent reproduits ici ? (...) Ce qui est certain, c'est que le mur attire le dessinateur et le satyre. A Herculaneum comme à Paris, tout prend un sens pornographique d'où l'art, et pour cause, n'est pas absent. Le peintre, le poète, l'acteur, tous ceux qui font profession d'art sont des exhibitionnistes et même, dans l'innocent tracé du jeu de marelle, on pourrait

Let's note:

- the paleographic inscription, object of the archaeological epigraphy, lawful for the official inscriptions or illicit for the parasitic inscriptions, identified or anonymous;
- the common graffiti: that of the daily newspaper present on the trees, the rocks, in the toilets and the lowlands, expressing the popular moo (its joys, its pains, its loves), illicit but tolerated as a popular and childish practice;
- the commonplace graffiti aestheticized, represented by painters, photographers, made licit by a process of cultural and political recognition, as the current of humanistic photography representing the graffiti of Montmartre;
- the political graffiti which represents slogans, clamours by which the people speaks on the walls of their city, which can be a crude expression, ranging from a word to a paragraph or a couplet, or a sought expression animated by an artistic imagination, a situationist or far-left expression that serves as a paradigm of protest against a certain European street art; illicit images but which can end up being patrimonialized with the liking of the political vicissitudes like the political graffiti of the university of Nanterre or those of the wall of Berlin;
- the american graffiti or *writing*, original expression initially illicit and protesting but tolerated by the communities which are recognized there;
- the *picturo-graffiti*, proposed by Denys Riout (1985) to think the unity of what was visible in the street (from the tag, from the slogan to the fresco and the stencil), faded replaced by the term street art ; initially illicit, picturo-graffiti quickly gave rise to commissions for municipal and even national cultural and artistic events.

Follows a trouble in the graffiti genre. For example, in the Graffiti issue of *Tribu* (Conte, 1985), artists are plotted on the telephone, obscene drawings, street inscriptions, drawings or collages by Zlotykamien and Blek the rat. But it is because these artists recognize these practices or recognize themselves in them or begin to practice them that, through the effect of an argument of authority, their validation makes sense for other researchers and attracts their benevolent attention. The critical analysis then consists, in a second time, in finding the validity of this authority.

Hence two different time lines within these orders.

On one side, a continuous line. An autonomous process has developed in North America, but on a more sociological than political line, with rapid market intervention. This does not exclude trade between the two shores of the Atlantic, especially thanks, once again, to Brassai. Indeed, it is a bridge between Europe and North America, via the exhibitions of the MoMa of New York. Since 1956 the MoMa has been devoting an exhibition to his graffiti photographs as "wild flowers of art"⁷, according to a photographer's formula. The exhibition is entitled: Language of the wall (graffiti). In 1968, another exhibition devoted to his general work also presents some photographs of graffiti⁸. Brassai is all the more the junction between Paris and New York that it is surrounded by francophiles American like Edward Steichen, Henry Miller or Lawrence Durrell who devoted to him an essay. Thus settling in the New York museum world, the idea that graffiti participates in the world of art. In 1989, an exhibition devoted to Tapiès presents his paintings as graffiti-like markings, "graffiti-style drawings". Finally, when, in 1991, Kirk Varnedoe directed the exhibition High and Low, the modern art and popular culture, the road leading from Paris to New York went through the graffiti and the lacerated posters of Raymond Hains and Jacques Villégé.

retrouver les préoccupations intimes qui assurent la perpétuité de la race [...] Notre vie est celle même d'un de ces murs. Les inscriptions s'y superposent. De temps en temps nous y passons l'enduit qui semble remettre tout à neuf, mais il suffit de gratter de l'ongle pour voir apparaître le dessin ou la maxime de nos années révolues. » Robert Desnos, "Au pied du mur", Arts et Métiers graphiques, 15 mars 1937, n° 57, p. 45-49.

⁵Helen Levitt, *New York, graffiti, kind birds*, 1940, gelatin silver, 25x20cm, Saint Etienne, musée d'art contemporain.

⁶Nigel Henderson, *Door, popular art*, 1949, gelatin silver, 25x19cm, Saint Etienne, musée d'art contemporain.

⁷Cf. MoMa archives, n° 100, 23 octobre 1956, MoMa-1956-0112-100.pdf.

⁸Cf. MoMa archives, n° 109, 29 octobre 1968, MoMa-1968-july-december-0067-109.pdf.

On the other hand, a broken line. Nevertheless, despite a common support (the wall) and a common social class (the poor), the “French” graffiti (Brassaï, Desnos, Villégélé) differs clearly from the “American” one by its matter, format, purpose, and ideology. Indeed, the American school, speaking above all of *writing*, insists on the scriptural mode of the inscription reduced to a word, when the Europeans rather think of a formula or a figurative drawing. Moreover, given the often intense political commitment of street artists, the concept of American-style graffiti appeared inadequate.

It seems to me that this type of misunderstanding between a protesting European graffiti (which revokes or even denies the system) and a protesting American graffiti (which opposes to claim a place in the system) can be read in Baudrillard’s *Kool Killer* (1976). This text is contrasted. On one side Baudrillard quickly saw the political and semiotic interest of urban graffiti, and made fine observations on the very constitution of a graffiti (nickname and number), on the distinction between pseudonymy and anonymity, on the distinction of principle between the movement graffiti and urban muralism (the NYC City Walls in 1969), on the relationship between wild inscriptions and other urban signs such as road signs or advertising, on the deindustrialization of cities, on comparison with the wall interventions of May 1968. But on the other hand, he wanted to reduce the graffiti to a racial community: the Blacks of the ghettos, and their riots. He made graffiti the effect of racial riots. Hence a totalizing affirmation: “it is always young Blacks or Puerto Ricans who are at the origin of the movement” (p.119), or “graffiti are unique to New York” (*idem*). Peremptory and inaccurate affirmations since the origin of the movement goes back, according to Gasman and Neelon, to the hobos of Missouri, to the graffiti gang of Los Angeles, mixing Blacks, Whites, Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Italians, Greeks, etc., as photographs or period documents confirm it. The link to racial riots is not proven, the graffiti comes rather nicknames (monikers) of the trenches or gang names.

This text by Baudrillard is nevertheless interesting for three reasons.

First, it is a precursor of what will become a research on street art: a focus on productions, their production conditions, their place of effectiveness, their actors, according to a contextual and comparative method. Then, it does not remain with the report, but proposes a line of interpretation, in this case the semiotics supposed to give a general principle of explanation of the behaviors and comprehension of the objects. Finally, it presents an overinterpretation by committing three paralogs: the error of induction which holds the particular for the universal (all the graffiti is made by blacks or Puerto Ricans); conversely the abusive disjunction that singles out what is common (graffiti is NYC-specific); and abusive causality where there is a simple correlation (graffiti comes from racial riots).

This overinterpretation corresponds to the reproach that the common sense addresses to the philosophers: to erect in a universal and explanatory system what is only a series of accidents, and to reduce to fixed propositions that which relates to mobile behaviors, in a word to make an undue hypostasis. It corresponds above all to a political overinterpretation that wants to see in graffiti the revolt of “the damned of the Earth”, whereas in 1976, there are already in New York galleries and an art market for writing on canvas. This transfer of support, which is precisely not a “recovery” (blame addressed by the conscience of the left), but an integration to the market, has been overshadowed by Baudrillard who wanted to see graffiti in New York only what comforted his first impression and not what contradicted his interpretation. This is the whole problem of a field study: it delivers a contingent truth, the opposite of which is possible, and it is therefore erroneous to want to make it a truth of reason that would free the necessary being from a phenomenon.

The concept of graffiti therefore appears overloaded with a valuation according to a political orientation:

- seen from the left (from a marxist point of view), graffiti is the voice of the insurgent people, indignant, as legally illegal as morally legitimate; it is a popular art in the making; and fifty years after the merchandising of the first writings a good conscience of the left wants to be convinced still of their revolutionary mission;

- seen from the right (from a conservative point of view) graffiti is the punch of anarchist minorities, as legally illegal as morally reprehensible; it is a degenerate art symptomatic of a decadent civilization; and after fifty years of capital gains, a bad conscience on the right still does not admit what a liberal bourgeoisie casts with relish.

It is up to the researcher to detect these interpretation filters.

The fact is that the art market has gradually abandoned the term “graffiti”, synonymous with legal proceedings, for that of “street art”, a sort of crush between street pieces and graffiti-art of the 1970s, keeping a double valorization, the innovation of the street and the artistic purpose, forgetting a double devaluation, the illegality of the graffiti and the disjointed of occasional pieces. So it’s not a coincidence that Allan Schwartzman, an exhibition curator and art critic, is popularizing this term in 1985. Nor is it a coincidence that among the ten names for urban interventionism it is this one that has prevailed, against “post-graffiti”, “spraycan art”, “aerosol art”, “wall art” (ambiguous term because it also refers to the wallpaper), because by pointing the street, he identified an origin, a place of exercise and exhibition, and a meeting place.

The “graffiti stencil” of the 1980s became the “street stencil” of the 1960s, and the woman tagger Miss.Tic became a street artist. Sales catalogs have changed the words.

5 The concept of street art and neomuralism

The proliferation of the term street art in book titles is late. As far as I know, it dates from 2004 (thirty-two years after the appearance of the word) with Nicholas Ganz. In the Spanish edition (of 2004) street art is translated by *arte urbano*, well before “urban art” arrives in France. Then in 2005 with Justin Armstrong, Louis Bou, Sven Zimmerman, again Nicholas Ganz in 2006, with a hesitation between graffiti and street art, found in 2007 at Tristan Manco. From 2008, the word is needed with the books of Cedar Lewisohn who interprets the 1968 situationism as a street art of Avant-Garde, and the Brazilian *pixao* of the 70s as an “anti-modernism”, and juxtaposes elsewhere street art and graffiti, and that of Johannes Stahl.

The first museum exhibition entitled “street art” took place, to my knowledge, at V.A.M. from London in 2005, emphasizing the figurative side (drawing), and not scriptural (writing), and already talking about urban art or art in the city (urban art in France designating any art in the public space). Notwithstanding this usage the concept of street art is not a good concept in the sense that:

- its extension is indefinite, absorbing all kinds of techniques (ceramics, installation, painting, sculpture, stencil, poster, sticker, etc.), all kinds of destinies of the work (ephemeral, temporary, perennial), all kinds of statutes (unlawful, tolerated, authorized, sponsored);
- its comprehension is indefinite, the properties of the thing to be designated being variable, sometimes a consciousness of a tragic world (for Noty and Aroz by example), sometimes the frivolity of a kitsch enchantment;
- the word is devoid of relevance when it designates works produced and exhibited outside the street.

For example, it would seem logical to think that street art is on the street and for the street as an aesthetic experience, while it is also a kind of workshop painting, executed on a wall or canvas, or even a digital executable marking in any environment. From where for the artists a way to try to get away from this name which indicates in fact a style, a way of mixed technique without predefined rules, this absence of rules being the counter-rule which makes them the point in common. Thus, street art is a figurative, illicit fresco, which pays homage to a popular figure like Amy Winehouse, or an abstract muralism of Jan Kalab, a distant drift of the bubble style, or a politically correct neomuralism of Fairey.

Hence the idea of placing this innovative trend in a history of art.

6. Contemporary urban art / urban contemporary art

The term “urban art” as it is used today is eminently ambiguous. This concept has a history (Jannière, 2007): it sends back between the two World Wars to urban planners like Léon Jaussely or Jacques Greber who defend the city as an integral work, object of embellishment which must command the public policies (whose Cornudet law of 1919-1924). Indeed, in French urban art refers to art in the public space: mainly architecture as it orders and coordinates sculptures, wall decorations (painting, mosaic), landscapes and topiaries, fountains and channels, sounds and lights, installations, or street events and performances. It is even officially defined, by Robert-Max Antoni (who teaches urban art since 1968 at the Ecole d'Architecture of Paris Val de Seine) under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, as “all multidisciplinary approaches leading to improve the living environment with a concern to assess the architectural quality, the quality of social life and respect for the environment”⁹. The formula was already used in 1933 by René Danger in his *Cours d'urbanisme* at the Ecole Spéciale des Travaux Publics: “the main elements of urban art: water in its various aspects, vegetation, architecture in its urban exterior form”¹⁰. Urbanism is for René Danger the combination of two streams: on the one hand, a hygienism inherited from the 19th century hygienist movement to make towns safer, especially during the reconstructions following the Great War, and on the other hand, an aesthetic (or “science of the beautiful”) suitable to define the rules of embellishment of a city by the urban art. Sanitize and beautify by spaces of more fluid circulation. Michel Ragon (1987) tries to think of it for the contemporary period and an urban planner like Françoise Choay makes it go back to the Renaissance, even to Vitruvius. An urban arts competition has been organized internationally for many years by architects and urban planners. This historic “urban art” translates into urban design or *Städtebau* or *urbane Kunst*.

Thus, when Stéphanie Lemoine (2014) entitled “urban art” her article about street art, it produces a confusion between two distinct phenomena: on the one hand an old architectural doctrine, on the other hand a recent commercial name. Is this confusion an abuse of language? Not exactly since it is not forbidden to use an old formula to make a neologism of meaning. It is still necessary to explain it and above all to know where the words used come from.

Adding “contemporary” as a predicate to the phrase “urban art” (*contemporary urban art*) does not solve the confusion. Indeed, it is redundant since urban art is contemporary art, which shows all the art in the public space: Calder on Notre-Dame Island in Montreal, Serra on the forecourt of the Philharmonic of Berlin, Alechinski in the Marais in Paris, Buren on the parking lot of Sérignan. Or “contemporary urban art” would mean that street art is the only new urban art, which is false and unacceptable to urban planners and artists in the public space.

Interpolating the “contemporary” predicate to the phrase (*urban contemporary art*) does not improve anything. Indeed, “contemporary urban art” is in no way identifiable since by definition any current artist is contemporary art defined not by a style but by the concomitance between the time of production and that of reception. In addition, this means that a “framed” work in the manner of gallerists, curators or auctioneers is not made from the street (its inspiration, its material, its place of exhibition, its future) but in the manner of the street. “Urban contemporary art” means a style, a way for works whose production and exhibition do not pass by the street. That’s why it’s better to call it *urban pop* or *street pop*, as I say, because these framed paintings that capture the visual clichés of street art (drips, overprints, collages, characters from mass culture, etc.) are often produced mechanically and in series (digigraphy), by authors without any experience of the street life.

So the concept of urban art can be understood in many ways.

- In the real sense, it is urbanism as an art of embellishment of the city conceived as a whole, the geometric design harmoniously arranging the intervention of this or that particular art; he is represented by Bernini, Le Nôtre, Le Corbusier, Niemeyer, etc.

⁹Vocabulaire français de l'art urbain, dir. Robert-Max Antoni, Editions du Certu, 2010. See also, from the same author Le vocabulaire illustré de l'art urbain, 2000, www.arturbain.fr.

¹⁰René Danger, Cours d'urbanisme, Librairie de l'Enseignement technique, Paris, Eyrolles, 1933, p.204 sq. Quoted in R.-M. Antoni, « L'art urbain, qu'est-ce à dire ? », L'art urbain, dossier documentaire, Edition du Certu, 2002, p. 14.

¹¹Street pop is an art movement using the visual vocabulary of street art and pop culture on conventional media.

- By metonymy, an element of urban decoration (painting, mosaic, installation, etc.) placed in a neighborhood under the aegis of a municipality or association is interpreted as urban art in the sense that it embellishes the “framework of life”. Here street art can be an element of urban art in the sense that a public, associative or private commission puts in place works in situ. It becomes wall decor or urban design.

- By neologism of meaning, and reductive neologism, it designates what others call the *street pop*¹¹, this type of works made in the manner of the street, but whose street is neither the origin nor the end, neither the support nor the place of exhibition and discovery, except in the decorative neomuralism.

Conclusion

To make of the street art a urban design thus means framing it because one subtracts its refractory power to make it an element of predictable and conformist urban decoration. It is “urban” not in the urbanistic sense - what happens in a city space – but in the moral sense, what is affable and in this same way does not disturb but participates in living well together.

In fact the difficulty of the search is twofold. It has a double constraint: on the one hand, to identify a moving object, changing in time and space to reveal its constant and common properties, and on the other hand not to freeze precisely such a phenomenon that today which means everything and its opposite.

Hence a kind of methodological requirement: to examine the fate of the pieces which reveals not only the gentrification of the practice (which would be found in any emerging art, such as cinema and comics), but especially a reception distanced in time: what yesterday was the denunciation of an unjust system today becomes a kind of new conformism, and what yesterday boasted of being graffiti now fights against graffiti. The most typical paradox is the East Side Gallery in Berlin, which used to be a hotspot for free and liberating street art during the fall of the Wall, which today is covered with antigraffiti varnish to make it an unalterable memorial.

Research on street art is not normative (the good or the bad street art) nor prescriptive (what it should be or do), but perspectivist: what it tends to be in a planetary environment so the impacts are multiple and retroactive. In these signs stands the figure of our destiny.

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German Street Art 1970 - 2000

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Introduction

To refer to German Street Art bears a couple of difficulties. The term “Street Art” (see for instance Sommer, 1975) originally meant mostly community murals. The understanding of Street Art in 2018 is a different one. Street Art today are self-authorized signs in public space, often urban space that want to communicate with a larger circle of viewers. The notion of signs aptly covered typography/calligraphy, images, colors, size, location choice, etc. Street Art is rather picture based and often addressed to the general public (Blanché, 2016). Since 2000 Street Art might be called a movement, i.e. more than a handful people do it. In this essay, I will shortly introduce three areas of *avant la lettre* Street Art in Germany, starting in the 1970s up to 2000. Ideas, technique and style did not flow so much like after the breakthrough of the internet. Before 2000, it made sense to talk about regional styles in *avant la lettre* Street Art, not just in Germany, but also in other western countries. To talk about *German* Street Art - i.e. a particular group in a certain area - does not make much sense after the first years of the new millennium. With the rise of the internet around 2003, almost everyone could know what happened in other cities. Street Art became nomadic and global, today Street art is both local and global. Like in other large western cities, what we call Street Art in 2018 emerged also in Germany mostly from four main genres: fine art, advertising/propaganda, punk and style writing graffiti. The borders between those four categories were always fluent. The subchapters in this essay follow the emergence of Street Art in Germany in three areas, Cologne/Düsseldorf, briefly Munich and Berlin in rather chronological order.

1. Cologne/Düsseldorf: From Beuys to Street Art (ca. 1964-1985)

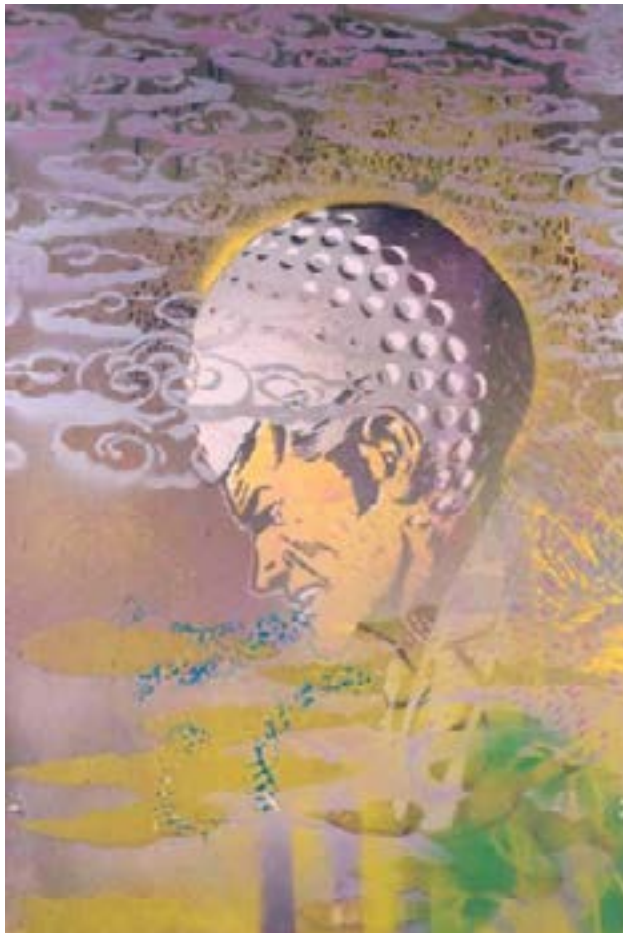
German Fluxus and De/collage artist Wolf Vostell (1932-98) combined political street scenes and urban riots, which he spray-painted in his 1964 work *We Were a Kind of Museum Piece*.¹ Today one could call this Vostell work proto Urban Art – it is not in the street, but about the street, using spray paint, which at that time was mainly car finish - a color made for the street, not for art. The large size of the work, the shape and the screen-printing technique point to billboard advertising on the street. Like many of his contemporaries, Vostell tried to close the gap between art and life by bringing street and art closer together. However, *We Were a Kind of Museum Piece* was still made for an indoor art context. A few years later, Vostell stepped outside on the street. His *Ruhender Verkehr / Stationary traffic*, erected in Cologne from 1969 counts as one of the first site-specific new public art sculptures in Germany. *Ruhender Verkehr / Stationary traffic* is a sculpture consisting of a completely cast-in passenger car originally placed in a parking lot whose contours are still visible, although roughly simplified. It was later often self-authorized spray-painted by street artists.

At the art academy in nearby Düsseldorf Joseph Beuys (1926-87), like Vostell connected to Fluxus, was the most prominent figure. His former student Christof Kohlhöfer (1942-) was friend with Pop Artist Sigmar Polke (1940-2011)

¹Wolf Vostell, *Wir waren so eine Art Museumsstück [We Were a Kind of Museum Piece]*, 1964, silkscreen print and spray paint on canvas photo, 120 x 450 cm, Inventory Number BG-M 0351/77, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.

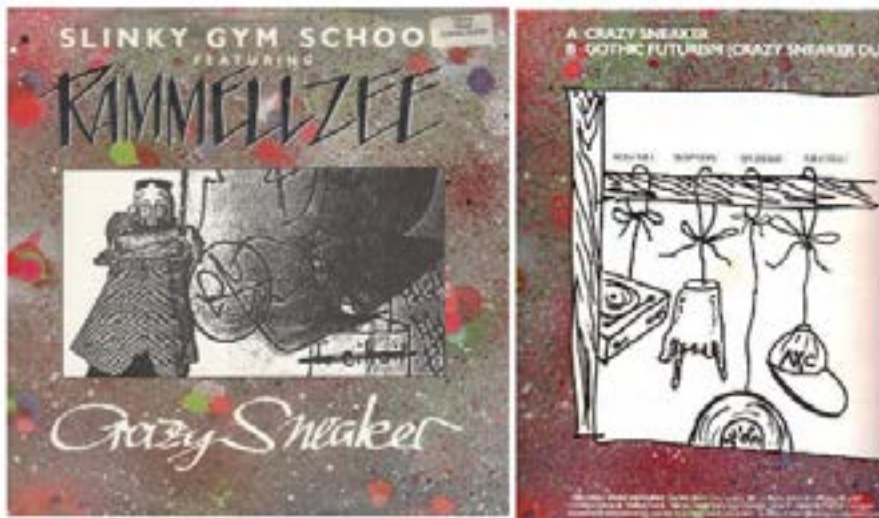
Like in Amsterdam (Stunned Film, 2006) also in the Cologne/Düsseldorf area, what we call Street Art today started analog to punk, in the 1970s. The punk scene itself was not just a youth scene or a music scene but deeply linked to the art scene in those cities. In 1976, Kohlhöfer made 15 colored stencil images for posters for the later punk pub and music club Ratinger Hof in Düsseldorf (Kohlhöfer, 1994), i.e. punk advertising in public space, which was often a grey-zone between illegal art, do-it-yourself punk and advertising that still forms Street Art today. The connection between punk anti-art or non-art rebelliousness with advertising, the dominant discursive capitalist medium seems to be a contradiction. However not all anti-art or non-art is actually not art (today those works are shown in art contexts) and not everything someone within a punk context calls “non-art” is not art for others outside that context. As many punk events and concerts often happened without the main aim to earn money, advertising is not necessarily capitalistic. German punk was invented in the Ratinger Hof (Hordych, 2011). It was then co-managed by Christof Kohlhöfer’s then wife Ingrid (1935-), also a Beuys student (Oehmke, 2014). The Art Academy Düsseldorf, where Beuys taught, was 300 meters away. In 1976, another Beuys student, minimal artist Imi Knoedel painted the walls of the Ratinger Hof white and put blue neon lights on the ceilings. The walls were then subsequently written on with slogan graffiti by guest – which was tolerated by the management. At the bar there once was a mural created with stencils. Kohlhöfer used stencils on canvas already around 1974 (like in fig. 1).

