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Urban Creativity  
Scientific Journal**

Places and non Places

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International Research Topic

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## Editors

Pedro Soares Neves  
Daniela V. de Freitas Simões

Does street art and urban creativity contribute to the settlement and establishment of places or non places? Do such artistic practices transform non places into places and/or vice versa? Taking a methodological approach towards such questions, this issue presents original research concerning these artistic practices in their contemporary context. Whether exploring street art and urban creativity in specific urban contexts or discussing its own rightful place, this issue sheds some light on such questions and contributes to the current scientific debate.

The contents were partially presented at the Lisbon Street Art & Urban Creativity International Seminar (2015). After the opening remarks and welcome by the Fine Art Faculty representative, a very pertinent image questioning was launched by Heitor Alvelos' keynote, followed by the first panel that addressed both EU projects, publishing experience, and gender issues within urban creativity.

The second panel was characterized by the narratives of *flanêurie* and photo-documentation, both as methodologies of approaching urban creativity. The following keynotes opened to consider a broader dimension, including practices from consolidated contemporary authors that work with light and sculpture. Also questioning the preservation approach, Peter Bengsten raised issues that led to a lively discussion with the audience.

The next day started with a balance between quantitative and qualitative research methods and great quality examples of each approach were presented. It is pertinent, at this

moment, to mention that is not usual, when dealing with urban creativity, to use quantitative methods and when this happens it may be of great effect due to the enormous number of extrapolations that can occur. These academic approaches were followed by a presentation by Lisbon Underdogs on their gallery and public art program practice. In the third panel, Brazilian authors and Portugal relations within communitarian creative practices were presented and discussed. The approach of the sub cultural as a specific area of analysis was combined with great results alongside the direct contact experience of Swedish reality.

The final presentation in the Fine Art faculty auditorium was a keynote address by Magda Sayeg, that in a sharp, honest, and incisive manner presented her work, motivations, and perspectives as author, and indubitable "mother" of "yarn bombing" as a global movement.

In the Mouraria Creative Hub (CIM) we experienced another "geography" – both in our physical location in Lisbon, and also in our experience of knowledge sharing. With a full room, both Sintra based Miguel (RAM) and Magda Sayeg presented details of their personal work process, sharing unedited and never revealed material.

We would like to acknowledge all that gathered for the seminar and for the production of the journal, and all that contributed with written work or critical reviews (members of the Scientific Committee). Thank you to all those who were with us in person, and who followed at a distance, sending us their remarks through the available channels.

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### Seminar quantitative report:

198 inscriptions; 12 nationalities present; PT; ES; IT; DE; GE; SW; UK; USA; AU; FR; DN;  
22 speakers (8 keynotes, 10 delegates, 2 members of executive commission);  
2 venues in Historical Lisbon center (Fine Arts Faculty and Mouraria Creative Hub) ;

### Journal (Volume 1) quantitative report:

64 received abstracts  
31 full articles received  
15 accepted articles without changes  
12 accepted articles with changes

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# The 'Place to Be' for Street Art Nowadays is no Longer the Street, it's the Internet

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### Abstract

*The current practice of photographic presentation, documentation, circulation, reception and negotiation of street art (pictures) online leads to a reconfiguration of both the global and the local, and therefore, to new norms and power relations. This article discusses the reciprocal constitution of local street art practices and global art discourse, with special attention to the concept of location and placement. As will be shown, central photographers as well as bloggers and administrators of Facebook pages position themselves – and are positioned – as decisive experts, opinion makers and gatekeepers. By defining 'the global view of individual cities,' they significantly influence – and continuously reinforce – the formation of a somehow globally accepted street art canon. Whereas Facebook's positively connoted real time stream emerged into some kind of ubiquitously present 'street art monitoring system,' a dominant lack of profound critique and far-sighted contextualization can be observed regarding the negotiation of street art and urban art festivals. These 'trends,' in the end, allude to more general questions addressing topics of the creative city, gentrification processes, urban policy and (de)centralized infrastructures. Subsequently, it becomes apparent that debates about spatial appropriation, advertising, legal restrictions, institutionalization, domestication, censorship, the quest for freedom and privacy as well as the questioning of hierarchies – which in the context of today's street art remain tied to the framework of the physical city – must be transferred to the internet. The internet and its central nodes are places of decision making which inevitably display the current (infra)structures of power. Therefore, a possible future, decisive and consistent step for street artists might be to both reclaim the city and the internet.*

**Keywords:** Street Art, Street Art Photography, New Media, Social Networks, Creative City, Net Policy.

This paper is about recent developments of local, situated street art practices in the context of globally networked media technologies. For, in the course of ongoing globalization processes and mobile, portable and digitally networked media technologies, one can definitely detect significant changes in both the perception and production of street art. In a certain sense, one could even assert that it somehow 'leaves' the streets.