In 1977, Kohlhöfer went to New York (Sanneh, 2011) and did there multicolored stencil works, also illegally in the streets, and was featured in Allan Schwartzmans book *Street Art* from 1985 (Schwartzman, 1985).



Treeck wrote (quoting Johannes Stahl) that Polke inspired Kohlhöfer to work with stencils and that Kohlhöfer inspired New Yorker stencil artists around 1980 like John Fekner (Treeck, 2001, p. 185, 316). Fekner told me in an unpublished interview he already started working with stencils in 1967 and in public space in 1976. He showed photo evidence that is clearly dateable, also on his website (Fekner 2018). In addition, Stahl (1989) wrote Fekner started in 1976 as well. As Kohlhöfer arrived in New York one year later, Treeck’s theory cannot be correct. In 1980, Beuys joined the protest of The Real Estate Show, an illegal group exhibition in New York. Kohlhöfer exhibited there and was part of avant-garde artist group COLAB who organized the show, as was fellow Beuys student and artist Peter Moennig (Zacks, 2015). Before Moennig (1955-) moved to New York in 1977, he did art on the streets before: “In Cologne, [...] he had conducted illegal actions at night: clandestinely changing the names of streets, placing sculptures in the way of pedestrians, pushing the boundaries of public behavior to provoke reactions.” (ibid.).

COLAB later that year organized the influential Times Square Show. Some of the participants of the latter, an unknown Keith Haring (1958-1990) or style writing graffiti promoter Fab Five Freddy (1959-) met another student of Beuys, Walter Dahn (1954-) who lived in Düsseldorf (Treeck 2001, p. 80). Dahn, Kohlhöfer and Polke exhibited together in a group exhibition in Bonn in 1981, showing works from the 1970s (Oppenheim, 1981). In Germany, Dahn got his part in art history not as Street Art predecessor, but as an important German representative of neo-expressionist painting around 1980, the so-called Junge Wilde (young wild ones). Dahn made his paintings in a fast, crude manner often with vivid brushstrokes and dripping paint, similar to graffiti spray paint “noses”. Neo-expressionism in Germany was deeply connected to punk and graffiti, like in New York. Basquiat and Haring were often associated with neo-expressionism and graffiti at the same time. Haring visited Walter Dahn in Cologne and drew his characteristic chalk figures in Dahn’s studio (Treeck 2001, p. 152). Already in 1979, Dahn made illegal little drawings in public space, inspired by New Yorker Writers. He later met style writers like Crash or Daze in person. Walter Dahn also met Graffiti pioneer RammellZee (ca. 1960-2010), for whom he made a music video (ibid., p. 80) and a record cover in 1984 (Fig. 2). From 1983 onwards, Dahn painted larger illegal murals in different European cities. He often collaborated with Czech born German fellow Junge Wilde painter Jiri Dokupil (1954-) or George Condo (1957-), a friend of Haring.



Dokupil studied in Cologne and in New York in the 1970s. In the early 1980s, he made illegal graffiti in Cologne (Treeck, 2001, p. 93). Dahn and Dokupil founded an artist group called Mülheimer Freiheit with other German painters, like fellow Beuys student Hans Peter Adamski (1947-). The group lasted from 1979 until 1984 (ibid., p. 278), the same period some members also did what we call Street Art today.

At the same time, in 1980, another known German Neo-expressionist painter, A.R. Penck (1939-2017), moved from the communist part of Germany, the GDR, to West Germany, to the then center of the German art world, the Düsseldorf/Cologne area. A.R. Penck painted illegal graffiti of his figures there (Fig. 3), but also with Helge Leiberg (1954-) a large legal public art mural in Hamburg in 1989, called Theory of Hamburg.



A.R. Penck's real name is Ralf Winkler. To paint illegal graffiti on streets is only consequent for Penck: he had named himself after famous geologist Albrecht Penck (1858-1945). Like his eponym Penck was interested in prehistoric cave paintings, a graffiti predecessor, as also painted directly on walls. His works often show stick figures and graphic symbols reminiscent of cave painting, runes, Asian calligraphy and simple graffiti. Penck's style was often compared to Keith Haring's, although he worked in that style decades before Haring. A graffiti style drawing by A.R. Penck is on the book cover of the book *Cologne Graffiti* from 1985, Treeck (2001, p. 306) printed a photo of another one by Penck on an electric street cabinet box.

All these artistic positions shown so far were rather obscure side products of artists that were successful in classical fields of institutional gallery art, mostly painters. This thought should not follow the popular notion that street art is unmediated by artistic training and emerged in a pure gesture of revolt, rather the opposite. But the academic artists doing it seemed to have seen it themselves as side products and at least their audience did. Neither Penck, nor Dahn, Kohlhöfer, Moennig or Dokupil are today famous or at least recognized as Street Art predecessors. Their traveling between the US and former West or East Germany can explicitly be seen in terms of cross-cultural exchanges in which personal networks of artists lead to cross-pollinating ideas across borders. In the US similar artists like Haring, Holzer, Basquiat instead got their recognition from the works they made on the street although they mostly had started as trained artists with an art historic background before.

The first time works we would call Street Art today were broadly discussed in the media and got much attention were the ones by the anonymous so-called Sprayer of Zurich. Since September 1977, he drew virtuously line-art spray-can figures in the streets of Zurich. Those drawings coined the general understanding of graffiti in the late 70s until the mid-80s. His illegal spray-can line drawings differed much from the style writing of tags and pieces coming over from the US with movies like *Wild Style* six years later. After painting about 900 graffiti in Zurich, he got caught. To avoid prison, the Sprayer of Zurich fled to Germany, to the then arty Düsseldorf/Cologne area, also because of Beuys, as Beuys (and ex-Federal-Chancellor Willy Brandt) wrote articles in favor of the Zurich sprayer alias Harald Naegeli (1939-), a classically trained artist then already in his forties (Treeck, 2001, p. 358-360). In 1980/81, in Cologne, he sprayed a cycle of about 600 graffiti called *Kölner Totentanz* [Cologne death dance] (ibid.). Naegeli was influential for artists working on the streets of Düsseldorf and Cologne whose *avant-la-lettre* Street Art was less a "side-product" than the ones of Dahn or Dokupil (in whose street line drawings Naegeli's influence is traceable as well). Before Naegeli and his works became known, there were mostly slogan graffiti in Cologne and Düsseldorf (Jensch and Riedt, 1985). Naegeli himself started

with slogan graffiti (Treeck, 2001, p. 282) as well.

The most notable proto *Street Artists* after Naegeli (and influenced by him) in Cologne/Düsseldorf were Marcus Krips (1965-), Axel Mazurka (1964-) and the so-called Bananensprayer Thomas Baumgärtel (1960-), who painted stencils of bananas since 1986. Krips studied art at the Düsseldorf Academy. In the years after 1982, he made numerous hand-drawn line-graffiti characters and stylized heads but also many stencils



(Treeck, 2001, p. 189). A photo (fig. 4) shows a wall of a very angular line drawing by Krips that depicts the side-face head of a punk wearing a characteristic mohawk and piercings. He told Thunar Jentsch that he accidentally caught Walter Dahn there spray-painting a skull in 1983 (Treeck, 2001, p. 81). Dahn combined his painted skull with the political inscription “Death Squad” that points to his US influences but also to then-contemporary political topics. Death squads existed at that time in Latin America, but reminded also of earlier Fascism, i.e. the European tradition of political slogan graffiti. The mentioned wall was near the Stollwerk factory. In this large former chocolate factory many squatters, punks and artists lived and presented their works there, punk concerts happened and Krips and others painted figural graffiti there, for example Walter Dahn with known New Yorker writer Daze (Treeck, 2001, p. 80).

In this place, the roots of later Street Art, i.e. fine art, advertising/propaganda, punk and style writing graffiti merged. The general understanding of graffiti before the mid-1980s in Germany was first slogan, then figural graffiti, not name and style graffiti yet. Exceptions like Walter Dahn exchanged ideas with graffiti style writers in New York even before the movies *Wild Style*, released as *Graffiti Wild Style* (West German airdate: 7 April 1983), *Style Wars* (West German airdate 11 May 1984) or *Beat Street*, which was aired in West (27 July 1984) and later also in East Germany (14 June 1985).

Another crucial influence to the development of Street Art were Richard Hambleton's shadow men (Jentsch, 1985, p. 122), each one resembling a life-sized black silhouetted image of some mysterious person. In 1984, the New Yorker Hambleton (1952-2017) traveled to German cities like Cologne, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Munich and painted also the Berlin wall (Treeck, 2001, p. 147). Often his shadow men in Cologne were complemented by wiking horns or pink women by German artist Katrin Kaluza (1959-) (Jentsch, 1985, p. 122).

2. From Munich to Hamburg and Berlin (1983-)

Those films started graffiti as a larger phenomenon that took a few years to grow. At the end of the 1990s, many writers changed to what we call Street Art today. Munich was the first graffiti center in 1985 with graffiti pioneer Loomit [Mathias Köhler] (1968-). He coined and influenced countless graffiti sprayers worldwide and was not just a German repeating the New York style. Writer BG183 [Sotero Ortiz] (1963-) from the New Yorker Tats crew confirmed that Europe was, in some ways, more advanced in terms of 3D style and a very collaborative approach as coined by Loomit and DAIM [Mirko Reisser] (1971-) (Nosé, 2000; Murray, 2002; Felisbret, 2009). Then followed the cities of Mainz, Heidelberg (1990), Dortmund (1991), Hamburg (1993) and surprisingly late - Berlin (1994) (Treeck, 2001, p. 87-90). That does not mean there was no graffiti in Berlin before 1994, just less style writing. I will not dig into the development of style writing graffiti in Germany here, for reasons of space.

2.1. Terminology: Wall Paintings, Façade Paintings and Murals

Early Street-Art-predecessors in 1970s' Germany were also community and squatter wall paintings, most prominently in Berlin, but also in Hamburg (fig. 5). Bernhard van Treeck used the term "wall paintings" as an umbrella term and differentiated between "Fassadenmalerei" [façade paintings] and "murals" (Treeck, 2001, p. 112, 280, 404). Façade paintings are for Treeck mostly legal, sanctioned and commissioned works, for instance public wall art, painted advertising as well as squatter wall paintings (Treeck, 2001, p. 112). Murals are for Treeck any large wall paintings, spray- or brush-painted, legal or illegal. Treeck used "murals" for mostly political wall paintings in Mexico, USA, Sardinia and murals in other countries in that tradition (Treeck, 2001, p. 280), and the German term "Fassadenmalerei" for German public wall paintings of the 1960s until 1980s. For Treeck "Fassadenmalerei" is rather a negative term, old-fashioned and German. "Mural" is for him a positive term, up-to-date, timeless, international; he uses a hip English term instead of a prissy German one. A "fassade painting" is literally superficial, a "mural" literally deeper.

In Germany, the most well-known squatter murals are in the Hafenstraße in Hamburg dating from the 1970s and early 80s (fig. 5). In the squatter scene, wall paintings were a popular means of visual and colored demarcation of an occupied house from an environment classified as bourgeois. Often those squatter wall paintings transport political messages in a naive way (Treeck, 2001, p. 155). Fig. 5 shows political symbols, i.e. the black-red-golden banana as persiflage of the German state, the arched back black cat on red star, a smashed swastika, symbols of leftist resistance, the fishbone, a warning sign of pollution, and Disney cartoons, references to Hamburg politicians (Helmut Schmidt or Zimmermann) or the controversial logo of British polit-punk band Crass, a crossed religious cross.

Treeck called squatter wall paintings "Fassadenmalerei" not "murals" (2001, p. 112) - although they often have political content and are often designed in the tradition of Mexican or US murals of the 1930s until 1970s, i.e. according to his definition they could be murals. Though I do not adopt Treeck's contradictory differentiations but I appreciate his urge to note that there are big differences in wall paintings in style, intention and content, also locally and temporally.



A phenomenon Treeck could not know yet in 2001, at the time of his publication, was what I call the Instagram mural. Today's frequency of occurrence of new commissioned mural paintings to "pimp" a wall (and along with it a quarter of a city) was unthinkable at the time Treeck wrote about wall paintings. My focus however here is about the origin of murals, wall paintings or facade paintings in Germany before 2000. Whether commissioned advertising murals that occurred in Germany since 1900, whether propaganda public art murals in a socialist realism style in the former GDR, whether unsanctioned squatter murals, sanctioned community murals or murals by artists that could work without restrictions - all these murals were influential for what we call Street Art today.

Carolyn Loeb noticed, "[w]orks by earlier leaders of the mural movement in the 1930s in Mexico and the United States had contributed to the project of constructing national identity. By the 1970s, we can see the emergence of mural practices that focus, instead, on urban space, neighborhood sites, and on the project of reimagining the design and experience of the city in relation to citizens' claim to the 'right to the city.'" (2014, p. 227)

Loeb made that observation by examining murals in Berlin. Almost 250 legal and illegal public murals appeared between 1974 and 1989 in West Berlin according to Loeb (ibid.). After WWII, many buildings were destroyed or seriously damaged, in Berlin over 70%. In the 1950s and 60s urban planning quickly and with rather rational, functional and economic criteria in mind rebuilt the cities.

As the pace of rebuilding quickened in the 1960s, mainstream planners targeted the demolition of many remaining older structures in favor of large-scale new construction and highway development, following the model for urban renewal that was widely promoted at the time in West Germany, Western Europe, and the US. (ibid)

“New” was equaled with “good” and “progress”, “old” with negative feelings of a past Germans did not want to think about at that time.

[I]t was not until a younger generation ‘saw urban development with critical eyes,’ that dissatisfaction with prevailing practices and plans for the cityscape arose. Instead of demolition, activist citizens and critical architects and planners began to argue for preservation and renovation of existing older buildings, street patterns, public spaces, and neighborhoods. (ibid.)

In addition, gentrification played an important role. There were plans to demolish for example the old residential houses in the Hafenstraße in Hamburg to make space for profitable big business towers. All that demolition lead to many gaps between buildings. Those resulted in more large firewalls, together with the restructuring of old streets. Those fire-protecting walls usually do not have (m)any windows and are ideally for large wall paintings. The opportunity for murals appeared when many of these unsightly walls occurred.

2.2. The Berlin Wall

Since 1961, another consequence of WWII was another large hideous building that mostly contained high empty walls, the Berlin Wall. 140 kilometers long, built in four stages, the last, most long lasting and highest-rising (3,4m) stage was built in 1975 – the point in time, its size and quality was better for wall paintings than the three stages before. The GDR called it “Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart”, the West “Wall of Shame”. Nearly all paintings occurred on the west side of the wall, as behind the GDR side there were armed guards, dogs and wired fences. On the west side, no one cared if the wall was painted, although it was forbidden there as well (Van Treeck 2001, p. 43). However, it often was viewed as beautification or justified and sanctioned resistance, even by the German establishment. During the whole period of its existence people painted on the wall, but most frequently in the last years until 1992 (Treeck, 2001, p. 42-46). Reasons for that were a growing anti-Wall sentiment, Gorbatschow’s Perestroika (since 1986) but also because of graffiti spreading all over the world after movies like *Wild Style* in the early 1980s or artists associated with graffiti becoming accepted in mainstream culture and also in the art world, especially Jean Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. It was not German artists who are and were closely linked with painting the Berlin wall, but the US American Haring or, even earlier, the French artists Terry Noir (1958-) and Christophe Bouchet (1962-). First, in the 1960s, there were rather isolated political slogan graffiti and scratched “I was there” tourist memory graffiti on the wall.

With the student movement of the sixties, the wall temporarily assumed the character of a public wailing wall. Political statements became more important. Numerous statements on socio-political topics were sprayed and painted, supplemented and painted over again. There was intensive communication between the actors. The contents were even more important than the form. However, with the times the graffiti changed. Individual-centered aspects became more important. By the East German soldiers, the painters were hardly noticed. Hagen Koch explains in a quote by van Treeck: “‘Graffiti helped to hide the wall. For the same reason, it was tolerated later, when the wall was planted on the west side’ (24.6.00). In the 1980s, the face of the wall was increasingly dominated by images in which the communicative character was no longer obvious. More and more esthetically designed pictures came to the fore. At the same time, political issues became more important, even though in this place a graffiti always remains a political statement both formally and specifically. [...] The growing community of writers

in Berlin also used the building as a base for painting in the last few years of the Wall's existence. [...] The spray-painted, large-scale 'pieces' finally occupied the largest surface and disrespected the pictures of the renowned artists. It was a victory of egocentrism over public spirit, marking the completion of the history of the wall. (Treeck, 2001, p. 42-46, translation: UB)

It took two years, 1990-92, to tear the wall down. In the mid 1990s, style writing graffiti increased before, at the end of the 1990s, many former graffiti writers became Street Artists.

3. Before and After the Fall of the Wall



Berlin walls were rather empty before the fall of the Berlin Wall – except the wall itself, the largest open-air gallery in the world. When the GDR vanished, the east was overrun with style writing graffiti (Treeck, 2001, p. 40). Spray cans were hard to get in the GDR, the regime punished political graffiti hard, but style writing graffiti and break dance did happen there as well as the US hip-hop movie *Beat Street* was shown in the GDR in 1985 and caused a hip-hop hype (Lippitz, 2016). A picture by East German photographer Andree K. Krause (fig. 6) depicts a wall in the GDR near Berlin combining the inscriptions “Beat Street”, Hip-Hop”, “New York” with a drawing of a ghetto blaster, a note, the head of a breakdancer and US cartoon character Snoopy.

There was also East German punk, for example Berlin stencil artist Atak (1967-) started in an East German punk band. His stencils in united Berlin around 1990 were influenced by comics, according to him East German Pochoirists did not know the French pochoirists (Metze-Prou and Treeck, 2000, p. 190-192). That changed in 1991 with a large stencil exhibition in Leipzig, which can be seen as the first Street Art exhibition in Germany, called “Galerie Ephémère”. Apart from five East German artists mostly French pochoirists participated, i.e. Blek, Miss.Tic, Olivier, Jef Aerosol, etc. (Metze-Prou and Treeck, 2000, p. 186-189).

Conclusions

The German Street Art Scene since 1970 emerged in the Düsseldorf/Cologne area at the same time when it was the German center of the contemporary art world and the birthplace of punk. Proto street artists of the first generation like Dahn, Dokupil, Kohlhöfer or Moennig were inspired by then contemporary (gallery) artists like Vostell, Polke, Beuys who used similar strategies and materials earlier, but not self-authorized on the street. The difference between German Street Art and the one in the US, East Germany or Swiss that in Germany it was from the begin made by artists in art academic structures. Dahn, Dokupil, Kohlhöfer or Moennig were (former) fine art students and close to punk. They were, like the second generation of Düsseldorf/Cologne proto street artists (Baumgärtel, Kaluza, Krips, Mazurka) also inspired by dominant single fine artists or proto street artists who came from outside, Naegeli from Swiss, Penck from the GDR and Hambleton from the US but also inspired by New York graffiti style writers – even before but especially after movies and books about style writing graffiti (Wild Style, Style War, Spray Can Art) appeared in Germany. There was a vivid scene happening not only in Düsseldorf/Cologne, as exemplified here, but also in other German cities, for instance in Kassel (Thiel, Beyer 1981) or Munich (Kreuzer, 1986, van Treeck, 2001) *before* US style writing graffiti appeared in Germany. Those works were called “graffiti” but they fulfilled what we called street art today: rather pictorial, if they used text it was readable and aimed at a general public, most works were done by trained fine artists.

Although the mentioned US movies and books about style writing graffiti appeared in the whole of Germany, Munich became the first (style writing) graffiti capital of Germany with Loomit, years before Hamburg or Berlin, where still murals and façade paintings in the older tradition of wall ads, propaganda or Mexican polit- or community murals were dominant. On the Berlin wall all these different kinds of street art predecessors were combined, at first not only political slogans and political wall paintings in the style of squatter or community murals appeared, often done by amateurs, but also fine artists like Noir, Hambleton, Dahn or Haring painted the wall. Later style writing graffiti took over, before the wall fell. To a certain extent, in a smaller scale and a few years later, similar processes happened in East Germany as well before, after the reunification of Germany, eventually Street Art emerged, according to today’s understanding of the term.

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Mona Lisa's eyes. Art-themed street art works in Italy

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Alterius non sit qui suus esse potest

Paracelsus

Introduction

Although street art is a global phenomenon and street art works, not necessarily site-specific, often show common characteristics regardless of their physical context, some local specificities appear¹, especially through the theme of art. The street art works that refer explicitly to “high” art are not many but very interesting because the references vary a lot from one cultural context to another. In this study, the focus is on street art in Italy, but only a comparison could allow to identify its specificity, so I also took into consideration street art in 3 other European countries. The survey was conducted on a sample of about 1000 photographed street art works in total, about 500 found in Rome (Italy) and about 500 found in Paris and Lyon (France), Berlin (Germany), and London (England), from 2014 to 2017. I will first describe the data and categorize the works chronologically and geographically, then I will sum up the results and propose interpretations.

Few words about the scope of the research, methodology and terminology. I employed an empirical approach: I considered the works, not their authors, and focused on the works' themes and situations as they appear(ed) to passers-by, neglecting the artists' intentions, foremost because since a work is delivered to the public, its meaning stops being controlled by its author, to a certain extent, and belongs to the public domain. Therefore, even when the artists were known, they were not interviewed. Regarding the terminological *vexata quaetio*, by street art works I mean what Alison Young means by “situational art works” (Young, 2014), that is works made in the public space, seemingly spontaneously, with no previous authorization, willing to address the public, devoid of commercial purposes, and whose meaning and intention are ambiguous. It is impossible to make a comprehensive review of the street art works of big cities at a time, so data are only indicative. Nevertheless, the consistent sample of about 1000 art works in total may compensate for it, hopefully providing a reliable estimation².

¹On the global-local nexus, see Faccioli and Gibbons, 2007.

²The exact number of the compound of art works is uncertain because in my photographic archives, there are sometimes many photos of the same art work, especially consisting of details of the work and work in its context, but the number of photos is not always the same. Moreover, it often happens that the same art work was photographed in different years: in this case I counted one art work and, if reproduced, chose the image with the better quality. The number of the sample is therefore an estimation.