Instead of languishing in its temporary and ephemeral existence in the street, street art is more and more both located and situated on the internet. What happens is that, today, people can take street art pictures – let's say – 'on the run', passing by and strolling through the city space. Instantly,

they are able to upload their digital photographs, almost in real-time, into the data stream of the internet. Consequently, street art shows its presence on specific photo management sites like Flickr or Instagram, on street art blogs, websites, apps, or may be embedded into digital street maps. Its upload, circulation and distribution in or through social networks, in particular Facebook, plays an important role in this phenomenon. As will become clear, online practices (re) shape, retroact and reconfigure offline practices, and vice versa. Within this paper, I would like to pay particular attention to the global conception of local street art practices. I particularly want to highlight the reciprocal constitution of local street art practices and global art discourse, with special attention to the concepts of location and placement.

## 1.1 The 'Place to Be': Offline and Online Environments

Street artists are aware of the benefits that online documentation and circulation can bring for them. With this in mind, local street art practices change: If street artists want to make sure that their work will be seen, they place it on so called 'street art hubs'; or on spots where local street art tours pass. Generally speaking, there is no need for street artists to frequent risky spots anymore, if ever. A backyard, if well documented, could be equally valued.

Among other things, this leads to the development of so called 'street art for the internet.' With this term I refer to works that (almost entirely) manage to exist without physical presence. This means, I relate to works that could have been realized in remote areas, in abandoned buildings, in one's own backyard or even at one's home. Additionally, some artists use their online channels to exclusively upload sketches, graphics or illustrations. In these cases, the notion of street art acts as nothing but a label. The fact is that both of these kinds of works do not necessarily need a 'street' to work as street art pieces, as long as they are documented and circulated adequately. Their place to be is the internet; what now matters is not the physical location, it is the digital one – that is, its URL. This means that, now street artists do not necessarily aim to position their works on highly frequented spots and streets. Rather they tend to situate photographs of their works on the internet. Due to these developments, location and spatial positioning have to be thought differently. The most popular locations – or web addresses – are websites, blogs and Facebook pages with lots of user traffic (Rushmore, 2013). 'Addresses' that possess a lot of relevant followers and actors from within the street art world's network are of particular interest. The digital audience, consequently, has become the far more attractive one from which they often expect 'instant internet fame' (Rushmore, 2013; Bengsten, 2014). In the course of this development, street art has somehow emerged into a kind of universal, stylized phenomenon without local attributes.

However, the emergence of 'street art for the internet' is only one aspect of this phenomenon. It must be emphasized that the negotiation of street art online is having a massive impact on the whole art form in general. Street artists are gradually adapting to the locative and situational conditions and

requirements of these 'new' – or, stated differently, additional and interrelated – environments. Photographic documentation, online presentation, circulation and reception have to be understood as constitutive parts of their work. Street artists think about the way their work will look on the screen; that is why they choose locations tailored to their individual needs and their own artistic aspirations. My thesis is that street artists may even reject individual spots if it turns out that photographic documentation doesn't work there in an appropriate manner. Simply put: What doesn't work in the photo will not prevail. Conversely, it must be highlighted that photographic documentation practices are also having beneficial effects. Photography offers artists, and street art recipients yet unknown, possibly unnoticed point of views. Consequently, by dealing with photography, street artists are also beginning to perceive both their works and locations in new ways. Herein lies one of the future potentials that street artists may take advantage of to advance artistically.