1. Data

Here is a list of the art works considered, with the main criteria taken into account:

Nb	Location	Date photo	Artist quoted	Subject of the quote	Period quoted	Nationality quoted artist
1	Rome	2017	Magritte	Work	20 th	Belgian
2	Rome	2017	Magritte	Work	20 th	Belgian
3	Rome	2017	Mondrian	Work	20 th	Dutch
4	Rome	2017	Munch	Work	19 th -20 th	Norwegian
5	Rome	2017	Manzoni	Work	20 th	Italian
6	Rome	2015	Caravaggio	Work	16 th -17 th	Italian
7	Rome	2015	Caravaggio	Work	16 th -17 th	Italian
8	Rome	2017	Leonardo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
9	Rome	2017	Leonardo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
10	Rome	2014	Michelangelo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
11	Rome	2017	Michelangelo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
12	Rome	2015	Unknown	Work	Fascist ³	Italian
1	Berlin	2014	Dali	Artist	20 th	Spanish
2	Berlin	2014	Haring	Work	20 th	US
3	Berlin	2014	Rockwell	Work	20 th	US
4	Berlin	2014	Warhol	Work	20 th	US
5	Berlin	2014	Michelangelo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
6	London	2014	Flagg	Work	20 th	US
7	London	2014	Haring	Work	20 th	US
8	Paris	2014	Klimt	Work	19 th -20 th	Austrian
9	Paris	2014	Michelangelo	Work	15 th -16 th	Italian
10	Lyon	2016	Warhol	Artist	20 th	US

1.2 Common characteristics

There are few common characteristics of the art-themed street art works used in this study in all countries alike: they almost all refer to painting, maybe because of the long-lasting felt prevalence of painting among the plastic arts, and they are not many. The proportion of art-themed works is similar in the different cities and countries: 12 among the works in Italy, 10 among the works in Paris, Lyon, Berlin and London, that is, in all cases, around 2%. These numbers should not necessarily lead us to think that there are more art-themed street art works in Italy than in the other European cities, because I stayed much longer and more often in Rome than in the other cities, hence the equivalent number of works in Rome, on the one hand, and, on the other one, in the four different cities all together.

1.2 Italian specificities

A substantial gap between Italy and the other countries appears on three elements: the subject of the quote, the nationality of the quoted artists, and the quoted periods.

Art-themed street art works in Paris, Lyon, Berlin and London happen to refer to the artists (20%) rather than to some of their single works: the quoted artists were eccentric characters whose personality and life were part of their art: Warhol (see his portrait by Don Mateo, fig. 1) and Dali. In the other cases, street artists refer to famous art works.

³Many thanks to Ulrich Blanché for his investigation and suggestions on this paste-up.



Fig. 1 (paste-up, Lyon, 2016)

In France, Germany and England, most quotations (6 out of 10) are to US art. The other art-themed street art works (4) refer to European art, including 2 references to Italian art:

- 2 references to Andy Warhol (1 portrait and 1 work inspired by his *Marilyn Monroe*);
- 2 references to Haring's art works;
- 1 reference to the famous James Montgomery Flagg's *Uncle Sam*;
- 1 reference to the baseball boy from *A Day in the Life of a Boy* by Norman Rockwell, 1952 (fig. 2);
- 1 reference to a Spanish artist: Salvador Dali's face on a black and white photograph;
- 1 reference to an Austrian art work: a copy of Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Emilie Flöge*;
- 2 references to Michelangelo Buonarroti's art works in the Sistine Chapel: *The Creation of Adam* and the *Delphic Sybil*.



Fig. 2 (paste-up, Berlin, 2014)

In Italy, instead, no American artist is referred to. All art-themed street art works refer to European art and the references to Italian art are majority (8 out of 12).

These data also let us observe chronological gaps because in France, England and Germany, the amount of works referring to the art of the 19th and 20th centuries are considerable (8 out of 10) and considerably higher than in Italy, where they are 5 out of 12:

- 2 references to Belgian art works (René Magritte's *The Son of Man* and *The Treachery of Images*)
- 1 reference to an Italian art work (Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* cans)
- 1 reference to a Norwegian art work by Qwerty alias Mr. Minimal (Edvard Munch's *Scream*, 1893-1910)
- 1 reference to a Dutch art work (Piet Mondrian's lozenges, fig. 3)



Fig. 3 (sticker, Rome, 2017)

References to art before the 19th century are few in the 3 cities of central and northern Europe (2 out of 10), whereas they are majority in Italy (7 out of 12):

- 2 references to Michelangelo Buonarroti's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel;
- 2 references to Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*;
- 2 references to Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* and *Young Sick Bacchus*.

Moreover, apart from one work in which the quotation is undetermined (a paste-up of statues in a pseudo-classic style in Rome), all the references to the art before the 19th century alike refer to Italian art only, that of Renaissance and Baroque:

- 4 references to Michelangelo (fig. 4);
- 2 references to Leonardo da Vinci;
- 2 references to Caravaggio.

The prevalence of Michelangelo is blatant: the sample consists of 3 references to *The Creation of Adam* (2 in Rome, 1 in Berlin) and 1 reference to the *Delphic Sybil* (in Paris).



Fig. 4 (stencil, Paris, 2013)

To sum up, in France, Germany and England, quotations are mostly to US art of the 20th century and can refer to the artists, even though most art works refer to art works. In Italy, instead, quotations are only to European art, especially Italian, mostly of Renaissance and Baroque, and refer to the artists' works.

Italy has a particular part in the street art world, a part where site-specificity seems to be more relevant for a few reasons. First, art-themed street art works in Italy often refer to Italian art, which is not the case in other cultural contexts: I could find no work referring to German art in Berlin, for instance, but surely there are some. So, unlike French, German and English cultures, popular patrimonial culture in Italy is mainly self-referential. Second, the references to Italian art are chronologically mostly concentrated on the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, in universally acknowledged masters such as Michelangelo, Leonardo and Caravaggio. The street artists who realize works in Italy are more focused on the far past than those who –or when they– work in France, England or Germany. So, in the cultural representations carried by street art, the art legacy is paramount in Italy.

Further distinctions are to be done about the status of the quoted works and the contents of the reference. Also, and first of all, a basic question needs an answer: why does street art quote art? Before trying to nail down the Italian specificity in art-themed street art works, I will try to answer to the last question.

2. Interpretations. Italian Scene, Italian Culture

As the observation of the Roman sample shows, there are at least 3 possible reasons, bearing in mind that some works presumably combine various motivations and these motivations partially overlap: tribute, legacy, legitimization of street art, and self-promotion. The first two cases occur when the reference is mimetic and bereft of any parodic intention or other instrumental exploitation. Instead, when the quotation is not mimetic and serves as a medium, it can be used to promote the street artist, as a self-legitimizing device or a vehicle for their ideas. Then the quote is used as a way to catch the attention. I will not reproduce and analyze all the 12 art works but select those that illustrate better the ideas.

2.1. Tribute and Legacy

By referring to art, street artists working in Italy often seem to be willing to pay a tribute the local artistic legacy: among the sample used in this study, 7 or 8 (one art work quotes unidentifiable statues) out of 12 art works quote Italian art. The street art works promote the specific art culture on whose national territory they realized their work. But to what or who is the tribute exactly paid?

The relevance of Italian masterpieces from Renaissance and Baroque let us think of a tribute to the Italian culture of these times, when in fact Italian exceptional geniuses such as Michelangelo, Leonardo and Caravaggio stood out of the European artistic world.

Reference to art is also likely to be a tribute to the artist whose work is quoted and to what he embodies. For instance, the rework of a detail of the *Young Sick Bacchus* (fig. 5) stenciled by the French artist C215 on a wooden door of Rome is apparently a mere tribute to Caravaggio as a brilliant painter and as an icon of rebellion for having been a hot-tempered and out of line man. The original art work (1593-1594) is probably a self-portrait but what makes C215's choice meaningful is that, along with the subject of illness (i.e. out of health), the canvas belongs to Merisi's *periodo chiaro* in which he used to paint street boys and rotten fruits. In other words, the street artist chose an artist and a work which are representations of the margin, the weakness, and the undertow.



Fig. 5 (stencil, Rome, 2015)

By doing that, the street artist both implicitly states his filiation and his poetics (aesthetics and ethics) of a free countercultural art in the streets (when mainstream art is the institutional indoor art) and engages a self-promotion, positioning himself as an heir of such a brilliant and rebellious tradition. Yet, the tribute to Caravaggio appears as the main purpose of the work. In other art works, instead, the quoted work is used as a medium.

2.2. (Self-)legitimatization

A first example of self-promoting process through art-themed street art works is a stencil on an electrical cabinet in Rome by the Italian artist 0707 (fig. 7).



Fig. 6 (stencil, Rome, 2017)

This art work is very likely to quote René Magritte's oil on canvas *The Treachery of Images* (1928-1929), because the use of French language (Magritte was born in Lessines, in the French-speaking Belgian area Hainaut) and the similar first words –*Ceci n'est pas*– of the written sentence in 0707's stencil ("*CECI N'EST PAS UNE STENCIL*") clearly echo Magritte's painting ("*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*"). It also plays with a similar concept. The meaning of Magritte's work is that the image of an object is not the object itself. In the same vein, the street artist probably meant to highlight a metonymy: the tool –the stencil as "a thin sheet, as of paper, metal, or impermeable film, with holes cut through in the shape of letters or designs"– is not the work produced with it –the stencil as "a pattern, design, letter, etc. made by stenciling"⁴–, although it is loosely called a stencil.

Moreover, the quotation is erudite and the statement nit-picking, but the artist claims to have no academic education: "Late 2012, 0707 started his career as street artist, in Rome (IT) without any artistic or academic background", is written on his website. With this art work, nevertheless, he shows that his self-teaching was a success, since he is implicitly referring to the Belgian surrealist painter without having studied art history. So, he might be also doing an anti-establishment gesture and claim that art school is not necessary to get an appropriate art education, both for knowledge and know-how.

However, the sentence "*CECI N'EST PAS UNE STENCIL*" has misspelling and mistakes. First, "stencil" is an anglicism: in French, a stencil is said *pochoir*. Then, the word is split in the wrong place: it should be "sten/cil" (not "st/encil"). The same happens with "n'est", which cannot be split. Were these mistakes voluntary? If they were, the play is remarkable because it combines a subtle criticism of two academic institutions, that of art education and that of language and spelling, while (mis)appropriating the criticized artistic erudition along with linguistic and writing rules. The wrong splits may have been done on purpose or not, maybe for violating writing rules, maybe for simple reasons of space and dimensions of the letters. The choice of the English word "stencil", instead, was surely deliberately based on the intention of making the sentence easily accessible. Indeed, Italian language uses the English word to designate a stencil, even if Italian words do exist to indicate the tool (*stampino* or *mascherina*). Like other street artists, 0707 probably intended to address both the local audience of Italian speakers and an international audience, on the site (the art work was found in the touristic Roman area of Monti) and on the internet, thanks to the nomadism of images of street art works in the virtual global world. This 0707's work is understandable by Italian speakers and by English speakers, that is by the largest possible audience, since English has become the new Latin. The French words are not an obstacle to comprehension by those who have a basic knowledge about the art of the 20th century, since the "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" of Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* is rather famous. It then appears that, paradoxically, the self-taught artist's target excludes those who wouldn't know about art history.

⁴All definitions come from the American Collins dictionary <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary>

In the other art works presumably aimed at legitimizing street art as art, the quotation is much less ambiguous. For instance, the paste-up by Pino Volpino (fig. 7) is a transparent quotation of Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* cans. The original signature "Piero Manzoni" on top of the tin can was replaced by that of the collective "Pino Volpino", the date was updated (2017 instead of 1961), and the words "*Merda d'artista*", "*Merde d'Artiste*", "Artist's Shit", and "*Künstlerscheisse*" (in four languages –Italian, French, English, and German– on the 90 original tin cans) were replaced by "*Merda di Streetartist*" in Italian, "*Merde de Street Artist*" in French, "*StreetArtist's Shit*" in English (a German version wasn't found): all titles alike in English language, whereas the description of the contents and other "metadata" are still in the various languages.



Fig. 7 (paste-up, Rome, 2017)

The rework highlights the word "street" as to establish a clear difference between art and street art. Additionally, it levels the linguistic variety, as to state the global extension of street art, whereas art, in Manzoni's time, was more geographically (thus culturally and linguistically) limited.

The tribute is merely figurative because Manzoni's work was in three dimensions and led to imagine a hidden dimension, that inside the closed tin can deemed to contain the artist's faeces. Pino Volpino's work has only two dimensions, cannot reproduce the mystery and interest of the quoted one, thus has little or nothing to do with Manzoni's provocative and innovative art work. Therefore, this cannot be the statement of an artistic lineage (or if it was in the artists' intention, it is very doubtful to actually be so) but a statement of artistic status. Maybe the collective intended to claim the artistic dignity of street art, using the image of Manzoni's cans to legitimize the street art work. Maybe they intended to undermine the artistic value of street art works considering the prices of many pieces with street aesthetics (kitsch) on the market, given that Manzoni's work was also a critique of the art market.

2.3. Self-promotion

Other works mainly exploit art references as props for their tag or self-portrait. This type of art-themed street art works always refer to the same type of art works: the world-wide famous ones. The high potential of immediate recognition of these masterpieces provides a great probability of visibility. Here we find street art works quoting Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. Playing with masterpieces through anachronistic *détournement* probably tends to desacralize them or claim they belong to the past: street artists' appropriations are probably aimed at claiming the artistic value of street art as well, but the presence of signature marks give to this element much less relevance, compared to self-promotion.



Fig. 8 (paste-up, Rome, 2017)

CTRL+Z's *Creation of Adam* (fig. 8) does not show the creature but only the Creator. A square comics speech bubble was added: God is saying "CTRL+Z", the "undo" computer action and probably the artist's surname. The art work displays a sharp contrast between the original fresco and the added element, on two levels: visual, in the chromatic values (warm colors vs black and white) and the shapes (natural sinuous lines vs artificial straight lines and square corners), and cultural (Renaissance art and theology vs contemporary IT world). Was the creation of the human kind an error? The use of IT language suggests that the computer may be responsible for the error, echoing the common drawing of the evolution of genus Homo up to the latest stage of decline, being the last stylized figure sitting in front of a screen.

The other street art work quoting Michelangelo's fresco found in Italy has the written signature of the Italian artist Blub and the figurative one, the snorkeling mask which is present in all Blub's art works. The close-up on the hands of God and Adam diverts the meaning of the original work because God is now giving the mask to Adam. Here as well, the quoted work is mainly used as a simple vehicle for the artist's self-expression, self-portrait and self-promotion, exactly like in French artist Mimi the Clown's *Mona Lisa*, where the distinctive signature marks –the clown's red nose, the wide-open mouth, the blackened surroundings of the eyes– were added to the image of the original art work (fig. 9).



Fig. 9 (paste-up, Rome, 2017)

Conclusion

There are few Italian artists in the ranking of the most valued contemporary artists, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Enrico Castellani, Maurizio Cattelan, but none of them is quoted in street art. Instead, old Italian masters are ubiquitous. In the other European countries, instead, the art-themed street art works mostly quote US art of the 20th century. Additionally, apart from Piero Manzoni, the quoted Italian artists are among the universally acknowledged masters of the western art

history. Hence, for street artists Italy is still perceived as a museum, like at the age of Grand Tour, rather than a living art factory. This is not only true in France, Germany and England, but also in Italy itself.

The Italian specificity of the street art scene is its self-referentiality, since most quoted art works in Italian street art works are Italian. Here, site-specificity takes a particular definition though, because the “site” is more cultural than geographic: the Italian Renaissance culture belongs to the world heritage, not only to Italian history. No surprise, then, if we encounter Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* on a wall of the German capital city (fig. 10). Hence, in this case local specificity is maybe less about *genius loci* than about *genius hominis*.



Fig. 10 (paint, Berlin, 2014)

Although the art works referring to Italian past art are many among the few art-themed street art works, the subjects of the references are very limited, since only the most famous masterpieces are reworked. Whereas C215’s quotation of Caravaggio seems to be a full tribute to the artist as a painter, as a man and as an icon, as well as a statement of legacy, the remakes of Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* and Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* use the works as channels to their own purposes: self-expression, self-legitimization, self-promotion. In these cases, street artists privilege the most famous masterpieces because they are eye-catching, thus provide visibility within a visually saturated environment. As Paracelsus’ quote in the front of this paper suggests, yet, the use of or the tribute to other artists may show a lack of confidence and creativity.

This study is the first step of an investigation that still needs to be completed at many levels. One category of art-themed street art works was neglected here: meta-street art works, i.e. those that refer to street art, like on the anonymous art work displaying *Mona Lisa*’s eyes on the white stripe of a one-way sign, which surely refers to French artist Clet Abraham’s works on traffic signs (fig. 11).



Fig. 11 (paste-up, Rome, 2017)

Another step of the investigation ought to gather more data. Indeed, it would be desirable to have a quantitative identical sample in each country considered, also to pinpoint the local specificities that then may appear in the other countries or, instead, the global characteristics of some art-themed works posted in different countries.

Finally, it would be interesting to compare art-themed street art works with art-themed art works of urban art, i.e. authorized works in the public space, because commissioned art works usually praise the local culture, often referring to art, but in a very different way than street art does.

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Framing Graffiti & Street Art

In / Out

Framing Jean-Michel Basquiat's art from street walls to galleries and museums

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Introduction

Jean-Michel Basquiat has been called many things: a neo-expressionist, a primitive painter, a surrealist, a poet, a graffiti writer, and, of course, a street artist. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, Basquiat is mentioned in the entry 'Graffiti' where he is presented as a "genuine street artist" (Chilvers, 2004: 307). In almost every book dealing with Street art or Graffiti, he is stated as a prominent figure and is alternately identified as the forefather, a pioneer or a precursor in the history of street art. Although the meaning of these terms slightly differs, they all suggest that what he achieved paved the way for the generations of street artists to come. Such an assignation is even more common in recent popular media, on the Internet and in art magazines. Yet, this identification is highly paradoxical considering that his work based on the street only lasted for a year or so, and that he rejected being part of the Graffiti movement. As he said in a 1985 interview with Becky Johnston included in the 2010 documentary film *The Radiant Child*, "I don't really consider myself a graffiti artist" (Davis, 2010).

However, his career is viewed within the context of Graffiti culture, it is literally framed by it and there is a tendency to understand his art as the logical extension of his work on the street. This paper focuses on Basquiat's Graffiti period and will examine the influence of his street-based work in his later oeuvre. The critical re-appraisal of Jean-Michel Basquiat as a possible indicator of the current state of street art will also be addressed. Indeed, by identifying Basquiat as a street artist, the implied message might well be that the medium is a transitional stage from which artists should depart to be accepted into mainstream contemporary art. I will first consider Basquiat's street-based work and discuss whether it best fits the labels Graffiti or/and street art. The real connection between his street-located art and his studio painting will then be examined.

1. Basquiat's early street practices: Graffiti, Street art or else?

By a current day definition, Basquiat's work is better defined as street art rather than Graffiti but many elements overlap. No real consensus has been reached in the matter of defining street art as opposed to Graffiti although different definitions have prevailed: in the American context of the 1980s, Graffiti is all about writing but mainly considers the aesthetic value of letters and has no semantic interest. For the Graffiti community, the goal was to have as much exposure as possible. Lewisohn contends that, "Graffiti writing has a very specific aesthetic: it's about the tag, it's about graphic form, it's about letters, styles and spray-paint application, and it's about reaching difficult locations" (Lewisohn, 2008: 23). Street art includes a larger variety of artistic mediums: it can be pictorial as well as textual and is meant for the general public. It is conversational as it engages viewers in a diachronic exchange. If we consider the SAMO writings based on the photographs by Henry A. Flynt, who best documented them, Basquiat's work on the street does not clearly match any category. The young artist started out writing, mostly with his schoolmate Al Diaz, in

early 1978 on the D train line and around lower Manhattan. In these days, the tag movement that occurred in the New York metro in the 1970s had already passed its peak, and Graffiti was already promoted from the streets to galleries. The writings were in both magic markers and spray paint. They mainly consisted of aphorisms that Basquiat and Diaz signed SAMO, the short for “same old shit” as Basquiat later explained, followed by a copyright logo. The pseudonym was conceived at times as a mock brand or as a fake religion.

1.1 Aesthetic vs semantic values, pictorial vs textual interests

In Basquiat's writings, the semantic value is predominant considering that the message addressed to passers-by is central. Yet, aesthetic concerns are still present. The use of colors contrasting with the background color and treating other contextual elements testifies to a quest for a great visual impact. The size of the letters considerably changed according to the space that was available. A major difference with graffiti writing is the little graphic interest as the SAMO statements were always written in cursive letters. However, they had a specific visual style such as the three vertical lines and disconnected horizontal lines for the vowel “e” that became SAMO signature style. Some writings also reveal a consideration for the visual display such as the cross-shaped statement “S A M S A M O © M A S M A S, OMNIPRZNT”, verging on a calligram. Although Al Diaz had previous experience in graffiti writing where he was known as “Bomb-One”, the style used for the SAMO writings considerably departs from the graffiti practices of the day. In *Graffiti and Street Art*, Anna Waclawek comes to the conclusion that, “Basquiat's use of legible writings made his graffiti different from most signature writers, but his direct approach brought him direct attention of the media” (Waclawek, 2011: 63). The combination of text/pictures is undoubtedly what singled out Basquiat's street writings from graffiti. Basquiat also sometimes drew faces and he included the copyright logo as well as other signs such as parenthesis or brackets, further blurring the distinction between the pictorial and semantic values. Such an association attests of the complexity of Basquiat's early experiment in semiotics, as he used both words and pictures to challenge the conventional sign systems and try out the value of symbols. The inclusion of signs such as the copyright logo or the crown was crucial since they ironically granted legitimacy to the SAMO sayings by imitating the communication of law and the royalty. This addition also stressed the difference between illegally executed graffiti and Basquiat's supposedly legitimate writings. Not only did they refer to the commodification of graffiti, but they also challenged the placement of messages in the public space. Although pictorial concerns are present in the writings, they remain rather limited and eventually Basquiat's early street work were mainly text-based, message-oriented and could be called “street aphorisms”.

1.2 Understanding the SAMO aphorisms: collective vs community resonance

Contrary to Graffiti where the name tag is mainly pictorial and acts as a signature, the SAMO statements had a semantic meaning. Indeed, Basquiat who grew up in an environment where three languages were spoken (his mother was Puerto-rican and his father from Haiti) undoubtedly had a way with words and showed particular interest in communication. His experimentation with language further distanced his work from Graffiti, bringing it closer to contextual artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. But the distinction between Graffiti and street art is again not clear. When exposed to a graffiti, the viewer must be part of the crew/community to fully appreciate the work. As pointed by Lewisohn, “Graffiti isn't so much about connecting with the masses: it's about connecting with different crews, it's an internal language, it's a secret language. Most graffiti you can't even read, so it's really contained within the culture that understands and does it. Street art is much more open” (Lewisohn, 2008: 15). If the SAMO epigrams were easily legible and were meant to engage viewers, their meaning remains quite cryptic. This aspect is not simply the consequence of their visual form, it

is rather related by their phonetic nature (“boosh-wah-zee” for “bourgeoisie” for instance), the use of free spelling forms (omniprzn), the combinations of words, figures and symbols and the application of non-sensical formulas (“SAMO© A pin drops like a pungent odor”). The constant play on words, spelling and sounds led Keith Haring to note, “It was the first time I saw what I would call a literary graffiti, one that wasn’t done just for the sake of writing a name or for making a formal mark” (Gruen, 1992: 52). The aim was then to convey a message, be it a cryptic or unintelligible one.

1.3 Site specificity

Although Basquiat said that, like most graffiti writers of the first generation, he painted on trains and also pasted posters in subway trains, there is no remaining evidence of this part of his oeuvre. The primary location of his aphorisms was Lower Manhattan. In an interview with Reade, Al Diaz stated that this location was simply related to places the duo would frequent, “We first began to post our SAMO graffiti in TriBeCa, Because I had a girlfriend who lived in the area and we were beginning to spend a lot of time there. It would soon spread into the surrounding areas of The West Village, SoHo, Chinatown/Bowery and into the Lower East Side. These were all the areas we frequented and naturally we wrote wherever we went” (Reade, 2017). In the late 70s, this area was a blooming art district, attracting wealthy collectors and art dealers. Basquiat’s aphorisms rarely took into consideration the pictorial integration within the visual environment. Diaz and Basquiat simply adapted the size of the letters according to the space that was available or decide on a color that would stand out against the chosen walls.