In this context, it can be noted that some artists already use their Facebook page or wall in a similar way to the way that they interact with the streets. Photos are meticulously selected and only pictures of both high quality and artistic value are uploaded onto their page. This means that street artists do not only upload photos onto their Facebook walls that serve as documents of past interventions, but as self-contained compositions. Often, these pictures are taken by photographers that they have befriended, who pay special attention to aesthetic values. With this in mind, street artists often acknowledge external support, especially when they can thus benefit from photographic know-how, skills or professional equipment. Of special interest are photos that take into account photo-aesthetic values; that is to say, which pay particular attention to the street art work's physical situatedness, provide an interesting perspective or framing, and which thus overcome a pure, documentary style. These kinds of photographic skills, for instance, can be observed by the example of Germany based artists TONA and ALIAS. And this seems to be hardly surprising. ALIAS, who is well known for his meticulous selection of spots and site-specific adaptations, transfers his street art practice onto the online environment: If you have a look at his Facebook page, it becomes apparent that he somehow interacts with the provided online architecture in a way comparable to the streets. Only photos with noticeable aesthetic added value

are selected and 'pasted' onto his wall; whereas the use of "Facebook Places" contributes to a reactivation of their physical location and context. Another increasingly popular photo-documentary style relates to photographs that show street artists at work – in their studio; or at night, 'on the run'. Besides TONA and ALIAS, Berlin based artist El Bocho also applies these kinds of documentation practices. Often, his photos do not only show his finished artworks, but the process of pasting them; and, additionally, he himself as artist and author. His documentation practices, consequently, are characterized by methods of double exposure offering a diverse framework of multi-perspective viewpoints.

## 1.2 The Rise of Gatekeepers: The Role of Photographers and Bloggers

In the course of this development, the relevance of (professional) street art photographers increases. It is important to note that these photographers always make choices considering what to photograph, what to show, and whose work to promote on their website or social network site (Rushmore, 2013). Consequently, they do not only document street art, they also (re)produce it. By selecting single pieces and ignoring others they make subjective valuations – sometimes consciously, sometimes not. Although their choices apparently seem to represent the present state 'of the local streets', they only show a subjective selection. In doing so, they somehow define (the global view of) individual cities. In this context, RJ Rushmore, founder of the street art blog "Vandalog," states:

Just because a street artist gets up in Brooklyn doesn't mean that anyone outside of Brooklyn will know about that artist if photographers don't pay attention and the artist doesn't post [his or, KG] her own photos. For some, who have never been to New York, but still consider it a street art capital of the world, the influential street art photographers of New York street art define the city (Rushmore, 2013: 82).

This means that people who are following individual street art 'scenes' or cities exclusively online – because they live far away or abroad – are strongly influenced by the subjective selection and upload of single street art photographers. Or stated differently: Their impression of individual cities is exclusively based on what they can see online.

In this way, central street art photographers do not only shape the global view of a city, they also significantly influence the formation of a somehow globally accepted street

art canon – in a similar way bloggers do. Both of these actors (re)produce the relevant (local) art works of selected cities and artists. In her study, art historian Heike Derwanz (2013) analyzed the frequency with which street artists were mentioned within ten different media platforms, including four blogs and six books, between 2002 and 2009. By doing so, she unfolded the international street art canon of the beginning of the 21st century. As she has shown, Above, Blek le Rat, D\*Face, Faile, Miss Van, Shepard Fairey, Swoon and The London Police appeared to be the most popular, or at least most mentioned, artists of these years.<sup>1</sup> Just as interesting is the fact that almost 50 per cent of all street art books were published by just eleven authors; out of 67 in total, excluding scientific publications. This means that about 20 per cent of all street art authors are responsible for almost half of all publications during this period (Derwanz, 2013).

Given the above, the relevance of (central) street art photographers should not be underestimated. Especially photographers who have been thrilled by the movement right from its beginning are now enjoying a global reputation – in particular Martha Cooper who is well known for her passionate documentation of the New York graffiti movement of the 1980s. Luna Park, a photographer from Brooklyn, is particularly mentioned in newer publications. Much like Berlin based photographer Boris Niehaus aka JUST, she represents the younger generation of graffiti and street art documentarists. Getting your street art photographed by one of these photographers can be read as a sign of approval (Rushmore, 2013). This is one of the reasons that street art photographs must be understood as digital documents or 'goods' which do not only incorporate subcultural capital, but are linked to economic and (art) market-related interests. At the same time, its authors assume the role of influential selectors and gatekeepers (Rushmore, 2013; Derwanz, 2013; Bengsten, 2014). This fact has to be seen in contrast to the argument that street art originally ran counter to the logic of gatekeepers. Thus, one of the main reasons street artists used to use the streets as their presentation platform was to undermine the central and selective role of gallerists, curators and methods of getting up that surrounded institutions in general. In bigger cities like Berlin and Hamburg this may probably not be that worrisome, since the subjective selection of individual photographers tends to matter less. Moreover, there are lots of tourists who also contribute to the production and aggregation of a great amount of street art pictures; especially



when they take part in one of the many, newly established and quite popular street art tours. In smaller cities, however, the documentary efforts of individual photographers tend to have an influence (Rushmore, 2013).

Overall, it is apparent that street art photography has somehow become a popular hobby. Today there are a lot of people out in the streets who are constantly trying to be the first in capturing the latest street art pieces in their city. Sometimes there appears to be an unspoken competition in uploading the first photos of new work online before someone else does (Rushmore, 2013). Immediacy seems to be linked to qualitative values. In this context, one artist from Berlin states:

*There are some fans who post pics of my works the following morning I pasted them. I don't know how they make it – and they don't overlook or miss anything. Sometimes they're quicker than I am* (interview KG, 6/2013).

This additional argument has shown that very often, new work can be seen online the same day it hits the streets. Online platforms like Facebook and Instagram, consequently, must be understood as some sort of real time “[street art, KG] monitoring system” (Rushmore, 2013: 80; quoting KAT-SU on Flickr and graffiti).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the case of central bloggers. Marc and Sara Schiller for example, a couple from the US, started their street art blog in 2003 out of sheer enthusiasm for street art and in order to share some pictures with their family and friends. The Schillers, nowadays, are not only generally respected within the scene, they also publish books, release prints, organize events and curate shows (Derwanz, 2013). Today, their blog can be compared to an ‘exclusive club’ where only the highest, or supposedly highest, quality artists enter. In her book “Street Artists. Careers on the Art and Design Markets” art historian Heike Derwanz states:

*In contrast to most street art fans, they [the Schillers, KG] possess a certain kind of ‘monopoly’ on information [...]. Artists share their pictures for attention, bloggers share their daily work for a position of power and recipients obtain participation on contemporary art history* (Derwanz, 2013: 149).

This constellation leads to the rise of two independent, but at the same time interrelated processes: On the one hand, artists sometimes reach out to bloggers and photographers to announce their latest work (Rushmore, 2013). In doing so, they hand over exclusive image rights while at the same time strategically fostering their work’s appearance on relevant street art blogs or online platforms. Street art blogger RJ Rushmore can report from his own experiences: “Most of the time these tips are friendly, but occasionally artists try telling the bloggers and photographers what to do, as if the artists employ the photographs of street art” (Rushmore, 2013: 82). On the other hand, it can also be observed that bloggers – and probably also photographers – reach out to artists in order to tell them what to do and how to act; in a similar way that gallerists sometimes do. One possible offshoot of this process of mutual interdependence and influence can possibly be observed in the emergence of Facebook’s ‘share 4 share’ practice; a practice which became quite popular among individual Facebook users, including artists, photographers and bloggers.

About six months ago, Marc Schiller twittered that street artists should exercise their voice more on the street; that they need to once again ‘steal space’ and become a voice of dissent. He subsequently elaborates why he doesn’t post on the Wooster site anymore: Because it seems like nobody has anything to say that is provocative. He explains that he enjoys seeing amazing murals in real life, but hates seeing them online. They have no emotional power online, he adds, because they rarely say anything.<sup>2</sup> Due to the fact that Schiller once was, or still is, one of the leading figures of this whole development, these statements are quite surprising. Within this context, one could – or should – at least question whether he himself wasn’t instrumental in creating the street art scene that exists today; an opinion which is shared by several actors of the street art world and which has thus become an inspiring source for further discussions and polemics.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3 Street Art Festivals, Creative Cities and the Lack of Critique**