On a semantic level, the degree of site specificity is crucial. With statements such as “SAMO as an alternative 2 playing art with the ‘radical chic’ set on Daddy’s \$”, it is clear that Basquiat targeted the mainstream art world rather than aimed at being recognized among graffiti writers. Site specificity in the SAMO writings is much higher than most graffiti writings of the times which were dictated by the multiplicity of occurrences. When taking into account the audience, it appears that the target is one of both actual interest and mockery. Contrary to most current socially oriented street artworks by Banksy or Blue for example, Basquiat’s interaction with the social environment he worked in is quite ambiguous as his writings eventually intended to attract the attention of the people they criticized. As a result, Basquiat had and still has a conflicting position, wishing to be in and out of the artistic community. His singularity prevented his integration into the Graffiti world with artists such as Rammellzee or Futura. At the same time, his street background and the use of street imagery and practices also kept him apart from conceptual artists. As he was looking for always more creative outlets and exposure, he extended his writing and drawing to other practices. Apart from his SAMO experiment, Basquiat’s early art gradually became frameless.

1.4 Frameless practices

As a young artist with no money, Basquiat could not afford art supplies. He would then draw and write on objects he salvaged from the streets such as doors, cardboard boxes, windows, and other items he found at his friends’ places. The 2018 exhibition “Basquiat Before Basquiat: East 12th Street, 1979–1980” at the Cranbrook Art Museum includes a collection of photographs taken by Alexis Adler, one of Basquiat’s former girlfriends, showing the diversity of art materials ranging from salvaged refrigerators to old television sets. Basquiat was indeed known to be a graffiti maniac and conceived each object as a potential recipient for his art. Annina Nosei, Basquiat’s first art dealer who gave him a solo exhibition in 1981, reported that Basquiat was deeply interested in Duchamp’s work as he offered her a book on the French dada artist. If Nosei’s reaction was amazement, “What American kid knows

Duchamp?”(Belcove, 2013), we can assume that Basquiat’s interest was real and his tendency to work with salvaged street objects was an attempt to experiment with everyday life items as ready-mades. Through this practice, he questioned the meaning street objects could take on when changed and moved from their original spatial context to a private space. This work cannot be labeled as either Graffiti nor Street art, it best corresponds to the notion of “bricolage” defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss as it involves using random materials and triggers a “dialogue with the materials and the means of execution” (Lévi-Strauss, 1974: 29). Unexpectedly, Basquiat’s experiment with framing helped his transition from the public to the private space and from the outskirts to the mainstream.

1.5 Connections and distance with graffiti writers and the underground community

As early as 1979, Basquiat stopped working with Diaz after an argument between the two about the future of their association. An article in *The Village Voice* had revealed their identity and Diaz observed that Basquiat’s intention was to be noticed by what they initially considered the establishment. To Diaz, Basquiat was betraying their graffiti action. Basquiat spread the news of the end of his SAMO activity by writing the famous epitaph, “SAMO is dead,” all around Lower Manhattan. After the SAMO statements, Basquiat would rarely write full sentences on canvas and let instead words and pictures convey meaning on their own. Hence, the announcement of the end of the partnership started to estrange him from the graffiti community. It also signaled the beginning of the new path he was to take, animated by the “necessity of substituting language itself for the man who until then had been supposed to be its owner” (Barthes, 1977: 143) as Roland Barthes stated in the essay “The Death of the Author”. Indeed, it was Basquiat’s quest for free expression and his will to find other creative outlets that brought him closer to graffiti writers through the hip hop community. As part of the underground culture, Basquiat got acquainted with Fab 5 Freddy, Crash, Kenny Scharf and Keith Haring in 1979. However, as mentioned by Rammellzee, Basquiat remained an outcast in this community, less because of his artistic choices than on account of his middle-class background. Rammellzee noted in an interview:

Basquiat was no ghetto kid — he grew up very middle class — so I guess this was kind of his way of filling that part that was missing in him, that part that he probably felt like he had missed out on because he had been surrounded by the white art world. I think it was an identity thing for him to have all these guys around (Nosnitsky, 2013).

Many commentators also romanced Basquiat’s early life by stressing his living on the streets, hence giving the impression he came from a deprived background. Such a critical revision can be read as an attempt to reinvent Basquiat and to make him better fit the idea of a graffiti writer’s background.

In June 1980, Basquiat participated in The Times Square Show, a group exhibition of Graffiti art that got together Jenny Holzer, Kenny Scharf, and graffiti writers such as Fab 5 Freddy, and Crash among other graffiti writers. Basquiat’s contribution was a large installation piece and other combinations of pictures and text. It was poet and art critic Rene Ricard, best known for his influential essays and as a supporter of pop art, who, in a 1981 landmark review for the *Artforum Magazine* paved the way for Basquiat’s success and his later appreciation within the Graffiti context. Entitled after one of Keith Haring’s titles, the article “The Radiant Child” acknowledged Graffiti as the most important art practices of US culture of the time, “The graffiti style, so much a part of this town, New York is in our blood now” (Ricard, 1981: 37). Significantly, Ricard opposed its collective promotion, claiming, “Say what you will about group shows and collaborative enterprise but Das Capital was written by one man” (Ibid.: 39) and he singled out a number of artists such as Haring and Basquiat. Indeed as a protégé of Andy Warhol, Ricard encouraged the promotion of the single artist. Not only was this essay crucial in attracting attention to Jean-Michel Basquiat, but it also contained the frame in which his art was to be seen as he said his paintings were “the logical extension of what you could do with a city wall” (Ibid.:

40). By saying that “One or two words on a Jean-Michel contain the entire history of Graffiti” (Idem), Ricard actually introduced Basquiat into Graffiti, positioning him as its leader in the process. As a reference in the introduction of Graffiti in mainstream art, the idea in Ricard’s essay has reemerged multiple times, especially with the renewed interest in early street art. However, the degree of accuracy in his assertion must be examined: to what extent is Jean-Michel Basquiat’s studio art an extension of his street art/graffiti work?

2. Basquiat’s art as an extension of his street work

2.1 Use of SAMO in his early painting

The first point to be made when assessing the link between Basquiat’s street-based art and his studio painting is the fact that although he declared “SAMO is dead” on the walls of downtown Manhattan, he still signed his paintings “SAMO” until May 1981. He even used the name for his first solo exhibition in Modena (Italy) in 1981. The painting *Cadillac Moon* is then a landmark as Basquiat put an end to using the pseudonym by crossing out “SAMO©” and replaced it with his real name. This act tells about the young artist’s desire to part with his former artistic identity but also to remind viewers of his street background. Basquiat’s enduring relation with his SAMO period also stems from his starring in the film *Downtown 81* that was shot in 1980. In the movie, Basquiat plays his own part as “Jean”, a young man trying to succeed as an artist in the underground culture of New York. The film does not mention Al Diaz and Basquiat appears as the only member of the SAMO duo. The late release of the documentary in 2000 accounts for the critical re-appraisal of Basquiat’s art as it enhances and romances his street-based work.

2.2 Street imagery

If Basquiat’s graffiti writings were mostly textual, his canvas work was first essentially composed of street imagery. As mentioned by Leonhard Emmerling, “big city life is central to Basquiat’s early paintings” (Emmerling, 2003: 30). Starting in 1980, Basquiat’s paintings reproduced the visual experience of New York City with buildings, cars, advertisements, ambulances, traffic lights and police officers. The painting *Red Man* (1981) is emblematic of the use of urban visual vocabulary in his early canvas work. Whether or not the imagery was developed so as to regain some street credibility, urban life remained at the core of Basquiat’s art. The use of crowns, one of the most recurrent motifs in Basquiat’s work, is also related to his former work in the street. Borrowed from the Graffiti tradition where it is a mark of a graffiti writer’s high status, the three-pointed crown is frequently used by Basquiat. The abundance of crowns in his canvas work signals his ambition to succeed but can also be regarded as a reminder of his background as a graffiti writer. In Graffiti social hierarchy, crowns are granted to superior writers whose fame have been established and acknowledged within the community. In Basquiat’s case, the will to reach a “royal” status stems from the need to reach recognition as an artist coming from the street and to extend it to mainstream art.

The combination of words/letters and pictures/signs is also inherited from the period and is essential to the general understanding of Basquiat's work. The exploration of the value of signs and symbols is certainly what motivated his artistic expression and as such, it is the link between his early street practices and his canvas work. Occasionally, the textual part in some paintings is a direct reference to the SAMO aphorisms. More generally in his studio work, words appear in a more saturated environment where the textual meaning is not clear. Like the SAMO statements, any literal significance is open to interpretation as words in Basquiat's paintings do not form sentences and are freely associated with other pictorial elements. Basquiat's name dropping is closer with tagging than his street work since the pictorial value of words equals their semantic worth. Considering that writing remained an essential part of his art in his whole career, Basquiat could be seen as "a writer of paintings", a label that would put him in a different category than graffiti writers or street artists.

2.3 Surrogate graffiti: scratching, scribbling, erasure and impasto

Even more important than the words themselves is the way they were written or, to be more accurate, drawn, erased, scratched and scribbled in the paintings. His scribble and doodle techniques did not only apply to words but also to the symbols and served as "surrogate graffiti". This term first appeared in *Graffiti*, a collection of essays compiled by Bill Adler in 1967; it refers to the illusion of street marking on a flat two-dimensional surface such as a poster or a canvas. Basquiat brought street techniques into his studio work by improvising gestures, erasing words, pasting pieces of paper, scratching the picture plane, in his own paintings. He also continued to use spray paint among the many materials he would use for many of his studio works. Like Cy Twombly with whom he is often compared, he transferred the urban visual language and some of the techniques into his canvases. Basquiat commented about this street-inherited technique by saying, "I scratch out and erase but never so much that they don't know what was there. My version of penitimento" (Buchhart, 2015: 14). Interestingly, by referring to this process which is based on traces of previous compositions, Basquiat also indirectly stresses the connection with his past as a street writer. Indeed in Basquiat's canvas work, there are visible traces of previous compositions telling about the artist's free creative process and giving the illusion of street art defacement. His collaboration with Andy Warhol also attracted attention to defacement, an act consisting in marring or damaging a plane surface which is common in Graffiti and other street practices. Paintings such as *Bananas* (1984) staged an artistic fight and then brought to galleries street slashing and crossing out, thus providing the act of going over a piece an artistic status. *Defacement* (1983), one of Basquiat's most famous pieces, equally fueled Basquiat's assimilation to a graffiti writer. As a tribute to Michael Stewart, a Black graffiti artist who was beaten to death by the police in 1983, the painting shows an ominous dark silhouette surrounded by two grotesque police officers. In an interview he gave after the tragic event, Basquiat stressed that, as a Black artist who formerly wrote graffiti, he could not but identify with Stewart, "It could have been me. It could have been me" (Fretz, 2010).

2.4 Street stretchers

Finally, Basquiat's original framing technique, a method which he started to use in 1982 further made a connection between the studio and the street. His canvases were not stretched across a frame, but attached to a rudimentary wooden frame. Contrary to traditional framing, Basquiat's exposure of the wooden mount signals that his representation is part of a larger context. It is a reversed framing that considers the outside and is not limited to the inside, so as to force viewers to pay attention to the surrounding environment. Such an original framing was a way for Basquiat to connect his work to the visual experience of art on the streets. The fact that it was actually salvaged material from the streets reinforced the strategy. The display also gives the impression that his paintings acted as billboards, hence belonging to

street visual tradition. In an effort to connect him to the street tradition, Rene Ricard commented on Basquiat's singular frames, claiming that, "He's finally figured out a way to make a stretcher... that is so consistent with the imagery... they do look like signs, but signs for a product modern civilisation has no use for" (Ricard, 1981: 41).

As stated by Richard Phelan in "The Picture Frame in Question: American art 1945-2000" (Phelan, 2016), the experimentation with the frame was quite common from the 1950s and voiced the questioning of spatial limitations, artistic value and critical reception. In Basquiat's case, experimenting with frames was also a way to place his work in a liminal space. Indeed, Basquiat's difficulty to fit in the artistic community, whether as a graffiti writer, a street or a contemporary artist, increased as he gradually developed his African-Caribbean background in his art. Basquiat always claimed his African heritage by stating, "I'm an artist who has been influenced by his New York environment. But I have a cultural memory. I don't have to look for it; it exists. Our cultural memory follows us everywhere, wherever you live" (Danticat, 2010: 132) and he had included African motifs such as voodoo, cosmograms and tribal signs in his early art. Yet, after a trip to Abidjan in 1986, he became even more aware of the need to preserve his legacy, which further estranged him in the US art scene.

Conclusion

In *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and The Commodification of Difference*, Deborah Root contends that, "Basquiat was, after all, a graffiti artist and exuded the aura of the street rather than the art college" (Root, 1996: 147). The arguments developed in my analysis showed that the idea of the "aura" of the street is certainly most appropriate: Basquiat virtually reached out to the streets and the graffiti community but he cannot properly be labeled a graffiti writer or a street artist.

Neither included in street art nor Graffiti, and not completely accepted in contemporary art, Jean-Michel Basquiat remains at the edges. He was always marginalized and his introduction into museums was also open to debate. The fact that The MOMA and the Whitney Museum of Art were not interested in buying his art before he died in 1988 and even declined the donation of his art is quite telling. What art critic Robert Hughes wrote after Basquiat's death best encapsulated the reasons why he became so popular, "Collectors were ready for a Wild Child, a curiosity, an urban noble savage. Basquiat played the role to the hilt" (Hughes, 1988: 36). After his death and with the popularity of street art, Basquiat's art has been appropriated by many to serve as an example of a successful transition from street based art to galleries and museums. Significantly even in the recent revision, Basquiat is singled out. Whether it is Basquiat's street background or his African-American identity that contributed to his marginal position, the myth of the urban noble savage turned art world star still endures. It is also in this context that Basquiat's contribution to street art is enhanced.

The goal of this paper was not to deny the importance of Basquiat's early work on the street for his own creative process but to show that its significance in the history of street art is problematic. It has been amplified by art critics and gallerists so as to increase Basquiat's legendary status and give more credit to the movement itself. The revision of Basquiat's contribution to Graffiti also aims at bringing closer contemporary art and street art with street art often considered as a rite of passage in an artist's path. Basquiat's quest for free expression, his will to reach the top celebrity status and the way he was framed by the Graffiti context, certainly mirror the experience of contemporary street artists who still struggle with their placement in and out of the artistic community and the way some of them resist being totally included into mainstream art not to lose their street credibility or how some reject it to better achieve fame.

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Towards a graffiti hauntology. After the death of graffiti: the “ghost” of non-places in the art of MOSA/Alexandre Bavard.

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1. The death of graffiti?

In 1982, the New-York based graffiti writer Lady Pink made a painting – an acrylic on Masonite, now part of the Museum of the City of New York’s permanent collection – that she has named *The Death of Graffiti* [Fig. 1]. In all likelihood, the urban landscape depicted in the artwork’s background is the Queens, where Lady Pink grew up (Corcoran, McCormick, 2014: 50). We can see the typical tenements towering an elevated subway line, as well as two cars of a train. The car on the left is covered with pieces (one made by the same Lady Pink, the other by her comrade Seen). A naked female figure stands on a pile of used spray cans, turning her back on the observer of the painting, and pointing to the car on the right side: this one is entirely painted in white.

In an interview released to the American writer and filmmaker Nijla Mu’Min, the artist describes her painting as follows:

The white trains were called white elephants and they came out in the early 80’s, someone painted them white, and we all thought they were a great big canvas for us all to work on [...]. The little girl standing on the mountain of spray paint, that would be me. I always had a lot of spray paint, like a mountain of spray paint. And I think the white train rolling by she’s pointing and saying “Oh my God, look at that white thing we can paint.” I don’t know why it’s titled *The Death of Graffiti*, maybe with the appearance of the white trains, we thought it would all vanish. (Mu’Min, 2013)

While the artist herself admits she has little memory of why she gave such title to her painting, she gives us an important information about the context of New York’s anti-graffiti policies of that time: the detail of the white car (or “white elephant”) refers to the fact that, under the government of Mayor Ed Koch, in charge from 1978 to 1989, the campaigns of repression, buffing and cleaning of graffiti-covered trains had become more and more insistent (Austin, 2001: 159-166), and they would eventually culminate, in 1995, with the infamous Zero Tolerance campaign launched by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. For its content, *The Death of Graffiti* takes on a very solemn and almost prophetic aura, because it seems to herald the end of an era, New York’s golden age of subway graffiti. At the same time, its very own format tells us something perhaps more interesting: the fact itself that the artwork is a painting and not a street piece, is indicative of another kind of death of graffiti writing, a death that had already occurred at that time, that is the transition of graffiti writing from urban spaces to indoor exhibitions, or from what we might call the “grey cube”¹ to what Brian O’Doherty has called the “white cube” (O’Doherty, 1999).

¹As opposed to “white cube” and generically referred to the art in the streets, “grey cube” is an expression that I have first encountered in a paper by the psychologist Andreas Gartner and the neuroscientist Helmut Leder (2014).



Fig. SEQ Fig. * ARABIC 1 Lady Pink, *The Death of Graffiti*, 1982, Acrylics on Masonite, Museum of the City of New York/Martin Wong Collection (Courtesy of the Museum)

The question of “the death of graffiti”, intended as a radical transformation (most of the time as an aberration) from graffiti writing’s original practice and ethos, has been at the center of many debates and contributions. Already in 1976, Jean Baudrillard hinted at the threat of graffiti writing’s recuperation by the bourgeois ideology and the institutional art world (Baudrillard, 2005: 38). Most recently, it has been discussed in a paper by Lachlan MacDowall and published in a collective book edited by Luca Borriello and Christian Ruggiero (2013: 119-130) and it has resulted in a dedicated collective book called *The Death of Graffiti* and edited by Oliver Kuhnerts Klage (2017). I have myself contributed to the debate through a paper published on the French online review *Cahiers de Narratologie* (Parisi, 2016), and as a chapter in a collective book dedicated to the “end of art” topic and edited by Cyril Barde, Sylvia Chassaing et Hermeline Pernoud (2018: 99-108).

The end of graffiti can be indeed interpreted as one of the latest steps in a larger, never-ending debate around the Hegelian end of art’s theme. In the present paper, I shall make use in particular of Arthur C. Danto’s interpretation: the end of art does not mean a true end to the production of works of art, but rather that a certain idea of making art (and therefore of understanding art) has changed radically, to the point art would have transformed its own ontological foundations (Danto, 1986: 96). In a similar way, but without speaking in terms of “end” or “death” of art, nor about ontology, the French sociologist Nathalie Heinich describes such transformations as a “paradigm shift” (Heinich, 2014), a concept first forged in 1962 by the American physicist and epistemologist Thomas S. Kuhn (2012) to describe, in sciences, a radical change from one universally accepted state of knowledge to a new one. Heinich employs such a concept in order to interpret the rupture from one universally accepted conception of art to a new one, or “an effective change in collective representations²” (Heinich, 2014: 45).

With regard to the specific case of graffiti writing, how can we describe such an ontological transformation, or paradigm shift? Which ontological foundation or collective representation has radically changed since graffiti writing’s early years in the streets of Washington Heights and the South Bronx, or on the trains of New York’s elevated subway? As I have already said, the most significant transformation or shift concerns the transition to the “white cube” from the “grey cube”. But how can the “grey cube” be more accurately described, and how can such a transition to the “white cube”

²Translated from the Italian by myself.

be interpreted?

2. From non-places to institutional places: graffiti between artification and deartification

When speaking about the grey cube, I refer to graffiti writing and street art's origin in the geographic, social and cultural margins of the urban society – what Henri Lefebvre had defined as “a society that results from a process of complete urbanization [...] during which the old urban forms, the end result of a series of discontinuous transformations, burst apart” (Lefebvre, 2003: 1-2) – outside the institutional artworld and the cultural industry. I shall henceforth call such margins “non-places”: marginal or interstitial places; places of transition or connection between the city center, the industrial zone and the countryside; places devoid of any specific architectural identity, and the space of which is punctuated by large housing projects and vacant lots, by bridges, viaducts, tunnels, motorways, railways, yards, abandoned warehouses and post-industrial rubble.

Worthy of a dystopian narrative, such a landscape exists worldwide, as it is the result of a global crisis of the urban society first observed and theorized by Henri Lefebvre, and consisting in the “implosion-explosion” (Lefebvre, 2003: 14) of the traditional cityscape, the proliferation of the suburbs, the dilation of the peripheries and the centrifugal scattering of the populations based on their ethnicities or social classes. Lefebvre's considerations prove to be a valuable interpretive tool when it comes to describing the urban environment immortalized in the photos and videos documenting John Fekner's interventions and New York graffiti writing in the 1970s and 1980s – for instance, Jon Naar's 1974 photos published in *The Faith of Graffiti* (Mailer, Naar, 2009) and Manfred Kirchheimer's 1981 documentary *Stations of the Elevated*. Most importantly, graffiti writing's original ethos as a spontaneous, conflictual and ephemeral creative practice is strictly related to non-places and their urbanistic and architectural precariousness, hostility and transience.

The expression “non-places” has already been employed by Marc Augé to designate something close to the idea of marginality: “a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Augé, 1995: 77-78), a world “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral” (*Ibidem*). Nonetheless, Augé circumscribes the discourse to a quite specific kind of place: he means especially the airports, the service stations, the shopping malls, the hotel chains and the holiday villages, all those places produced by what he calls “supermodernity”, or a world characterized by “overabundance of events, spatial overabundance, the individualization of references” (Id.: 40). As already seen, my personal use of the expression “non-places” is inspired more by Lefebvre's idea of urban society rather than Augé's supermodernity. A similar concept has been proposed by Edwige Comoy Fusaro: “cata-places” (the prefix *cata-* coming from the Greek κατά meaning “against”, “downwards” or “circa”), or “rarely-visited areas in the urban centers and transit places (construction sites, parking lots, tunnels, overpasses) [...] interstitial areas³” (Comoy Fusaro, 2015: 6).

Although my decision to emulate Augé by using the negative particle non- obliges me to specify my own, different purpose, at the same time it allows me to convey the idea that, at its original status, graffiti writing as “art of non-places” was a non-art: in fact, from the angle of Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro's artification theory – meaning by this concept the “dynamic process of social change [...] through which objects, forms, and practices are constructed and defined as artworks” (Shapiro, Heinich 2012) – graffiti writing had not yet gained the status of art until its recognition by the artworld, i.e. by the market, by museums, by the specialized media, etc.

³Translated from the Italian by myself.

Now, such a dynamic process of recognition by the institutional artworld is itself the very first sign of a paradigm shift, an ontological transformation, or a “death of graffiti” if preferred, and it began as early as 1972, when the sociology student Hugo Martinez founded the *United Graffiti Artists* and organized the first “graffiti art show” at the New York City College: for the first time, the words “art” and “artist” were associated to the word “graffiti”, and for the first time graffiti writing moved from outdoor walls and trains to indoor walls and to canvases in order to be exposed in a gallery-like space. From non-places, graffiti writing had begun to move to institutional places, from the grey cube to the white cube: if such a transition can be interpreted, on the one hand, as an evolution in terms of social recognition of the graffiti writers as artists, on the other it raises some questions about a hypothetic perversion of graffiti writing’s original ethos, linked to graffiti’s occurrence in non-places and that I have already described in terms of spontaneity, conflict and ephemerality.

Such a perversion could also be described as a form of *deartification*. This word should not be mistaken for an antonym of artification, for the two concepts actually have two distinctive epistemological applications. The latter, as we have already seen, is a sociological concept, while the former is a philosophical one, originally coined by Theodor W. Adorno in 1953 (*Entkunstung*) and by which the philosopher meant the process through which art loses its original critical force and reaches the status of commodity (Adorno, 1981: 119-132). In our case, we may speak of a graffiti deartification to describe the loss of the original spontaneous, conflictual and ephemeral non-places ethos, through its transformation into something planned, consensual and permanent: something that clearly occurs when graffiti writing enters the realms of the institutional artworld or the cultural industry.

My question now being: is there any possible way to reconcile graffiti’s original ethos and the need for social recognition; the grey cube and the white cube; non-places and institutional places?