At this point, let me turn to a related point. Besides private institutions, municipal associations and free curators, it is more and more up to bloggers, photographers and other re-

lated 'experts' to organize events, to curate festivals and to have a voice. Since about four years now, it seems like street art festivals are popping up in almost every city or country around the globe (Rushmore, 2013). These festivals are characterized by the realization of a great amount of murals, preferably located in the seemingly fancy, arty-farty districts of the cities. Their line-ups are mainly based on online research (Rushmore, 2013) which means that bloggers and other organizers do not only confirm the street art canon they themselves created, but continue to reinforce it. In doing so, they favor the consolidation of a somehow globally accepted street art canon which, at least initially, may be perceived as a fairly static formation. These touring muralists have to travel a lot in order to fulfill all of their invitations and appointments. Often they have – or take – no time to get informed about local situations, discourses or polemics. So what they do is put up a nice, decorative mural that works everywhere, but has no relation to the local streets and its inhabitants. Although their works are characterized by a high level of artistic skill, they often lack one of the main characteristics street art was once popular for: site-specificity. Since most of the works circulate online, there seems to be no demand to act differently. A lot of festival curators seem satisfied with convincing the local city marketing with luminous colors and don't seem to pursue further objectives.

This, or at least a similar phenomenon, may have been the case in Hamburg. In September 2014 there was a street art event called "City Canvas" (City Canvas, 2014). According to the project's website, the event aimed at turning a 70 meter long wall into a canvas for five large-scale murals. Therefore, five national and international artists were invited to paint the temporary walls of the construction site at Spielbudenplatz in Hamburg St. Pauli. The project received a lot of positive feedback since the colorful, quite decorative murals seemed to please a great amount of passers-by, tourists and not to forget, online audiences. Berlin based "Graffitiarchiv" (Engl. "Graffiti Archive"), nevertheless, voiced some criticism by directly highlighting the sociopolitical relevance of its venue. In an corresponding online article they state that the venue is – or respectively was – the location of the so called "Esso-Häuser", a housing complex from the 1960s which hosted over 100 flats, a hotel, retail stores, clubs, bars, an underground car park and the petrol station "Reeperbahn," which was kind of a cult object for the whole neighborhood (Graffitiarchiv, 2014). Just a couple of months

before the event took place inhabitants were ordered to leave the complex and it finally got demolished. The "Graffitiarchiv" consequently frames the event as a stage for a concealed sociopolitical issue: While the walls attracted with luminous colors, they covered the predominant gap in the local cityscape. They assume that the real estate company responsible intentionally misappropriated the affirming, fresh visual imagery of street art with the intention to distract from previously outlined urban policy measures. In doing so, they allude to phenomenon – known as "art washing" – to which future street art festivals and similar events should turn their attention when fathoming (out) their objectives.

In the light of this case, more general questions regarding the negotiation of spatial appropriation, the legalization of walls and the creative city can be raised. In the end, it should be critically questioned what kind of negotiation processes take place in the course of such art projects – and where? What are the key assumptions which frame a responsible, sustainable, and preferably globally oriented city development? And who is in charge of the decision-making process? Besides their seemingly favorable and decorative upgrade of individual districts, should street and urban art festivals not at least try to grasp urban dynamics and take up local themes? Regardless of this, it remains unclear as to why the creative city, especially in the course of festivals, seems to regulate itself quite frequently instead of gaining, appropriating and conquering (new) space(s). Following this idea, it could be even stated that the creative city somehow alienates itself from the original 'mission' or self-conception of street art. Drawing things together, this may not be that surprising. Elaborating on street art festivals and its underlying policies, one is probably confronted with the same dynamics and controversies today's cities are generally known for: On the one hand, they promote themselves as welcoming, responsible, open-minded, lively and creative location factors – a self-description which both satisfies inhabitants, delights tourists and attracts investors. On the other hand, they constantly try to stifle any creatively used or transformed industrial wasteland. One of the first artists, maybe the first, who actively responded to these 'trends' was Italian artist Blu. In December 2014 he covered two of his iconic large scale murals in Berlin Kreuzberg – 'unauthorized', unannounced and by night: "After witnessing the changes happening in the surrounding area during the last years, we felt it was time to erase both walls," according to the artist's statement (Blu,

2014). By blackening his murals – then one of Berlin’s most iconic landmarks – he sent a clear and unambiguous message towards the city, its investors, the real estate company responsible, and gentrification processes in general. Thus, it must be highlighted that the location and its surrounding area – which also got vacated just some months before – represented (and still represents) a lucrative building site for new luxury apartments which were not only supposed to profit from their privileged situatedness near the river Spree but also from their unique view.