3. MOSA vs. Alexandre Bavard

Such concerns have been at the center of French graffiti writer MOSA (street name of Alexandre Bavard)’s most recent reflections and experimentations. A member of the Parisian crew PAL (*Peace and Love*), I have personally started to observe his practice and interviewed him in early 2017, during the last fieldwork of my doctoral studies. My attention was immediately caught by the aesthetic (and ethic) solutions the artist had found in order to split his practice between the grey cube and the white cube, the non-places and the institutional places, and consequently by their aesthetic (and ethic) consistency. I will take into consideration two recent productions: the performance called *Bulky* (2016) and the body of sculptures called *Neo-Archeologia* (2017).

In both cases, graffiti writing is the starting point, and yet neither the performance, nor any of the sculptures look like graffiti. Even at a closer look, nothing in these works suggests the idea of a tag, or a throw, or a street piece. So, where is graffiti in *Bulky* and in *Neo-Archeologia*? The answer is that graffiti writing disappears and reappears under new forms. MOSA, himself, disappears as a graffiti writer – i.e. as executor of tags, throws and pieces – and reappears as Alexandre Bavard, visual artist, creator of sculptures and performances. In one of the interviews that MOSA/Bavard released me as informant for my fieldwork, he stated:

It’s been a while since I have decided not to use my street identity for what I do in my studio, as a visual artist. For that I use my real name, Alexandre Bavard. [...] The bottom line is that what’s in the street stays in the street. If you have an artistic commitment and understand what illegal graffiti really is, you leave it on the street. Then, you can draw inspiration from its energy and transform it, and reinject such energy into your artistic practice in another way, by creating new languages. [...] I think graffiti is living a kind of exhaustion, but at the same time all of its strength can be reused otherwise, even as contemporary art.⁴

⁴The original of these interviews are in French. The translation into English is mine.

⁵*Bulky* has been performed in several galleries, museum spaces and theaters, for instance: in Paris on December 17 2016 at the Galerie Le Module and on June 29 2017 at the Palais de Tokyo, in Bari (Italy) on November 19 2017 at the Petruzzelli Theater during the event TEDxBari.

In other words, this “spectral” process of disappearances and reappearances consists of the transfiguration of graffiti writing into a completely different language. Vis-à-vis the transition from non-places to institutional places, such transfiguration becomes a necessary process in order to avoid the threat of deartification. Let us give a closer look at the process.

Bulky⁵ is the result of a direct re-elaboration of MOSA's tag: more precisely, the artist has conceived a choreographic score by reconstructing the movements of his body during the act of tagging. The process is illustrated by the artist in a limited-edition silk-screen print [Fig. 2] that he has produced in 2018:

Bulky is a system of notation of the movement generated by the tag. This system responds to a primary desire of bringing the tag into the exhibition space, moving past the reductive idea of transposing a street tag onto canvas, this through a process of intellectualization of street calligraphy and the resort to the dance. The signature in the street induces movements under the instinctive will of the tagger.



Fig. 2 Alexandre Bavard, BULKY - Study of the Body in Space, Silk-screen print, 2018. (Courtesy of the artist)

Neo-Archeologia, on the other hand, has absolutely nothing to do with tagging, but it shares its same birthplace, i.e. non-places, and particularly the vacant lots that fill the North-Eastern Parisian suburbs like Pantin and Bagnolet, where MOSA usually practices graffiti writing [Fig. 3].

MOSA and Alexandre Bavard are, of course, the same individual, yet when this same individual enters such non-places, his activity splits in two: as MOSA, he explores those vacant lots in order to carry on his unsanctioned tagging; as Alexandre Bavard, he almost acts like an archaeologist coming from the future, walking around the wasteland by collecting found objects, mostly garbage, as if they were archaeological finds: car tires, vacuum cleaner attachments, boxes of household products, etc. Nevertheless, the transfiguration of the vacant lot into an archaeological site can only be accomplished once such objects are moved to the artist's studio, in order to be transformed into imaginary relics through the technique of plaster cast and the addition of airbrushed neon color [Fig. 4-5-6].

As we have just seen, both *Bulky* and *Neo-Archeologia* derive from graffiti writing but neither of them looks like graffiti, nor occurs in the street: they rather appear as contemporary artworks that play between the grey cube and the white cube, or, as already observed by British anthropologist Rafael Schacter, “in between the walls” (Schacter, 2017: 111). Indeed, both Bavard’s creations seem to perfectly fit the category Schacter has named “intermural art”, i.e. “A practice occupying the vital space between the street and the studio, between the independent and the intuitional” (*Ibidem*) and by which “artists are now taking the Graffiti and Street Art model – as a concept, as a method, as an ethic – and translating it into a new style of art” (*Ibidem*).

Now, how can we specifically define the concept, the method and the ethic – to sum up, the philosophy – lying behind Bavard’s recent experiments? I have already mentioned a “spectral” process of disappearances and reappearances in such creations: once non-places have been left in favor of institutional places, the original ethos that characterized them – based, I would recall, on spontaneity, on conflict and on ephemerality – can only survive in a “spectral” mode. These works (and especially *Neo-Archeologia*, for it brings into play the question of time) seem to state that graffiti writing is no more, that it is perhaps really dead or “living a kind of exhaustion”, as Bavard told me, yet the ghost of graffiti writing still haunts his studio creations...



Fig. SEQ Fig. * ARABIC 3 MOSA/Bavard in action in a vacant lot, Bagnolet, 2017

4. Towards a graffiti hauntology

Our recent history is populated by ghosts. At least, that is what British theorist Mark Fisher states in *The Slow Cancellation of the Future*, an introduction to his collection of essays *Ghosts of my Life* (2014: 11-22). Fisher borrows from Jacques Derrida the concept of hauntology (*hantologie*), that the French philosopher had developed in his book from 1993 *Specters of Marx*. The word is a portmanteau between haunting (*hantise*) and ontology (Derrida, 1994: 11), and was originally coined by the French philosopher in order to describe the “spectral” condition of communism in 1848 – “A specter is haunting Europe”, says the incipit of the communist manifesto signed by Marx and Engels – but especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989. According to Fisher, hauntology becomes the ideal conceptual tool to explore the ruins of ancient utopias or, in other words, the lost futures that still haunt our present, including of course its (our) artistic production.

Fisher takes as an example the video of a song by the British band Arctic Monkeys (*I bet you look good on the dancefloor*), released in 2005 but looking like “some lost artifact from circa 1980” and that “there was no discordance between the look and the sound” (Fisher, 2014: 14). He then observes that most of rock and pop music produced during the years following 1980 show no significant stylistic evolution. He adds:

Count back twenty-five years from 1980, and you are at the beginning of rock and roll. A record that sounded like Buddy Holly or Elvis in 1980 would have sounded out of time. Of course, such records were released in 1980, but they were marketed as retro. If the Arctic Monkeys weren’t positioned as a ‘retro’ group, it is partly because, by 2005, there was no ‘now’ with which to contrast their retrospection. (*Ibidem*)

I think the same kind of considerations would not be inappropriate in order to describe graffiti writing's destiny during the years 2000-2010: existing for fifty years so far, no significant formal or stylistic "now" has occurred in order to allow us to contrast a true retrospection. Even the most brilliant and innovative graffiti writers and crews of such years, like the same MOSA and his fellow members of the PAL crew (SAEIO, HORFE, TOMEK and SKUB, among others), cannot really release themselves from the specters of graffiti writing's mythical past and its nostalgia: the New York of the years 1970-1980, the trains and their whole cars that crossed the five boroughs, the golden age of funk and hip-hop, PHASE2 and DONDI, old school and wildstyle. Once again, "graffiti is living a kind of exhaustion", and since 1990 it is dragging itself on as a repetition of past styles or, in the best cases, in the typically post-modern form of pastiche.



Fig. 4 Alexandre Bavard, Neo-Archeologia, Airbrush on plaster cast, 2017 (Courtesy the artist)



Fig. 5 Alexandre Bavard, Neo-Archeologia, Airbrush on plaster cast, 2017 (Courtesy the artist)



Fig. 6 Alexandre Bavard, Neo-Archeologia, Airbrush on plaster cast, 2017 (Courtesy the artist)

Thus, hauntology appears to be a useful conceptual tool in order to discover the specters that haunt graffiti writing, an art that "performs anachronism" (Fisher, 2014: 14), and its specific "nostalgia mode" – a term introduced by Frederic Jameson (1991: 19), and interpreted by Fisher as the "formal attachment to the techniques and formulas of the past" (Fisher, 2014: 15). Nonetheless, it is no less useful when it comes to define the "spectral" philosophy (the concept, the method, the ethic, as Schacter puts it) at the foundation of works like Neo-Archeologia.

As Martin Hägglund observes in his essay *Radical Atheism, Derrida and the Time of Life*, a specter can be described as something that is never "fully present", but that is always at the same time "no longer" and "not yet" (Hägglund, 2008: 82). Three levels of "spectrality" can be unfold in the interpretation of *Neo-Archeologia*:

-At a most superficial (let us say a merely aesthetic) level of hauntological interpretation, these sculptures look like some strange, disturbing fossils ("no longer") coming from a dystopian future ("not yet"). Their antediluvian appearance and their acid colors seem to prophesy some imminent threats, that immediately projects us in front of our current environmental responsibilities: are they the ruins of our civilization, erased by a catastrophic event? The relics of an upcoming nuclear disaster, like the explosion of Chernobyl or Fukushima? Or are the surviving traces of a flood caused by Earth's rising temperature? No biological remains inhabit the fossils imagined and recreated by Alexandre Bavard: these techno-fossils seem to announce the specter of our disappearance on Earth.

-At a more symbolic level of interpretation, each of these sculptures keeps a trace of the non-places, and specifically the vacant lots where they have been found as garbage. A vacant lot is, by definition, an interstitial and transitional space in the urban environment: a portion of land that has already been exploited ("no longer") and has been left neglected, waiting for a new usage ("not yet").

-At a critical level of interpretation, *Neo-Archeologia* embodies graffiti writing's ambiguous and everlasting suspension between a bunch of "no longer" and "not yet": between the grey cube and the white cube, between non-places and institutional places, between anonymity and recognition, between spontaneity and planning, between conflict and commodification, between ephemerality and musealization.

The third and last levels of *Neo-Archeologia*'s hauntological sounds like a sort of ethical warning, the bottom line being that, in the transition from non-places to institutional places, graffiti writing can survive deartification only at the price of its disappearance and its transfiguration into something different, through a constant aesthetic research that plays within the frames and the paradigms. Otherwise, it would betray its original ethos and turn into its own parody, a taxidermic ersatz for the benefit of the "white cube".

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“This’ll Look Nice When Its Framed” - Works of Urban Art commenting on frames

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I analyze some of well-known British Street Artist Banksy’s works that literally and metaphorically comment on different kind of frames in Urban Art. I use “Urban Art” in this particular context as an umbrella term for Banksy’s illegal street art pieces and for his legal indoor gallery art. Methodologically I combine an empirical art historical approach and interpreting description with an etymological one as Banksy’s work combine image and text and often function like visual puns. I use Baxandall’s (1988) concept of the “period eye” to reconstruct how viewers saw Banksy’s work at the time of creation on-site.

2. “THIS’LL LOOK NiCE WHEN ITS FRAMED” and “This is where I draw the line”

“THIS’LL LOOK NiCE WHEN ITS FRAMED” (Fig. 1) is the inscription of a street art piece by Banksy in San Francisco from 2010. A black boy with a can of red paint looks at the spectator right after he seemed to have finished writing this sentence on a rooftop –his clothes are splattered with the same red color. On the stencil of the boy and all around the word is splattered orange and red paint, also in front of the motif on the floor. The missing apostrophe in “iTS” instead of “it’s”, the colloquial “ll” instead of “will” and the case insensitivity underlines a kid did that or someone who deliberately or because of incapacity does not obey to rules of grammar, i.e. rules generally. Instead he used predominantly upper case letters, in English an equivalent to shouting (Robb, 2014).

From an artistic point of view, it would be very hard to cut out the whole piece and transfer it to a more traditional art space. “The stencil’s punchline is that it’s not for sale. It will never look nice in a frame because it cannot be framed (Hudson, 2014).” When you frame Street Art, you might destroy it. Someone else did that however. The owner of the building lived in Texas and had it whitewashed within a few weeks without knowing a famous artist did it (Hough, 2010).

“This’ll Look Nice When Its Framed” seems to hint at the ambiguity of the slang term “framed” as “Produce false evidence against (an innocent person) so that they appear guilty” (Oxford Dictionary). When a person gets “framed” this is a negative thing, the person becomes a passive object; a frame is a medium of violence to gain this state of an object, a frame can be a mental or literal prison. Street Art collectors or framers are like those of butterflies, they like objects they can own.

A frame can also be a stabilizing, enclosing unity, or a thematic context for understanding or interpreting, or a boundary of expected or permitted actions. To frame means “to construct in words so as to establish a context for understanding or interpretation”. “Frame” derived from Middle English *framen*, *fremen*, *fremmen*, which meant “to construct, build, strengthen, refresh, perform, execute, profit, avail” or from Old English *framian*, *fremian*, *fremm*

i.e. “to profit, avail, advance, perform, promote, execute, commit, do” (Wiktionary, 2018). So the origin of frame can be seen already connected with personal profit and the weakness of those who get framed, but those who are promoted/advanced/strengthened might often already be strong before. Banksy’s Street Art is frame-volatile by nature as it is too large, too connected to its location, too ephemeral, so you cannot sell it. Street Art eludes a frame. Adorno (1951) wrote:

The concept of time is historically formed on the basis of the social order of property. But the desire for ownership reflects time as fear of losing, of irretrievability. What is, is experienced in relation to its possible non-being. It is thereby turned into a possession and precisely in such petrification to something functional, which can be exchanged for another, equivalent possession. Once become entirely a possession, the beloved human being is actually no longer even looked at.

Like a human being, Street Art can be looked at but it cannot be owned forever. Humans are ephemeral, too. “Time-frames” and “space-frames” are both human constructions, theoretical or literal ones, to make profit, often-financial profit. “THIS’LL LOOK NICE ” can imply, it did not *before* it is framed. To make this spattering paint mess look “nice” one has to frame it. Banksy discusses the transfer from illegal to legal, from vandalism to art (object) and all the social constructions around these concepts. “When its framed” the street piece changes its status, it becomes an object, either literally or as a photograph. The photographic frame a spectator chooses tells a story about what was important for the photographer, which might differ from the artist’s intentions. Every frame is an interpretation.

A similar Banksy piece (Fig. 2 and 3), done at the same time, also in San Francisco, showed Banksy’s trademark rat on one rooftop side of a house. The large rat seemingly just drew a red line connecting three buildings of a street corner as it holds a marker pen that nearly touches this red line (Fig. 3). On another rooftop-side of a house appears what the rat seemed to have written in red color: “This is where I draw the line”. Apart from its literal usage in this piece, it is a common expression that means to refuse to go any further: Here is the border or frame. It was interpreted as Banksy’s critique on the financial exploitation of Street Artists on this very spot in San Francisco: “THIS IS WHERE I DRAW THE LINE” in red which can be seen from the street above a clothing store that allegedly took street artists’ works and printed them on T-shirts and other apparel for sale without giving the artists any credit or revenue” (San Francisco Citizen, 2015). This interpretation is too specific, too narrow, as most viewers, who see the piece worldwide on Banksy’s website do not have this local background knowledge. On the photo provided by the artist, the shop is not visible although the photographer could have pictured the shop as well.

Nevertheless, both pieces can be read as a consumption critique, a critique of the art [market] world: ““This’ll look nice when framed” ironically points to Banksy’s philosophy that art can exist outside of traditional venues like museums, galleries, or displays in people’s homes” (Hudson, 2014). Street Art can exist outside of frames, but to communicate to an audience, it needs frames, for instance photographs, videos, prints, cutout street pieces. At the same time, any Street Art in frames points to the limits of these frames. We see something is missing in between the rat and what it wrote as the viewer cannot see the connection between both from the street level (Fig. 2), there is a gap, a blank space, a void, an argument space in between. In the documentation *Saving Banksy* (Day, 2017), it becomes obvious that Banksy actually did not physically connect the two lines as he knew it was not visible from street level. Nevertheless is the gap in-between integral part of the artwork.

A similar work by Banksy from 2005 shows some pictures of a white line of paint that runs through London. At the end of it there is a cocaine-snorting police officer kneeling on the floor. It is impossible to buy this whole work. A video might catch it best, photos point to the missing pieces between them. You could experience it not even on location as a whole, but you cannot frame it easily. Banksy’s site-specific works are sometimes so large it is hard to turn them into a commodity, which happened in the case of most Banksy-works anyway. Most frames make a work of Street Art sellable. What type of frames could that be? You can sell photos; you can print them on commodities. However, you

could only sell the whole work (“This is where I draw the line”) if someone would own all three buildings. So far, I could not find a photo that shows the whole work. On video footage a bit more of the red line, Banksy drew is visible.¹ The video documented how a former TV manager cut out the main motif of the rat. By that, he saved this part of the artwork from destruction through time but – at the same time - he destroyed the site-specific work all together. Banksy knew someone would try that as it happened before. Therefore, he created a work that would auto-destroy itself.

In the case of “this is where I draw the line” the objectifier, the person who frames the work, turns it into an object, rated the stencil of the rat higher than the words drawn or the line mentioned in what the rat wrote, and higher than the connection between words, context and image. The new frame replaces the original context. Once the street was the frame, then the gold frame or the photo frame. Every framing of Street Art is a personal interpretation of a particular work of Street Art. The objectifier, the person who cuts it out of the wall, or the photographer, who “took” the photo, rate their interpretation higher than or equal to the artist's. Which could be a good thing under certain circumstances, as it democratizes art. The viewer can get, can own his personal interpretation.

This leads to the question, what is actually the artwork in Street Art? If “this is where I draw the line” had a gold frame it would be obvious. “In the figurative sense, the frame of Street Art is the edge of the viewers’ range of vision or the scope of the photograph” (Blanché, 2016, p. 115). Site-specific street pieces often cannot be fully experienced through only one frame. You need the frame of the artist, his or her point of view. You need photos who frame the details this case, the rat, and what it wrote. A satellite photo of the location might be helpful and the street view, the position from where pedestrians on location actually see the piece. They see that it is on top of a shop called the Red Victorian: the rat paints red on the red Victorian. It wears a Ché Guevara barrel with a star, a communist icon, often associated with the color “red” and “Victory” hinting at Guevara’s catchphrase: “¡Hasta la victoria siempre!” (“Until victory, always!”). None of these frames is the one and only one. In the best case, the work rises in the mind of the beholder between those frames. As I mentioned I could not find a picture where we see the connection between the line drawing text and the line drawing rat is actually visible. However, in our head we might have seen this line. It is not necessary to understand the work or to appreciate it. Nevertheless, wouldn’t it be necessary to own the whole piece, not just a part of it? If you transfer enough context, accompanying photos, info or videos with the piece, a part might be able to act like a *pars pro toto*.

The expression “framed” in this work follows the notion of a street piece being like a wild animal that someone put into a cage when it is cut off the street, a metaphor often used by Street Art protagonists: the prominent photographer Glen E. Friedman said about Banksy’s “This is where I draw the line”: “There is this beautiful incredible animal, and you just kill it so you can own a part of it?! That is fucking foul” (Grief and Zinger, 2017).³ Banksy himself is not as strict in his comment: “I don’t know if street art ever really works indoors. If you domesticate an animal, it goes from being wild and free to sterile, fat and sleepy. So maybe the art should stay outside. Then again, some old people get a lot of comfort from having a pet around the house. It’s hard to capture the adrenaline of street painting when you’re in a nicely lit studio with the kettle on. Maybe the people who steal graffiti off walls are on to something - the edge is still there.” (Ward, 2010).

¹See TC 1:37min at the extended trailer of the Saving Banksy Movie 2017, produced by Brian Greif & Kevin Zinger, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztHKstXFj8>

²See also Bengtsen, P. (2016). „Stealing from the public. The value of street art taken from the street“, which makes a similar point.

³Glen E. Friedman in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ilx3zleUQw>

Banksy seems to question and to understand some positions on framing Street Art. Indoors Street Art might be boring as it lacks context. Street Art motifs indoors might be even boring for the artist to attach them there, as the outdoor thrill is gone. Outside Street Art can be free, but is an endangered species. Someone might paint over it. Wind and weather might destroy it. People who like to own Street Art motifs might get comfort from their caged Banksy, although the artwork might get sterile, fat and sleepy indoors. Illegal works, put there in a self-authorized performative act, become ornament or wallpaper. Street Art thieves at least do not obey rules either, not even the ones of the Street Art scene. However, their motivation is often just money. On the other side, Street Art is like a wild animal that escapes the bars of the cage of consumption. All these different frames enlighten our different views of Street Art. Street Artists like Banksy take into account of their self-authorized Street Art to potentially be stolen from the street. Banksy sprayed his “mobile phone lovers” in Bristol illegally onto a door that was easily removable within 20 minutes. So Banksy put this work in a frame, but a more flexible one. He might not have known that the youth club that owned the door was in financial troubles after government funding was cut (Turco and Cush, 2014). This illegal present became a second agenda afterwards. In a letter to the manager of the youth club Banksy authenticated the work as his own: “I recently painted on a doorway near the club. This was meant to be a small visual gift for the area – but apparently a financial one would’ve been more useful. I don’t normally admit to committing criminal damage, but seeing as it looks like charges won’t be brought any time soon you have my blessing to do what you feel is right with the piece.[...]” (Turco and Cush, 2014).

Banksy changed his mind to frame the piece as potentially salable afterwards. Frames assign value to Street Art; they show different grades of validation, in a qualitative and a quantitative way. A piece that became a photo opportunity is framed very often, by different photographers. This value- of what is framed at all- is often a financial one or one of attention economy. “A Banksy” was cut out of a wall because it was done by Banksy, the famous artist. “The Banksy” was not photo-framed a thousand times because everyone felt this single street piece was particular moving, intellectually or aesthetically pleasing. Some people might have felt like that, they might even not have known the artist. If something has already value, more people would like to frame it.

3. “Never Underestimate the Power of a Big Gold Frame

When an artwork was put into a frame, it could be an institutional one or literally a (gold) frame. In another Banksy (Fig. 4), this time an Urban Art piece in a big gold frame from his “Vs. Bristol Museum” exhibition (2009), a stick figure says to another: “Does anyone actually take this art seriously?” The other answers: “Never underestimate the power of a big gold frame”. Banksy does everything to make this piece look not serious for a classic beholder of art or one who thinks of art rather as an object of consumption or of investment. Banksy uses dirty, cheap plywood and paints two badly drawn, crude stick figures on it. Stick figures are a synonym for not to be able to draw properly, for children’s scribbling, for fast and amateurish images that are as far from a traditional understanding of art as possible. Banksy *can* draw and paint in oil accurately, but the point of this piece is that he chose not to.

The stick figures communicate with speech bubbles reminding of children’s cartoons, another Pop Art or low art phenomenon most conservative people would not call art at all. The answer of the stick figure sounds like a truism, a platitude reminding of inscriptions on t-Shirts. Then Banksy just contrasts these cheap messages with a gold frame that probably represents probably an institutional frame or art label. Within a frame like that anything can be art. Actually, art is defined through the institutional or literal frame - if it is in a gallery it is art. Damien Hirst works vice versa. His recipe contains expensive material and the finest craft, sometimes executed over years, relying on art history - not cartoons. Both artists use the literal frame to increase meaning and value, Hirst puts his work on a plinth made of expensive Carrara marble, the one Michelangelo used. Some of his works have a display case made of gold. Banksy puts his cheap plywood stickmen ironically in a golden frame, too.

Banksy criticizes the framing of art. However, what about the other way round? On the street even a Picasso-like female figure or an expensive Spot Painting by Hirst would be buffed, sandblasted, painted over. According to Banksy the frame, the location, not the content, the message, the appearance of a work of art make sure many people look at something as art.

“Maybe Banksy knew that Picasso also drew Graffiti, which he saw on the streets of Paris and even left some in Montmartre as he told the photographer Brassai in 1945 (Brassai, 1960). The photographer had already documented Graffiti in Paris before 1933 and published photos and thoughts about the art theory of Graffiti in the surrealist magazine *Minotaure*, which had a big influence on the new discovery and appreciation of Graffiti (Brassai, 1933). Banksy’s rat with the paint roller treats Hirst, Picasso, and Graffiti equally. That the rat paints over all of them raises each to the level of recognized contemporary art. On the other hand, the rat treats each as scribbles defacing a wall. [...]” (Blanché, 2016, p. 178).

Brassai was the first artist that turned graffiti into art by framing it. He chose scratchings and drawings by kids on the streets of Paris, framed them with his camera and presented them in an art context. He literally took them, made them his own, and turned them into art. Before that, graffiti was just background noise to give other art, often caricatures or paintings more authenticity, for instance in Dutch church interior paintings of the 17th century. However, Brassai framed graffiti as graffiti, not as a means to an end.

Banksy works contrariwise. As a Street Artist who earned his merits on the street, he also does not respect the literal and metaphorical frames of normally framed gallery art. He created Urban Art, a mix of both. He updates gallery art; some are summarized in his series called *Crude Oils* (Blanché, 2016, 114-120). One of Millet’s *The Gleaners* from 1857 (fig. 5) takes a cigarette break from her hard work that already Millet criticized. This critique of hard working conditions is not apparent to an average contemporary viewer in the Millet painting today, but in Banksy’s version it is. The original painting’s impression is just picturesque today. Banksy’s gleaner leaves the painting, sits on the frame, she shows a world outside of her normal “frame” is possible.

4. Conclusion

Street Art is frame-volatile by nature, because of its ephemerality, its size, location or technique. Every framing of Street Art is a personal interpretation of a particular street piece. The new frame replaces the original context. Once the street was the frame of the work, then the gold frame or the photo frame. Street Art can exist outside of frames, but it needs frames to communicate to an audience.

At the same time, Street Art points to the limits of frames. Art often needs an update; the artist breaks the frame, thus pointing to the frame to gain this update. Frames are often a symbol of power. “Time-frames” and “space-frames” are both human constructions, mental or literal ones, often to make profit. Frames assign value to pieces of Street Art; frames show different grades of validation, in a qualitative and a quantitative way.

Banksy’s street pieces *THIS’LL LOOK NICE WHEN ITS FRAMED* and *This is where I draw the line* show the problems the regular art market has with Street Art. To sell it, it has to be framed. Street Art, like most contemporary art, does need the bigger picture. One single work of an artist might speak for itself, but the framework, the staging, the context, the other works by the same artist or other artists, is equally important or even more important than a single work. Also in his gallery art, i.e. in *Gleaners* from the *Crude Oils* series and in *Never underestimate the power of a big gold frame* Banksy refers to Street Art when he comments on frames.

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Figures



Fig. 1. Banksy, “This’ll Look Nice When Its Framed”, stencil, 2010, San Francisco. 853 Valencia St (between 20th St & Cunningham Pl), Mission, San Francisco, CA 94110, Photo: Warholian.com, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/warholian/4545092719/sizes/o/>



Fig. 2. Banksy, “This is where I draw the line”, stencil, 2010, 1672 Haight Street (between Belvedere St & Cole St) Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, CA 94117. Photo: Warholian.com, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/warholian/4549987228/sizes/o/>



Fig. 3. Banksy, “This is where I draw the line”, stencil, 2010, 1672 Haight Street (between Belvedere St & Cole St) Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, CA 94117. Photo: Warholian.com, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/warholian/4549989490/sizes/o/>



Fig. 4. Banksy, "Never underestimate the power of a big gold frame", drawing, stencil, goldframe, signed, Bristol 2009. Photo: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/e2/69/d5/e269d58b81b60328a3b374279ebe4b6e.jpg>



Fig. 5: Banksy, Gleaners, Paiting and goldframe, Bristol 2009. Photo: The author.

Framing Graffiti & Street Art

Agenda

“Can art change the world?” The participation through JR’s artworks

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Introduction

The monograph *L’art peut-il changer le monde?* (JR 2015) gives an overview of the artworks and projects created between 2000 and 2015 by the French photographer JR. This chronological compilation documents the artist’s approach, from his first illegal urban interventions as a graffiti artist to the current participative projects that involve citizens from all over the world - from the Parisian suburbs to the favelas of Rio, through the shantytowns of Nairobi, the urban redevelopment areas of Shanghai, and the Israeli and Palestinian communities living on both sides of the separation barrier.

This overview of the career of JR allows us to identify a first shift in his work that takes place in 2004. That year, his practice switches from an individual creative process to a participatory or an “engaging” process, to use the artist’s own words (JR 2016). Indeed, if in the early years his work first unfolds in the city, as a “strategic political place” (Bertho 2014: 1) to achieve individual recognition, it eventually looks to the inhabitants of a city in order to take them as objects of his photography. According to JR, since 2004, his projects strive to make people more visible in the urban space by plastering their large size portraits onto the facades of buildings: “At first, I wrote my name in the streets to say ‘I exist’. Then I took pictures of people to stick them up in the street and to say ‘they exist’” (Lemoine et Ouardi 2010: 151).

The present text will focus on this second type of interventions, to question and problematize the participation as a political tool.

1. “Portrait d’une génération”, a figurehead

The inclusion of citizens in the artistic approach of JR occurred in 2004 with the project *28mm*, which was then extended more successfully with *Portrait d’une generation* (Fig.1). This project, conducted with the young residents of Clichy-Montfermeil, followed the riots that broke out in the Paris suburbs in 2005. The project was created by JR in response to the images which were aired over and over again by the media, which showed the young people caught in scuffles as wild, violent and dangerous beings (JR 2015: 33, 52). The sensational nature of this rebellion was, in the words of the artist, exacerbated by the media filter and tirelessly brought back to the forefront to the point that it tended to ‘spectacularize’ the event and distort the representations of the youth.

In reaction to this media construction, JR went to Clichy-Montfermeil and made portraits of the locals portraying caricatures of themselves. These monumental black and white photographs were then pasted onto the facades of buildings with the help of the residents.

Portrait d'une génération is based on two founding principles that will systematically be reproduced by the artist in all of his other projects. First, as explained above, this project comes into being in response to the representations conveyed by the media discourse. It is thus rooted in the artist's desire to portray a social or political reality from a different perspective than the media. JR summarizes his intention by saying: "all projects are born of a media vision. Each time it was a question of showing the places, and the people who experience them, from a different point of view than that of the media" (JR). Second, it draws outlines of a recurrent operating procedure whose cornerstone is citizen participation. These two principles – subversion of media representation and participation – will be at the core of our reflection in the remainder of this article.



Figure 1 : 28 millimètres, Portrait d'une génération, B11, Destruction n°4, Montfermeil, 2013

1.1 Media visibility

Before considering the participatory dimension of the projects, it is important to specify who are the individuals involved in JR's projects. Regarding their treatment by the media, there are two categories of individuals. On the one hand, there are those who are underexposed. They stay "in the shadow of their censorship"[Our translation] (Didi-Huberman 2012: 15). An example of this are the old people from the *Wrinkles of the city*¹ project, or the abused women from *Women are heroes*², whose realities are often obscured. On the other hand, there are those who are over-exposed "in the light of their spectacularization"[Our translation] (Didi-Huberman 2012: 15), that is, put under the spotlight because of the temporary media coverage they receive. These are, for example, the migrants or the young rioters of Clichy-Montfermeil. Didi-Huberman nuances this apparent contradiction by arguing that "under-exposure deprives us of the means to see, quite simply, what could be the question [...] But the over-exposure is not much better: too much blind light" (*Ibidem*).

While under- and over-exposure appear to be diametrically opposed, the effect they have on individuals remains the same. The excessive media denial or focus leads to the invisibility of these individuals and their emancipatory capacities and reinforces the original balance of power those people are subjected to. By their action of denial or apparent interest, the media tend to convey representations that reinforce the assumption that these citizens play only the role imposed on them and so they are supposed to play. In summary, the people chosen by JR have been chosen because they seem to be imprisoned in representations produced and conveyed by the media to reinforce and reproduce the “distribution of the sensible”³ (Rancière 2008: 48). They are, therefore, tacitly understood as individuals “deprived of logos, of symbolic representation in the city” [Our translation] (Ibidem)

For example, the over-exposure that brings the young people of *Portrait d'une génération* into light does not make it possible to look at them with new eyes, nor to erase the stereotypes about them. On the contrary, this ‘mise-en-spectacle’ which placed them at the center of public attention during the time of the riots only validated and reinforced the attributes and social behaviors that had previously been implicitly ridiculed by the dominant order to justify their distance from the political scene.

These effects of over- or under-exposure allow, in short, the hegemonic discourse to be served and the distribution of roles that it strives to maintain to be locked in. The image appears, in conclusion, to be a source of alienation for these individuals who undergo a form of symbolic domination through their treatment by the media. JR's projects are, therefore, built precisely on the power relations that are implicit in the media treatment of these people. In other words, the image in JR's approach is “at the center of his domination and his contestation” (Bertho 2015: 29). Before questioning this attempt to reconfigure the situation through JR's images, we need to first focus on the device used to engage the citizens.

1.2 Citizen collaboration: from 2004 to 2011

The term ‘participation’ from the latin ‘participare’ refers to the action of ‘taking part in’. This overly general, or overly inclusive, definition is insufficient to qualify the type of experience offered to the citizens by JR. At this stage of reflection, we'd better, therefore, specify this term to better measure the degree of involvement or commitment (in a more political way) of the citizens. If we refer to the typology established by Nathalie Casemajor, Eve Lamoureux and Danièle Racine, the projects developed by JR represent a form of collaboration, in the sense that the habitants are understood as “collaborators in an artistic proposal that emanates from the artist, but to which they can contribute” (N. Casemajor et al.: 176). The formal framework of the experience is indeed provided and delimited by JR, so too are the choice of the medium and the imagery produced. The inhabitants are involved in three different ways throughout the extended process, as they are used as photographed subjects, as objects of social emancipation discourse, and as assistants to affix the work in the urban space.

¹Wrinkles of the city is a project initiated in Cartagena in 2008 and developed in Shanghai, Los Angeles, Havana, Berlin and, finally, Istanbul until 2013. It aimed to expose the portraits of old people on the city's wall in order to link together the history of places and individuals in particular through the matching of individual's wrinkles to wall's asperities

²Women are heroes project began in 2008 in Morro Da Providência, the oldest favela of Rio de Janeiro. Then it has been adapted to other countries (India, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, etc.) to pay tribute to women victims of violence.

³According to the philosopher Jacques Rancière, the social order is not a natural basis which would appear as an established fact to people. On the contrary, the order of domination is a human construction which has implicitly been promoted as a natural order of distribution. Furthermore, and as a corollary, the “distribution of the sensible” corresponds to the organization of this domination through the distribution of roles which consolidate this very domination. From this point of view, politics do not refer to different parties in any usual sense. The real political moment occurs when this sharing of the sensible is put into question.

The distinction between collaboration and cooperation made by Brigitte Chapelain is also helpful in this context. It allows the processual progress, in which the artist and the habitants are engaged, and during which their actions feed one another, to be highlighted. She states that:

In co-operation, we share a production or a creation, but in collaboration, we share the processes that lead to it [...] co-operation is considered as the sharing of the result, each of the participants carrying out a stage without being interested in the work chain constituted by others, whereas in collaboration, it is the way of doing, organizing and learning that we share (Chapelain 2017: 48).

We shall therefore prefer the term 'collaboration' to describe the relationship that links participants to JR in the projects conducted from 2004 until 2011. This first conceptual framework is to be put in direct perspective with the title of the monograph. Indeed, citizen collaboration is revealed by the chronology of the book as the leitmotif of the artist's practice until 2011.

In other words, it appears to be the path taken by JR since 2004 to defend the cause of individuals whose media over-exposure or under-exposure locks them into stereotypes or medias representations that prevent them from taking part in political life. Collaboration is brandished by the artist as the ideal political tool, or as the argument of choice in the struggle for "the right to the city" (Lefebvre 1968). More generally, it also represents the right of citizens to assert themselves as beings with legitimacy on the political scene. Through its repetitive use in projects it seems to be the preferred path to respond to the question that weighs heavily in his approach: "Can art change the world?" Furthermore, collaboration is used with even more political efficiency in a new form, which is exacerbated from 2011. For this reason, we will focus more on this question below.

2. Inside Out Project (IOP)

The idea of citizen participation as a springboard or as an activator of change seems to be gradual and reaches its peak in JR's work in 2011. That year, the artist is awarded the prestigious TED Prize, given to the author of a work or exceptional project aimed at producing global change.

From the outset, JR structures his speech around the question "Could art change the world?". This question will be taken up again in the title of the 2015 monograph. The political efficiency of his art up to now has always been present in the background of the artist's approach, and for the first time, it is made explicit by this question publicly raised. The artist answers to it by invoking the need to modify the participative rules that have been in force until now by inverting roles in the process. JR then concludes by announcing the official launch of the *Inside Out Project*, declaring it "the world's largest participatory art project" and inviting people around the world to participate via the website. This mutation of the initial device is presented as one of the conditions of the possibilities of change. In a late interview for Al Jazeera America, he explained: "I realized the people needed to see the process and get involved in it. For that, they have to go through it. [...] They really have to take the risk themselves" (JR, 2013).

In more concrete terms, the mechanics of *Inside Out Project* is this one: citizens scattered around the globe are called upon to organize themselves into a 'Group Action' made up of at least five members with a common task. They have to make their portraits and submit them to the website⁴, noting the cause they want to defend. The photographs are then reworked according to standards established by the artist, printed and returned (for free or with a small contribution) to the participants to paste themselves the portraits in the urban space. The framing of the portraits is very different from those of previous projects like *Portrait d'une generation* where JR used a 28mm lens to be very close of the individuals. The aesthetics of *Inside Out Project*'s portraits is more like photobooth's aesthetics.

With this new project, JR claims to allow everyone assert a cause that is dear to them, to defend their ideals and finally, to exist in the eyes of the world. Nevertheless, most of the time, the cause is not visible in the urban public space but only in the public digital space. The cause is linked to the action group's portraits and its presentation on the website but it doesn't appear at their side in the urban space. Its knowledge and its visibility are reduced to a specific audience, internet users. This is the case, for example, of the IOP "Be the voice" (figure 2.) in San Francisco with 161 posters pasted in the streets. The cause appears only on the website:

We want to "be the voice" of the unheard of in our community and put everyone together regardless of their social status, we want to bring together the homeless and sheltered with the rest of us. We want send a message were we look around and see persons and not just people.⁵

This new participatory model, also named *The People's Art Project* on the website, does the exact opposite of the previous projects which were addressed to a particular and targeted social minority. In this case, the promise of visibility does not concern forgotten people or «outcasts» anymore, but potentially all the world's citizens. This global project which relies on the use of information and communication technologies and, more specifically on the internet, calls for worldwide emancipation, even in the most remote areas. It gives the illusion of being based on an ideal of visibility and access to speech for all through the massive diffusion of "portraits of ordinary singularity" (Bertho 2015: 10) and all sorts of claims (tolerance, peace, acceptance of diversity, etc.). Indeed, relying on the assumption that all people are equal in the use of new technologies, JR never takes into account the possible difficulty for some people to have access to internet or to a digital camera.



Figure 2 : Inside Out Project, Be the voice, San Francisco, Mars 2015

Regarding reappropriation

Within this new proposal, participation still reigns supreme, but it takes a more radical form than collaboration. It has the consequence of the artist's disinvestment in the reality on the ground, and his renunciation of the proximity relation that he establishes with the citizens. JR therefore defines himself more as an intermediary. He explains: "what has changed in my artistic practice is that people are more and more involved while I intervene less and less. In *Portrait d'une génération* I did everything. In *Face 2 face* and *Women are heroes*, the community started to take steps. In *Inside Out Project*, I don't take the pictures anymore, I don't paste the portraits anymore. The people have become the actors" (JR, 2012).

⁵<http://www.insideoutproject.net/en/group-actions/usa-san-fransisco>

According to the authors of the analysis grid 'Typology and Public Participation Issues' to which we have already referred, the *Inside Out Project* is related to artistic initiatives in the category of 'reappropriation'. The authors describe:

Artistic proposals whose conceptual paternity returns to the artist but which are propelled into the public space with the hope that participants will appropriate the concept and redeploy it with more or less leeway. The participants become 'maneuvers'. This type of project works with a professional artist, on the one hand, and individuals or communities who (re)create works according to a certain pattern on the other. The artists loses 'control' over their project. Generally, there is little interaction or deliberation between the artist and the participants, but the participants have some creative freedom (N. Casemajor et al. 2016: 176).

In summary, participation in the work of JR adopts two forms, collaboration and reappropriation. The first appears in the artist's speech, and in his monograph as the gradual evolution of the second. These two forms follow each other within the same continuum in JR's pursuit of a political art that could produce change.

3. A political art?

Inside Out Project can be seen as one of the objectives in the artistic career of JR, an artistic proposal recalibrated for political ends. Indeed, the catalyst for political change in JR's work lies in the shift brought about by *Inside Out* - from a local collaborative approach to a global approach supported by a standardized device - and, as a result, in ever-greater freedom given to the citizens.

In the section 3.1, we will therefore attempt to question this presupposition, which tends to reduce the problem of political efficiency in JR's work to the strict local/global, proximity/distance dichotomy. To do this, the *Inside Out Project* device will be confronted with the definition of a micropolitical art, the last possible rampart for a political art according to Paul Ardenne (2000). This first reading will then be put to the test using the conceptual framework of Jacques Rancière (2005, 2008), which allows us to understand the notion of political art from a different perspective. This demonstration will be enriched with empirical facts to confirm that *Inside Out Project* cannot be reduced to a strictly local or global approach, nor can the projects that preceded it. Our reflection will then open to other lines of approach to attempt to detect the political burden of JR's projects.

3.1 Micropolitics vs macropolitics

Until 2011, JR focused his artistic work on a concrete social reality (riots of Clichy Montfermeil, violence against women, migrants) delimited to a defined area or population. These projects triggered by a media vision took shape on the ground, and were influenced by the artist's knowledge, as well as by meetings and dialogues with those who had lived these experiences. In this sense, this first wave of projects can be compared to so-called 'micropolitical' initiatives.

According to the historian and art critic Paul Ardenne, micropolitical art is a form of postmodern art resulting from the inability to stand up against totalitarian regimes. It feeds on the collapse of our system of understanding of the world based on the great founding narratives and it draws its consistency in a relative helplessness related to the many traumas that occurred at the end of the 19th and during the 20th centuries. Micropolitical art is built from the observation of a global political efficiency reserved for avant-garde utopias. Located in the immediacy, and centered on the individuals, this form of art rests on gestures of presence, of co-presence in reality, very targeted actions in places of daily life, of the ordinary, of the 'situation', without the artwork, which emanates from this decision to integrate this world defeated by its modern tutelary models, claiming to have any universal vocation" (Ardenne, Charbonneau 2006: 19).

On the other hand, we could argue that the approach behind *Inside Out* is 'macropolitical', particularly in view of the scale deployed and the overall mission pursued. It is no longer about a circumscribed artistic approach, which addresses a particular audience, but about a call to an unprecedented international mobilization in the history of artistic participation. This massive rallying of people all over the world is in fact made possible thanks to the elaboration of an online device, a kind of a "worldwide playground" [Our translation] (Couchot et Hilaire, 2005: 62). This device is itself allowed thanks to the 100,000 euros granted by the TED Foundation to its annual winner.

The TED Foundation also aims to bring together a global audience around their major conferences. It tends, more precisely, to create a community of interests, virtually constituted through the internet and social networks. In this sense, the TED is as much an ally of choice in the realization of the global project pursued by JR as it is an enabler that inspired it. Indeed, as a laureate, and like his predecessors, the artist must formulate a wish that ranks on the side of a global cause, and which is addressed to an international audience. To comply with these requirements, he says at the TED conference, "my wish is to use art to change the world." And he finishes by asking, "I want you to get up for what you care about by participating in a global art project, and together we will turn the world inside out ..." (JR 2011).

This utopian discourse is not without recalling the words of Rimbaud and Marx, as repeated by André Breton in 1935 in his text *Political position of surrealism*: "transform the world said Marx; change life, said Rimbaud: these two slogans for us are one " (Thomas 2006 : 34)

It seems to be driven by a "transformative political will linked to a system of a global interpretation of the world" [Our translation] (Lachaud 2007: 35). The pursuit of universal changes would be, if we believe Ardenne, the preoccupation or ideal of the modern artists. By extension, the historian says that the postmodern artist stands "against the universal, [which is] a modern obsession"[Our translation] (Ardenne, 2000: n.p). "Conscious of the emptiness of heavy ideologies"(Ibidem), the postmodern artist aims at producing effects that are only perceptible on a little scale.

So, if we follow Ardenne, we can assert that *Inside Out* is engaged in a losing battle because of its universal and global goals and challenges. If we stick to this first reading, the projects that hold a real political charge could be those developed before *Inside Out*. Contrary to JR's allegations, these micro-propositions rooted in everyday life and committed to producing concrete effects appear to be the only possible way to move towards an art that could still be a vector of change.

3.2 Micropolitical art and Rancière's thought

The resurgence of art politics in postmodernity is a sticking point that gives rise to divergent thoughts.

In Ardenne's reflections, the political dimension of art can survive in postmodernity only by adopting moderately committed, located and contextual forms. On the contrary, according to the philosopher Jacques Rancière these forms testify to a reversal of the politics of art into ethics. They tend to erase the contentious or dissensual character that allows politics to manifest itself.

From Rancière's point of view, the political dimension of art unfolds at the heart of the aesthetic regime of art equivalent to artistic modernity. After the French Revolution, works of art were liberated from the bonds that kept them linked to external references and social conventions, such as the hierarchy of genres, or the dictates of beauty. The acquisition of the autonomy of art under the aesthetic regime leads to the creation of a common space in which the order of domination is abolished in the name of the equality of subjects experiences and of their aesthetic judgment.

The advent of postmodernity began what Rancière denounces as “the reign of ethics” or “the ethical turn of aesthetics” which “removes what lies at the heart of the political community, in other words dissensus” (Rancière, 2009: n.p). Behind the reaffirmed political concern that conditions many artistic forms as early as the end of the 1980s, appears an art “marked by the categories of consensus” (Ibidem). Among these forms, Rancière notably points to the relational arts, close cousins of micropolitical arts, which are “a softened and socialized version of the aesthetic promise of emancipation” (Ibidem).

In Jacques Rancière’s view, the specifically political character of art in postmodernity does not reside in the strict oppositional duality between micropolitics and macropolitics on which Paul Ardenne relies. This theoretical contribution thus makes it possible to affirm that the politicization of art should not be reduced to the scale of the projects. It is also quite significant to see that Guattari and Deleuze, at the origin of the concept of micropolitics, already affirmed that “every policy is at the same time micropolitical and macropolitical” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980: 260).

Furthermore, as part of our research, some interviews⁶ conducted with individuals who created an Inside Out Group Action also call into question the distinction between micropolitical and macropolitical as an evaluation grid for political art. These interviews conducted in a semi-structured way allow to balance the exclusively macropolitical character attributed to Inside Out. They demonstrated that the actions carried out by citizens to realize their portraits, produce a common claim and assert their existence are also organized on a smaller and more local scale, that of the city, even if the device relies on a global and international rallying mechanism. To put it short: the Inside Out has to be thought as a complex intersection between a macropolitical technical device and micropolitical tactics.

Indeed, each group action tends to work and to exist daily through concrete actions. So the claim has a local existence before existing virtually on the web and being visible on social networks. In many cases, these microactions go beyond the project’s scope and give rise to more permanent proximity relationships, in particular in the associative, cultural and educational sectors, or with local elected officials and the media. Finally, interviews reveal that many individuals who created and led group actions already knew JR’s artwork because of their familiarity with the field of contemporary or urban art. They are independent photographers, cultural mediators in museum or cultural center, curators, students in art sections and so, seem to play the role of activators of local projects by connecting people who are interested to be part of it. So we note that the ideal of worldwide visibility and emancipation announced by JR is made possible by the intervention of these insiders. They not only make the *IOP* known but they use it as a launching pad for many causes.

Conclusion

On the one hand, *Inside Out Project* functions as an international promotional showcase for small groups of local citizens, who are locally situated and working in the field before gaining wider visibility. This global device, which houses a constellation of specific projects, simply facilitates their meeting and formation into a virtual community, that shares the same goal of visibility, and which conveys similar claims built around great universal principles (equality, fraternity, tolerance, etc.).

On the other hand, *Inside Out Project* works as a strategic device of autopromotion. The artist attaches his name to a large number of smaller initiatives grouped together under the heading Inside Out Project. He also proceeds with their aesthetic standardization by touching them up and by reframing them. Finally, he personally frames the participative process by submitting to the groups many rules through guidelines available on the *Inside Out Project* website. As Nathalie Casemajor, Eve Lamoureux et Danièle Racine put it, behind these practices emerges “the danger of a sliding towards a communication strategy serving the fame of the artist” (Casemajor, Lamoureux, Racine, 2016 : 176).

⁶Five interviews have been conducted in France and Belgium. They’ll be part of an other scientific article.

Finally, the entanglement of the local and the global within *Inside Out* demonstrates the hybridity of the device and its porosity. It is, therefore, irrelevant to attempt to grasp or measure the political burden of JR's projects on the basis of one-sided concepts, such as that of micropolitics proposed by Paul Ardenne. At this stage of our research, the question of politics, in sense of reconfiguring the categories of the visible in the work of JR, in all its forms, remains suspended. To answer this question, the political dimension of JR's art needs to be assessed from other modalities inherent to the experience of participation.

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Street Art Against the Mafia: urban and social regeneration in Naples and Caserta

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Introduction

On 23 June 1992, at a ceremony one month after the death of the anti-mafia magistrate Giovanni Falcone, his friend Paolo Borsellino declared that the fight against the mafia [...] must be a cultural and moral movement that involves us all, especially the young, the most able to feel the beauty of the fresh scent of liberty: this helps us to reject the stink of moral compromise, indifference, proximity and, therefore, complicity' (Costabile 2015: 25).

In recent years the "cultural and moral movement" referred to by Borsellino has been put into practice right across the Italian South, including the region of Campania where organised crime has managed, over time, to penetrate and establish itself within every level of society.

Street art is not just art that uses public space, but a type of art that almost corresponds to this space, is a distinctive feature of it, makes it special and welcoming to its users, and takes on an instructional and social role in relation to a wider public. As a result, to quote Linda Shearer, "monologues have become dialogues" (1988: 7).

In the case studies I will discuss, the focus on art has involved launching regeneration processes that relate not only to the physical environment but also, and especially, to the dynamics of local society, since the purpose of any artistic display that is not restricted to formal environments but chooses public space as its arena must necessarily be to generate thinking that can transform a location into a cultural resource, "humanising" and "beautifying" the city and its outskirts (Deutsche 1991: 49).

It is important that this kind of intervention fosters a sense of identity: in difficult areas such as those described here art needs to abandon its protective shell of self-reference and engage with the city's social complexities, especially at its margins, in order to find new ways of moving forward in social, moral and political terms.

The aim of the street art initiatives discussed here has been to respond to the need for moral conduct by starting with aesthetic initiatives that have the capacity to revive the positive energy of these areas, an energy that has long been buried under a thick layer of injustice and illegality:

Like the press, one role of street art is to form social consciousness. In authoritarian systems where outlets for free expression are limited, it is one of the few gauges of political sentiment. In more open systems, street art enables various entities to lobby for their interests. Street art, in essence, connotes a decentralized, democratic form in which there is universal access, and the real control over messages comes from the social producers. (Chaffee 1993: 4) caricatures of themselves. These monumental black and white photographs were then pasted onto the facades of buildings with the help of the residents.

As we will see, street art, especially in difficult areas like the outskirts of Naples and the province of Caserta, is entirely at home in the terrain of “social activism, social outrage and creativity” (Lewisohn 2008: 153); this allows it to become the vehicle for a message whose construction starts with an “economy of words and ideas, and rhetorically simple discourse” (Chaffee 1993: 9).

In order to make our contribution to the fight against organised crime, the organisation *Inward* (Observatory on urban creativity)¹ and the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli” decided to put our energies into art-based initiatives, in view of the fact that art:

- can stimulate creativity;
- stimulates dialogue and encounters between people, irrespective of the level of their formal education;
- may encourage its audience to question themselves and imagine possible future situations;
- offers opportunities for self-expression, a particular feature of active citizenship;
- has outcomes that cannot necessarily be predicted, and which as a result arouse people’s interest and entertain them.

1. Case study 1: Ponticelli

Ponticelli is a quarter of Naples on the city’s eastern side. It is a difficult area, well away from the city centre, and over time it has proved to be fertile ground for the introduction of a large number of illegal activities by organised crime (Barbagallo 1999). In May 2008, a traumatic event indicated divisions in the quarter: popular unrest led to an attack on the local Roma camp, which was burnt down.

The forces of order responded and the magistrates investigated, but culture and art went missing. This has resulted in the need to intervene in the quarter on an aesthetic level as well as in other ways, in the knowledge that the fight against the Camorra needs to be accompanied by broader action for urban and social regeneration. Within the quarter, the organisation *Inward* has been responsible for the peaceful and colourful invasion of Parco Merola, where by 2017 seven large works of art have radically altered the park’s appearance; local residents have been encouraged to get directly involved in the project, which has been designed to start from key words such as progress, rebirth and legality.

To grasp not only the aesthetic strength of these works but also, and perhaps above all, their moral force, it should be borne in mind that it was actually from Parco Merola that people had set out to set fire to the Roma camp in 2008. This unfortunate story was the starting point for the first of the initiatives hosted by the park: the work undertaken by Jorith AGOch2 with its evocative title in Neapolitan dialect, “Ael. Tutt’egual song’ e creatur” (“Ael. The children are all equal”) (fig. 1). The face of the Roma girl Ael, an emblematic symbol of suffering and marginalisation, is accompanied by a pile of books to remind us that the desire for integration, just like acceptance, is arrived at through education: this is what makes people want to challenge the Camorra and every form of racial discrimination, opening the local population up to accepting the ‘other’ and distancing themselves from organised crime.

In the same quarter, and in the very same residential complex of Parco Merola, some other building walls have been ‘decorated’. A puppet holding a computer game joypad, symbolising tradition and modernity in defence of play and the right to be children, is the focal point of the work ‘A pazziella ‘n man’ e criature’ (Play in the hand of children”) (fig. 2).

The mural in Ponticelli by the Sicilian artists Rosk and Loste3, “Chi è vulut bene, nun s’o scorda” (“Those who are loved do not forget”) (fig. 3), portrays two children with a football in the shirts of the Napoli and Argentina teams: two future men who dream of Maradona and the victory that comes from the street. These are not the children of today but their parents, who were once children too. Sport puts the parents and their children on the same level. On the streets of Ponticelli, just as everywhere else in Naples, there is never a shortage of balls and pitches, often improvised, where people can play: football unites, and at the same time provides a moment of opposition and of respect for the rules.

The research director of *Inward* Luca Borriello, quoted by Zagaria, has discussed the work by Rosk and Loste:

The intention of this contribution is to refer once again to the importance of a path of education: once the person who is loved now, as a child, becomes an adult and a parent, perhaps they will not forget the love they were given and will make the same gift to their children, and so on for ever. Play, kids, play and have fun. (Zagaria 2015)

Another work undertaken in Ponticelli's Parco Merola is "Lo trattenemiento de' peccerille" ("The enjoyment of the littlest ones") by Mattia Campo Dall'Orto (fig. 4)⁴. The artist decided to portray the faces and stories of the community living there, and sought to extol the various features of this community. Central to the work are two children holding the book *Pentamerone. Lo cunto de li cunti* by Giambattista Basile⁵, whose subtitle became the title for the mural; they are absorbed in reading, and above their heads are depicted figures launched by their imagination. The work emphasises the importance of reading, the stimulation of creativity, and the reinterpretation of our own lives.

All the projects were conceived and realised by Inward after a careful survey of the area overseen by the organisation *Psicologi in Contatto*⁶, which first of all drew attention to the inner workings of the environment where the work was to be undertaken. They had noticed a particular abandonment by the youngest children of reading: the book as an object, and children's capacity to immerse themselves in narrative worlds whose principal aim is to boost creative potential. In socio-cultural environments on the margins, it is proven to be really important for the ability of developing children to be autonomous and outward-looking. For example, to add to the execution of the street art piece by Mattia Campo Dall'Orto, a scheme was developed for sharing donated books within apartment blocks: the idea was to encourage reading among the children and young people in the eastern outskirts of Naples. Every child who read the book that had inspired the mural wrote about or drew what they wanted on specially provided post-it notes and then, strengthened by their own creativity, passed the book on to another child, who passed it to yet another, until these reading trails crossed over among the buildings.

The ultimate purposes of this operation were thus socialisation and boosting the potential of the children in the Parco Merola area, helping them to experience their own daily life in a spirit of fertile imagination.

These works were conceived and undertaken for Parco Merola in Ponticelli. They were part of a wide ongoing socio-cultural operation, specifically designed for the younger residents of the neighborhood. Art thus becomes a tool for opportunity, redemption, and escape, making clear how the achievement of legality - as opposed to Camorra in all its forms - is a necessary precondition to any path towards civic development.



Figure 1 Jorith AGOch, Ael. Tutt'egual song' e creatur, neighborhood of Ponticelli (Napoli), Photography by Inward



Figure 2 ZED1, A pazziella 'n man' e criature, neighborhood of Ponticelli (Napoli), Photography by Luca Sorbo



Figure 3 Rosk & Loste, Chi è vulut bene, nun s'ò scorda, neighborhood of Ponticelli (Napoli), Photography by Inward



Figure 4 Mattia Campo Dall'Orto, Lo trattenemiento de' peccerille, neighborhood of Ponticelli (Napoli), Photography by Luca Sorbo

2. Case study 2: Orticanoodles for Giancarlo Siani

On 23 September 1985, in Naples, the journalist Giancarlo Siani, aged 26, was savagely murdered, just a few metres from where he lived, by two Camorra killers (Di Fiore 2016). In his articles, the young Giancarlo had always shown a particular interest in the social issues of deprivation and marginalisation, identifying those suffering from these ills as the main supply of labour for organised crime.

On the initiative of the quarter's residents, *Inward* planned for the Italian street artist duo known as 'Orticanoodles'⁷ to execute a large mural, 38 metres long, on the very same street where the journalist lost his life (fig. 5). The mural is divided in 26 parts—26 in fact, the same number as the journalist's age—to talk about the ideals to which Giancarlo Siani had dedicated his whole life: legality and civic awareness.

The mural was the outcome of a crowdfunding initiative supported by the quarter's residents, who wanted to emphasise, once again, that they had nothing to do with organised crime and that they sided with the rule of law.



Figure 5 Orticanoodles, Un murale per Giancarlo Siani, neighborhood of Vomero (Napoli). Photography by Inward

3. Case study 3: Giò Pistone and Alberonero for Casapesenna

Pasquale Miele was a young businessman, just 28 years old, who ran a small clothing factory. On 6 November 1989, Pasquale was killed by two Camorra men at his house in Grumo Nevano, in the province of Naples. The investigation quickly focused in on the world of protectionism, and the police had little doubt: the execution had been carried out by a gang who had been ordered to intimidate the Miele family.

A little less than three years later, on 6 August 1992 at Villa Literno in the province of Caserta, four assassins killed Antonio Diana, the owner of an engineering workshop, Nicola Palumbo, one of the employees there, and Antonio Di Bona, a farm worker who happened to be there at the time of the attack. Di Bona had brought his tractor in to be repaired: a chance occurrence unrelated to the vendetta between clans that lay behind the triple murder. Di Bona and Palumbo had to be killed too because otherwise they would have been inconvenient witnesses.

In the neighbouring district of Casapesenna, also in the province of Caserta, fear of the Camorra has grown over the last thirty years in step with the growth of the Camorra itself: the local population is reluctant to discuss organised crime for fear of the consequences. Since the 1980s, the town's political and management apparatus has been a sort of plaything for the local Camorra clan; this environment has allowed local organised crime to become one of the strongest and most violent criminal groupings both within the region of Campania and at a national level. An

organisation that is so rooted in the urban and social fabric of the town of Casapesenna has of course impinged on the daily lives of the residents, but also on the economic and cultural development of the entire area. Teresa Caldeira, while not talking about this particular context, has provided a helpful explanation of the consequences of a heightened presence of organised crime for a particular area:

Usually an experience of violent crime is followed by reactions like enclosing the home, moving, restricting children's activities, hiring private guards, not going out at night, and avoiding certain areas of town, all actions that reinforce a feeling of loss and restriction as well as the perception of a chaotic existence in a dangerous place. (2000: 28)

The relatives of Pasquale Miele and Antonio Di Bona established the organisation Terra Nuova to provide a focal point for social engagement, and in order to teach the younger generations about resistance to the Camorra. They were given a building confiscated from the boss of the Venosa clan in Casapesenna, in the heart of the notorious "Terra dei Fuochi"⁸, where the *Centro di aggregazione giovanile per l'arte e la cultura* (Youth Centre for Art and Culture) was set up.

In June 2015, this building had been handed over to the organisation totally destroyed by vandalism, but has been completely rebuilt with support from the Ministry of the Interior.

In Casapesenna, ideas about public space have not conformed to the contemporary ideals of community and universality: the high perimeter walls of the houses encourage separation and isolation and foster the idea that each social group should live in homogeneous enclaves, isolating those who are seen as different. Moreover, the forbidding height of these walls immediately evokes the idea of an obstacle:

Once walls are built, they alter public life. The changes we are seeing in the urban environment are fundamentally undemocratic. What is being reproduced at the level of the built environment is segregation and intolerance. The space of these cities is the main arena in which these antidemocratic tendencies are articulated. [...] Cities of walls do not strengthen citizenship but rather contribute to its corrosion. (Caldeira 2000: 334)

Street art was identified as one way of knocking the walls down, metaphorically at least. In this way, what had once been divided, isolated and uncommunicating now manages to attract the attention of the thousands of people who visit or pass by the property that was confiscated from the Camorra.

Thanks to the University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli' and the organisation Agrorinasce ('Agenzia per l'innovazione, lo sviluppo e la sicurezza del territorio'), and with my own involvement, the function of the walls has been completely subverted: they no longer promote division, but instead project welcome and openness to all those whose ideas about living embrace legality and the desire for regeneration. This is the first time that Italy has seen a collaborative juxtaposition of murals by these two artists: there is a harmonious fusion of Alberonero's use of colour and abstract geometry⁹ with Giò Pistone's fantastical figures (fig. 6)¹⁰. The walls have changed their form and purpose, as discussed, and at the same time the location has been given a new identity suitable for a centre for art and culture, becoming a source of inspiration for the children, young people and adults who attend it.

The completion of the murals was followed by numerous activities undertaken with every type of school in the area in order to involve the younger generations, in the knowledge that for the area to undergo social and economic change it needed to experience cultural processes that related to active citizenship. Twelve art and culture workshops were held between October 2015 and March 2016, with more than 6,500 participants.



Figure 6 The courtyard of the real estate confiscated to the boss Venosa during the work in progress for the works by Alberonero e Giò Pistone, Photography by Francesco Rinaldi

4. Intervention methodology and the goals achieved

Involvement and participation have been the two key concepts and principles around which all the urban and social regeneration initiatives discussed in this article have been structured (figg. 7-8-9-10). Over and above the obvious aesthetic value of these operations, the impetus to pursue this approach has come from the desire to have a real impact on an urban and social fabric that is not accustomed to artistic practice, or to beauty in general.

In the context of the increasingly general impotence of the law, teaching people about beauty and art means educating them in legality: teaching young people to respect and defend the landscape of the city and its outskirts.

This methodology conforms to the argument made in the 1930s by John Dewey, to the effect that every experience that is truly complete has within it an aesthetic element (Dewey 1934).

In the areas discussed, the artists have created not only works of art but also, and I would argue especially, an active public. In this form of practice, a product-centred approach to art gives way to a model of open-ended collaboration that is characterised by great freedom of action and the mass involvement of actors who often have little to do with the dynamics of formal art as it is often understood.

If we move on from these premises, street art initiatives like these have at least as great an impact on the public sphere as they do on public space. The interaction between the individual and the artist, but also between individuals, together with the aesthetic response to the art initiatives, helps to imbue public space with the civic values that help to lay the foundations for “that feeling of belonging that links individuals to places” (Montebelli 2000: 5).

In the cases considered here, there has been a shift in sense and meaning, which no longer derives from bringing art to the people but instead from working with people to create an art that not only has a significant aesthetic impact but also, and above all, relates to how people might lead their lives.

The projects carried out in Casapesenna and Naples moved, therefore, from the recognition of the centrality of art and active participation in the formation of culture and citizen’s behaviour and identified the younger generations as the privileged subject for the affirmation of a new ethical, civil and cultural awareness.

What does it mean to create a new awareness? This new awareness was generated among the young people who took part in different laboratories especially in Casapesenna. The concepts of culture and beauty were chosen as the starting point for the revival of the cultural and social fabric of the community and for the development of feelings of

belonging, solidarity and sharing. Work in this direction has enabled young people to regain, first of all, the knowledge, but also the use of important physical, cultural and spiritual areas of their town.

During each workshop, video-interviews were taken in local schools, mainly involving young people in order to understand how our chosen methodologies of art have succeeded in starting a process of ethical change and revival, the results of which will be visible during the next few years.

In order to measure the impact of these activities, interviews with the participants were carried out to gauge their feelings and reactions towards the workshops. In each workshop, participation varied in terms of numbers and age: so far, we have carried out twelve workshops with more or less 50 participants attending each. The first four workshops were held with primary school children (5-11 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between the 6th and 20th November 2015; four workshops were carried out with middle school students (11-15 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between the 4th and 18th December 2015; the last four workshops were carried out with secondary school students (15 -19 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between 15th January and 15th February 2016. In this way, we covered all age groups. It is important to underline that this was the first attempt in Italy to carry out some impact studies on the effectiveness of street art. We had no proscriptive model nor bibliography to follow.

These interviews showed an incredible awareness from the youngest students, in particular on issues relating to organized crime: from camorra murders to the unauthorized construction of buildings to the issue of buried toxic waste. This awareness was also conveyed in drawings realized by the pupils themselves; one of them, during a wonderful sunny day, designed a landscape during a heavy rainfall. Asked to explain why he had decided to draw this, he replied that only the rain can give birth to healthy plants and clear the ground of toxic waste (4/12/2015¹¹). Similarly, a child drew two huge hands that, in her opinion, were the hands of God that would help honest people to defeat the *Camorra*.

The key word most used by these young people during our interviews was “hope” (08/12/15¹²). Although aware of the social drama that exists in their local communities, each student had not lost hope of a future free from the yoke of organized crime. Similarly, parents who often accompanied their children during the workshops have, on several occasions, expressed their happiness about our workshops. On one occasion, one mother (53 years old) who often accompanied her children to the workshops explained: “My son always wants to be here because he says that everything here is beautiful and colourful” (22/1/2016¹³). This collected evidence shows how the implementation of such projects in urban contexts full of social decay can play a major role in the formation of a civic consciousness able to move beyond the entrenched ideas of organized crime.

The outcomes of this project deal with tangible (architecture) and non-tangible (street art) qualities in urban contexts. Tangible values in an urban setting can encourage urban regeneration, urban gentrification and improving public spaces in cities. Whereas, non-tangible qualities can promote a healthy and vibrant city through positives communication via artists’ approaches to display constructive social, political and political messages.

Unfortunately, the lack of available funds in Italian universities did not allow us to carry out a more detailed and systematic study of the impact of our project, one where we could have measured how our project had changed the lives and visions of children in these deprived areas. Indeed, as Borriello has also pointed out, in Italy so far no impact study on the effectiveness of street art has ever been carried out (27/02/2017¹⁴). He also explains that his Street Art Observatory, Inward, is working precisely on how to determine the most appropriate methodologies to measure the impact of street art on the city and its inhabitants (ibid). Evaluations need good theoretical grounding

and evidence of such adequate theoretical grounding is not obvious. Moreover, because of the lack of funding and of previous studies, all measurements of impact carried out in Casapesenna were designed and realized by art historians without the support of sociologists or psychologists, which may explain why they are so limited. Thus, the lack of expertise in evaluating the effectiveness of the project and the associated understanding of good practice in street art are evident, resources in terms of both people and funding remain scarce. Yet, this project has had the merit of turning the spotlight on a territory too long forgotten and left in the hands of the Camorra.

Why might street art, in particular, be a vehicle for fighting crime and widespread illegality? Street artists have the capacity to create a cultural space in the urban environment which otherwise could never have existed. Working for the city, and in direct physical contact with its fabric, street artists develop a particular relationship with urban space: 'they forge a very physical and intimate negotiation with space by altering it' (Lewisohn 2008: 93). In this way, the city's residents can reappropriate urban space and resume being actors within this, since use, according to Lefebvre, 'implies not "property" but "appropriation"' (1991: 356). Street art is thus a way of appropriating the local area and creating a sense of belonging to this. To develop the argument further, this type of art initiative in public space can be seen as having great symbolic potency; the walls and buildings can be seen as a place of experimentation and a testing ground for creative thinking. As Cedar Lewisohn has said, 'street art is often reflective of the place' (2008: 63).



Figure 7 Artistic/educational workshop in the courtyard of the real estate confiscated to the boss Venosa, Casapesenna (Caserta), Photography by Alessandro Santulli



Figure 8 Artistic/educational workshop in the courtyard of the real estate confiscated to the boss Venosa, Casapesenna (Caserta), Photography by Alessandro Santulli



Figure 9 Artistic/educational workshop in the the courtyard of the real estate confiscated to the boss Venosa, Casapesenna (Caserta),
Photography by Alessandro Santulli



Figure 10 Artistic/educational workshop in the the courtyard of the real estate confiscated to the boss Venosa, Casapesenna (Caserta),
Photography by Alessandro Santulli

Conclusions

I would argue that street art best expresses its potential when its form emerges from a process of reflection and it is enlisted for subversion of the collective imaginary previously imposed: unlike other visual arts, street art speaks to the public in a way that cuts across any differences of a political, sexual, economic or cultural nature. As I have emphasised, the methodologies of intervention discussed in this article have been shaped by starting from a participatory approach, in order to foster the development of processes of social inclusion. This critical centre, consisting of relationships and creative participation, favours the “public sphere” (Habermas 1989) within the range of artistic expression. Around it can be constructed the “new image of the city” that is open to the gift of hospitality, as discussed by Derrida (2000); this is very different to the closed nature typical of the recent and not so recent tribalisms and is impervious to the fear of social interpenetration that the sociologist Bauman has termed “mixophobia” (2003). Street art, like other forms of participatory art, has the potential to play an active part in constructing social reality by promoting the “aestheticization of urban chaos” (Özkan 2011).

The initiatives described have had the merit of reigniting the population’s interest in the issue of illegality and organised crime and launching processes of regeneration of urban spaces that have been under the control of the Camorra for too long. Moreover, these initiatives have encouraged the attribution of new meanings to places and the redetermination of their function. Street art moves forward by means of reflection on ‘oppositions such as “lack of communication” vs. “dialogue”, “isolation” vs. “communication”, “euphoria” vs. “dysphoria”, “life” vs. “death”, “continuity” vs. “discontinuity”, etc. (Stano 2013: 194).

Nowadays in the Youth Centre for Art and Culture in Casapesenna there is a Literary Café where creative writing, art and pottery courses are being held.

In Parco Merola, Inward continues its activities. They are now decorating three new buildings facades with three new street artworks by La Filla Bertha, Hope (Daniele Nitti) and Zeus 40.

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L'Homme Sandwich: Project 43 in Nice

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“The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”

- Guy Debord

Make no mistake: the street is ground zero for the current global wars between the haves, those one percenters who control and manage the global economy, and the rest of us; between those who wield power and those who fear it; between those who belong and all the others clamoring at the door. The street is the epicenter and visual brand for the corporatized, homogenized, Googlized world we inhabit, and when tyranny descends, the street will once again be the ongoing theatre of revolution and repression.

The street has been central to my photography and conceptual art practice for over three decades. As a platform for encounters and public gatherings, and as an impromptu stage, the street's inherent possibilities and cultural openness forces me to step out of my personal space and comfort zone; to recognize and negotiate difference; and to look, listen and learn. I believe that the art of “negotiating the street” is fundamental to today's pulsating cities and a key to imagining our collective future.

“43” plays out on the streets and builds on a specific event in order to create a collective conversation about urgent contemporary issues. First launched at the 2015 Venice Biennale, “43” has taken different forms when it occurred in New York, Berlin, Miami, Nice and London, with the common objective that it engages with the people, streets, public spaces and institutions that make up our cities. It is therefore always in-situ, always collaborative and always dependent on its reception by and interaction with local audiences for its completion.

The specific event that took place on the night of September 26/27, 2014 in the village of Iguala in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, represents the Barthian punctum of “43”, its historical wound. Forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Teachers' College were kidnapped while riding a bus to a political rally. Although presumed to be murdered, and although the town mayor and his wife were linked to the killings and jailed, the Mexican government continues to ignore local protests and has not produced any proof of their disappearance. The lies and obfuscation have only amplified an international outcry for answers about some 150-200,000 unsolved murders of Mexico's “Drug Wars” since 2006. The disappearance of the “43” has been taken up by Mexicans in an emblematic rallying cry: “Ya me cansé (J'en ai marre / I've Had Enough)”.

Beyond the horrible tragedy to the families and the blatant crime committed, why is this important? Drug cartels operate a \$25-\$50 billion annual cash business. Drugs cultivated and manufactured in Mexico and throughout Central and

South America are 90% sold in the United States and the rest between Canada and Europe. The bulk of this illegal cash must find its way back into the economy. This causes great harm, from drug addiction and mental illness to increased health care costs; from guns on the streets to gang and innocent youth murders and incarceration; from massive corruption of police and politicians to money laundering through banks and real-estate projects* that give rise to gentrification, eviction and the erasure of long-standing urban neighborhoods.

Inspired by protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the ensuing Occupy movement, Tahrir Square and Arab Spring, Los Indignados and 15-M Movement, the Peoples Movement of South Africa, the Syrian refugee crisis and the backlash on immigration in the US and Europe, “43” is based on the concept of exchange and agency: An object (the card), a dialogue, an offer made and accepted, the gaze and pose (photographed), the contract (usage and model release), and the implicit engagement of each participant in furthering the project. It is in this sense that I refer to “43” as an art campaign. This form of art practice can be traced back to the participatory artworks of the Dadaists and later Fluxus artists, both global movements that rejected the authority of institutions and the art market in favor of involving the viewer/audience in art-making through “Happenings”, and whose commonality “is a feeling that the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or that art and certain long established bounds are no longer very useful” (George Brecht, in *Fluxus: The History of An Attitude*, 1998).

L’Homme Sandwich: Project “43” in Nice builds on these ideas to present a commemoration and a call to action in a collaboration with local artists, academics and the University of Nice during the “Framing Street Art” Symposium. Two young actors Joy Serradell and Kevin Gallet each wear a sandwich-board designed by Niçois sculptor Lucas Bernardeschi, which features a photograph from a previous 43 performance in the back and a mirror in the front. The performers’ slow and deliberate movements in a procession, at once solemn and surreal, transform the city/scape into an impromptu choreography that invokes the public’s curiosity, as the performers solicit a response to their question: “What have you had enough of? What are you fed up with?”

“Je suis fatigué de l’information, parce qu’on nous dit pas tout.” (I am fed up with the news, because they don’t tell us everything.)

- Nice resident

According to the United Nations, by 2050 85% of the world’s projected 9.8 billion people will live in cities. In democratic societies urban spaces are managed by people elected to fulfill the needs of their citizens. However with the liberalization of free trade and open borders, a rampant global hyper-capitalism has taken hold whereby fewer and fewer people and institutions amass tremendous wealth and resources across nations and continents. Cities and their streets, like other commodities, are more and more privatized for the benefit of the few.

In this scenario streets and the cities they dissect are contested landscapes, their use, benefits and narratives in conflict between stakeholders with opposing agendas. Street art practitioners should take this into account. The same market forces driving the concentration of wealth are driving the exploding phenomenon of street art with art washing, corporate and urban branding, as well as the contemporary art market dominating an ever-expanding practice. The history and spirit of street art, which has always been anchored by a strong engagement with social activism and shaping alternative cultural discourses, is at a crossroad.

Whether consciously or not, the families of the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa who challenged the state and exposed its complicity by coming together and screaming their indignation, creating posters and slogans and spectacles, launching a ripple effect that captured international media attention and the cultural imagination, their actions - repeated monthly and continuing - playing out on the streets of Mexico city, could be understood as the ultimate form of street art.

* For links between the 43, Mexico's drug cartels, global banking and real estate, including the US, Canada and Europe's biggest banks as well as the Trump organization, see the following stories:

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Framing Graffiti & Street Art

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German Street Art 1970 - 2000

There was a vivid Street Art scene happening not only in Düsseldorf/Cologne but also in other German cities, for instance in Munich before US style writing graffiti appeared in Germany. Those works were called “graffiti” but they fulfilled what we called street art today: rather pictorial, if they used text it was readable and aimed at a general public, most works were done by trained fine artists. The German Street Art Scene since 1970 emerged in the Düsseldorf/Cologne area at the same time when it was the German center of the contemporary art world and the birthplace of punk. Proto street artists of the first generation were inspired by then contemporary (gallery) artists like Sigmar Polke or Joseph Beuys who used similar strategies and materials earlier, but not self-authorized on the street. Walter Dahn or Mathias Kohlhöfer were (former) fine art students and close to punk. They were, like the second generation of Düsseldorf/Cologne proto street artists (Thomas Baumgärtel, Marcus Krips, etc.) also inspired by dominant single fine artists or proto street artists who came from outside of Germany, like Harald Naegeli (Swiss), A.R. Penck (GDR) and Richard Hambleton (USA). The German scene was also inspired by New York graffiti style writers – even before but especially after movies and books about style writing graffiti (Wild Style, Style Wars, Spray Can Art) appeared in Germany. Although those US movies and books appeared in Germany, Munich became the first (style writing) graffiti capital of Germany with Loomit, years before Hamburg or Berlin, where still murals and façade paintings in the older tradition of wall ads, propaganda or Mexican polit- or community murals were dominant. On the Berlin wall all these different kinds of street art predecessors were combined, at first not only political slogans and political wall paintings in the style of squatter or community murals appeared, often done by amateurs, but also fine artists like Thierry Noir, Hambleton, Dahn or Keith Haring painted the wall.

Keywords: Fekner, Kohlhofer, Street Art, Murals, Punk, Cologne, Berlin Wall, Squatter Murals, graffiti, street art, Wall Paintings, Façade Paintings, terminology, Walter Dahn, Terry Noir, Harald Naegeli, A. R. Penck

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“This’ll Look Nice When Its Framed” - Works of Urban Art commenting on frames

In this paper I look at how some of Banksy’s works comment on different kind of frames with an empirical approach. “This’ll Look Nice When Its Framed” (2010) is the inscription of a street art piece by Banksy in San Francisco. Street Artists like Banksy take account of their self-authorized pieces to potentially be stolen from the street. This particular piece plays with the ambiguity of the term “framed” as “to be reaped of all your benefits, and your personal profile used against your will” and as an artwork put into a frame, an institutional one or literally into a (gold) frame. In another Banksy, this time an indoor gallery piece in a big gold frame from his “Vs. Bristol Museum” exhibition (2009), a stick figure says to another: “Never underestimate the power of a big gold frame”. “Framed” in the first piece follows the notion of a street piece being like a wild animal, that is put into a cage when cut off the street, a metaphor often used by Street Art protagonists (i.e. Banksy, Johannes Stahl, Saving-Banksy-Movie). Banksy discusses the transfer from illegal to legal, from vandalism to art (object) and all the subjective social constructions around these concepts. “When its framed” the street piece changes its status, it becomes an object, either literally or as a photograph. The photographic frame a spectator chooses tells a story about what was important for the photographer, which might differ from the artist’s intentions. The new frame replaces the original context.

Keywords: Frame, Banksy, Urban Art, Street, Art, gold frame, photographic frame

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Street Art Against the Mafia: urban and social regeneration in Naples and Caserta

The attempt to halt the remorseless spread of organised crime in the Italian South is not just an issue for the judges, investigating magistrates and forces of order; every citizen should feel that they are an integral part of a wind of change, coming from below, that may have a decisive impact on effecting social change. Starting with this premise, art and culture, adopting an approach of participation and involvement, can play a primary role in processes of renewal. In various areas within the provinces of Naples and Caserta, carefully researched works of street art, with the direct involvement of the local population, have provided the means for intervention in decaying and marginal environments where organised crime seemed to be so well entrenched as to be ineradicable. In this context, Street Art shows an excellent expressive force, mainly due to the peculiar characteristic to arrive in never reached spaces, to speak to the suburbs, to the border places, and to the falling buildings; and if the traditional visual arts speak to those who want to listen, Street Art is able to communicate with all audiences and to activate not only cultural, but also social (sense of belonging and historical identity) and economic (development of a territory) processes. Street art has the power to redefine public space and to break the conspiracy of silence. My paper presents some case studies, analysing their assumptions, methodology and objectives.

Keywords: Street Art, Urban Regeneration, Social Regeneration, Public Space, Contemporary Art

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Towards a graffiti hauntology. After the death of graffiti: the “ghost” of non-places in the art of MOSA/Alexandre Bavard

Native to the urban non-places (namely the suburbs, exploited and abandoned lots or buildings, infrastructures like yards and tunnels, etc.) as a spontaneous, conflictual and ephemeral creative practice, graffiti writing (an art based on the practice of tagging, or name/style writing) has been almost immediately recuperated by the institutional artworld and the cultural industry, thus entering the realms of museums and collections, of the art market, of advertising, merchandising, fashion and tourism, among many others. This paradigm shift from non-places to institutional places seems to mean the “death” of graffiti writing as we know it. In most cases, such a death goes along with a “deartification” (what Adorno called *Entkunstung*) of graffiti writing, represented by its simple musealization or commodification. Nevertheless, it may also result in a critical redefinition of graffiti writing’s aesthetic limits and possibilities. Such is, for instance, the case of French graffiti writer and visual artist MOSA/Alexandre Bavard’s most recent production, *Neo-Archeologia* (2017-2018), in which graffiti writing no longer exists under its usual forms, but is transfigured into a body of sculptural works that succeed in holding a trace of graffiti’s former ethos. In order to analyze such work, I shall make use of the Derridean concept of hauntology: while conceived for the white cube, and while looking nothing like graffiti, *Neo-Archeologia* is nonetheless haunted by the “ghost” of non-places, which used to define graffiti writing’s original ethos.

Keywords: Graffiti writing, hauntology, Alexandre Bavard, non-places, end of art, deartification

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“Can art change the world?” The participation through JR’s artworks

Citizen’s inclusion in the creative process is becoming more and more widespread, particularly when social and/or political purposes are at stake. Since his debuts as a street artist, JR has repeatedly claimed that his participative art included citizens from all over the world. From 2004 onwards, his different projects have been increasingly fostered by the idea that participation was as a political ideal that would “change the world”. This belief in the potentialities of participation is rooted in different presuppositions this article tries to deconstruct by analyzing two particular forms of participation in JR’s work.

Keywords: Street art, urban space, citizen’s participation, portraits, political art, art on the internet

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Mona Lisa’s eyes. Art-themed street art works in Italy

This study addresses street art works that refer to art in England, France, Germany, and Italy in order to figure out the specificities of Italian culture in the representations of street artists and the specificities of Italy in the street art world. It is based on a sample of art works found and photographed between 2014 and 2017. The references to Italian art mainly concern Renaissance and Baroque, whereas those to the other nations’ art concern exclusively the art of 19th and 20th centuries, not only European but also American. The Italian specificity of the street art scene is its self-referentiality, but the “site” is more cultural than geographic. The purpose of quoting art is either tribute, self-expression, self-legitimization, or self-promotion.

Keywords: Glocal, Italy, quotation

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Framing Jean-Michel Basquiat's art From street WALLs to galleries and museums

Starting from the observation that Basquiat has recently been defined as a “street artist”, this paper focuses on the American artist's graffiti period so as to determine if and how he contributed to the genre. The analysis takes into consideration his later oeuvre to assess the impact of his street-based work on his artistic career.

Keywords: Jean-Michel Basquiat, street art, graffiti, contemporary art, labeling

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Supervision by research: a betrayal of the street art spirit?

Our purpose will not be historical, even if the reactivation of a memory of the practices and the concomitant research is necessary. We will attempt to sketch an epistemology of an aesthetics of the street art, with a logical point of view, by an analytic of usual concepts used to designate street works. If the speech must be adequate to its object, how to do when the object is unstable or mobile? In a word, does anything like street art exist so that it can be studied, or is it just an artefact of art market, of marketing, or of research? We shall see that the research cannot frame nor supervise the street art because it is a social dynamics which takes place as much in the artistic space as in the relations of sociability.

Keywords: Art, market, memory, recognition, treason, urban

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L'Homme Sandwich: Project 43 in Nice

With “L'Homme Sandwich: Project 43 in Nice” the artist continues his socially-engaged art practice as he evokes a particular event in order to incite an urgent reflexion on our current human condition. Edward Hillel's working method is always in-situ: initiating what he calls “a poetics of engagement” with sites and places, he involves institutions (museums, art centers, schools, libraries, galleries...), colleagues (artists, curators, authors, artisans...) and the public (witnesses, audiences, students...) in an action / collaboration / participation with his project. The works produced in various materials and mediums (photographs, videos, installations, sculptures, drawings, publications, conferences, residencies...) retain a common objective: to create an active and ongoing “post-memory” of his subject.

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A Family Affair? Framings of the concepts ‘Graffiti’ and ‘Street Art’ in a diachronic perspective

This study surveys the usage of the concepts graffiti and street art in a diachronic perspective, by comparing definitions of the concepts in contemporary research and the usage of the terms in academic and non-academic material such as introductory books, subcultural publications and social media, published circa 1985 to the mid 2010s. The results of the study indicate that the contemporary cultural formation of graffiti and street art as different if also closely related sociocultural contexts might be the result of a hybridization between already existing artistic practices, and that changes in terminology, categorization and identity have been as crucial as the development of new artistic tactics and forms. The results also indicate that the two concepts produce different types of public identities where the ‘street artist’ is presented as a biographical subject and the ‘graffiti writer’ as a subcultural persona.

Keywords: Street art, Graffiti, Terminology, Concepts, Subjects.

Framing Graffiti & Street Art

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Conference Programme

Framing Street Art

8-9 Juin 2017 @ Bibliothèque Louis Nucéra, Place Yves Klein, Nice (France)

Thursday 8 June 2017

Welcome Session

- 9:30 Marie-Joseph Bertini (Directrice du LIRCES, Université Côte d'Azur | FR), Welcoming speech
- 9:45 Robert Roux (Conseiller Municipal de la Ville de Nice Délégué aux Arts dans l'espace public et Subdélégué aux Musées)
- 10:00 Edwige Comoy Fusaro (Université Côte d'Azur | FR), Where is Street Art?

Chair: Edwige Comoy Fusaro

- 10:30 Christophe Génin (Université Panthéon-Sorbonne Paris 1 | FR), L'encadrement par la recherche : une trahison du street art ?
- 11:00 Karin Wackers-Espinosa (Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3 | FR), Du hors cadre au cadre : un aller simple des figures urbaines
- 11:30 Discussion

Chair: Christophe Génin

- 14:00 Vittorio Parisi (Université Panthéon-Sorbonne Paris 1 | FR), Du non-lieu au lieu commun... et retour ? Le street art entre transfiguration du banal et banalisation de l'art
- 14:30 Marjorie Ranieri (Université de Mons | BE), Approche critique du dispositif participatif dans l'œuvre de JR. Le cas Inside Out Project
- 15:00 Marine Siguier (Université Paris-Sorbonne | FR), Entre institution et contestation : le street art autochtone à Montréal
- 15:30 Discussion

Friday 9 June 2017

Chair: Hélène Gaillard

- 10:00 Susan Hansen (Middlesex University | GB), Breaking the frame. Studying street art as a permanently unfinished object
- 10:30 Jacob Kimvall (Södertörn University | SE), Framing graffiti through street art – and street art through graffiti

- 11:00 Louis Volont (University of Antwerp | BE), From the white cube to the concrete metropolis. 'Iconoclash' in Berlin and Antwerp
- 11:30 Discussion
- Chair : Susan Hansen
- 14:00 Hélène Gaillard (Université de Bourgogne | FR), Framing Jean-Michel Basquiat's art: From street walls and ready-made canvas to galleries and museums
- 14:30 Ulrich Blanche (Heidelberg University | DE), "This'll Look Nice When Its Framed" - Works of Urban Art commenting on frames
- 15:00 Discussion
- 16:00 Edward Hillel (New York | USA), Lucas Bernardeschi (Villefranche-sur-Mer | FR): Performance & Projet 43

Supports



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Seminar Programme

Street Art Europe

13 April 2018 @ Salle du Conseil, Faculté des Lettres, Arts & Sciences Humaines, Nice (France)

Recherche | Research

9:00-12:00 Sites of Street Art

Slinkachu's Micro-Urban Landscape | H  l  ne Gaillard (Dijon | FR)

Is Street Art Site-Specific? | Peter Bengtsen (Lund | SE)

Spatial Invaders | Alexandre Ornon (Nice | FR)

Mobility and Connectivity in the Street Art World | Santiago Gonz  lez Villajos (Madrid | ES)

Street Art and City Scapes | Courtney Rehkamp (Cincinnati | USA)

13:00-14:00 Street Art Histories

Le regard de la Joconde. M  ta-street art | Edwige Comoy Fusaro (Nice | FR)

Street art versus art urbain | Christophe Genin (Paris | FR)

The German Street Art Scene since 1980 | Ulrich Blanch   (Heidelberg | DE)

Beyond Dominant Narratives on Street Art | Egidio Emiliano Bianco (Rome | IT)

15:00-16:00 Socio-Political Street Art

De Berlin    Schengen | Vincent Lambert (Nice | FR)

Street Art Against the Mafia | Luca Palermo (Naples | IT)

Cr  ation | Creation

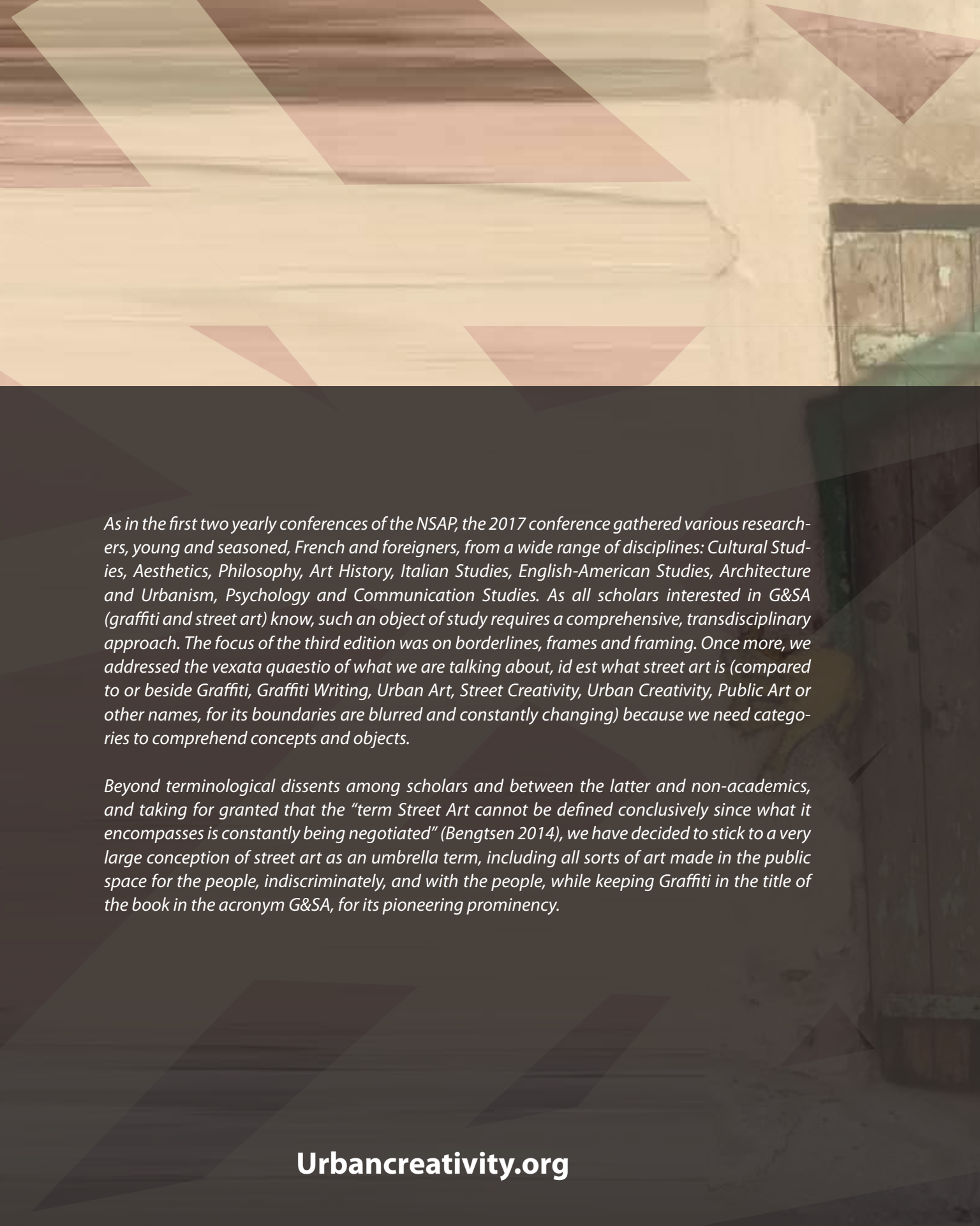
16:00-17:00 Nice Art, Dominique Decobecq & Ariane Pasco (Nice | FR)

Institutionally framed by the Nice Street Art Project, research project of the Interdisciplinary Laboratory Narratives, Cultures and Societies (LIRCES), Universit   C  te d'Azur (France)

<http://nicestreetartproject.fr/>

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As in the first two yearly conferences of the NSAP, the 2017 conference gathered various researchers, young and seasoned, French and foreigners, from a wide range of disciplines: Cultural Studies, Aesthetics, Philosophy, Art History, Italian Studies, English-American Studies, Architecture and Urbanism, Psychology and Communication Studies. As all scholars interested in G&SA (graffiti and street art) know, such an object of study requires a comprehensive, transdisciplinary approach. The focus of the third edition was on borderlines, frames and framing. Once more, we addressed the vexata quaestio of what we are talking about, id est what street art is (compared to or beside Graffiti, Graffiti Writing, Urban Art, Street Creativity, Urban Creativity, Public Art or other names, for its boundaries are blurred and constantly changing) because we need categories to comprehend concepts and objects.

Beyond terminological dissents among scholars and between the latter and non-academics, and taking for granted that the “term Street Art cannot be defined conclusively since what it encompasses is constantly being negotiated” (Bengtson 2014), we have decided to stick to a very large conception of street art as an umbrella term, including all sorts of art made in the public space for the people, indiscriminately, and with the people, while keeping Graffiti in the title of the book in the acronym G&SA, for its pioneering prominence.