Secondly, these events allude to another closely associated point: It somehow seems as if there is a serious lack of profound discourse regarding the negotiation of street and urban art festivals, in particular with respect to the contextualization of large scale murals. It is noticeable that almost every project is emphatically featured and promoted by a variety of different actors from the street art world’s network. Even its ‘experts’ who are supposed to take into account heterogeneous criteria and parameters tend to comment on almost every large-scale project in a quite one-dimensional way. Due to the fact that artists often definitely do demonstrate artistic expertise, this attitude may be legitimate. In contrast, it could be argued that the recently outlined lack of critique, far-sighted discussion, and profound contextualization may not be beneficial in the long run. By not applying differentiated criteria and neglecting multi-perspective points of view, street art festivals and related artworks, in the end, lose more of their impact than the general downscaling that the now common, web based pixel standard already accomplishes. Could this affirming – if at first sight seemingly blunt – attitude be the first offshoot of the exclusively positively regarded Facebook culture and its related real time stream? In his book “Das halbwegs Soziale. Eine Kritik der Vernetzungskultur” (Engl. “Networks Without A Cause. A Critique of Social Media”) net critic and activist Geert Lovink (2012) points towards a newspaper article by Jonathan Jones from The Guardian, which states:

*It is the job of a critic to reject the relativism and pluralism of modern life. All the time, from a million sources, we are bombarded with cultural information. [...] In fact, in this age of overload, indifference is the most likely effect of so many competing images. If we do make an aesthetic choice it is likely to be a consumerist one, a passing taste to be forgotten and replaced in a moment (Jones, 2010: n.p.).*

Against this background it might be claimed that the unification of complex feelings and their reduction to the like-button may have contributed to the general leveling of (aesthetic) judgment and individual taste at large. Careless optimism reduces one’s ability to question things critically. At the same time, it must be taken into account that both in academia and popular culture, art critique isn’t truly meant to provide encompassing qualitative judgments or impose rules of normative value. Whereas academic theorization tends to remain neutral, dealing with aesthetic qualities within a clearly framed, mostly self-referential discourse; popular culture very often reports on (internationally) celebrated artists and their related market value.<sup>4</sup> How else can we explain that the general media landscape seems to know little about the sociopolitical meaning of Banksy’s latest work in Gaza, but knows best about the winning amount of his last auction?

#### **1.4 Conclusion and Outlook: Reclaim the City – and the Net(s)**

In summary, it should be emphasized that this recently expressed, global conception of street art definitely leads to a reconfiguration of both the global and the local, and therefore, to new norms and power relations: Within the street art world’s network, central bloggers, street art photographers, as well as administrators of Facebook pages position themselves – and are positioned – as decisive experts, opinion makers, and gatekeepers. However, it should not be forgotten that blogging and street art photography originally were a bottom-up practice. In recent years, the number of street art photographers significantly increased, favored by the rise of smartphone technologies. Everybody with a phone can be a ‘photographer’ these days. This trend somehow contributed to rebalancing recently outlined, originally disparate constellations; in particular, platforms or websites that favor user participation have triggered the direction of such developments.

Generally speaking, there seems a basic necessity for today’s street artists to simultaneously address two different, but at the same time interrelated, environments: The streets and the internet (galleries and museums excluded). Usually, artists try to satisfy a double public: On the one hand, they try to satisfy the expectations of the constantly growing online audience; on the other hand, they do not neglect their output in the streets. Consequently, it seems to be a step of logical

consistency to assign online media a central role in (trans)forming and (re)shaping the present street art world. My research has shown that online practices definitely (re)shape, retroact and reconfigure offline practices, and vice versa. It is noticeable – and I would like to highlight this – that local street art practices cannot be analyzed adequately without paying close attention to global conceptions and discourses from within the street art world's network. This is especially worth mentioning when talking about street art festivals and their negotiation of spatial appropriation, selection of site/venue and legalization. At the same time, it applies when elaborating on the formation or consolidation of a street art and urban art canon. Prospectively, this may be an important topic of general interest – providing a broad variety of possible, interdisciplinary approaches – that further research projects, municipal discussions, and political debates can take up. Such a discussion, at the same time, requires that we directly address the present lack of critique and of profound contextualization.

The overall idea or concept of a sustainable, creative and preferably globally oriented city should fall under the active responsibility of many heterogeneous actors. It should be integrated into a society that favors participation – without obscuring its own editorial mechanisms of exclusion – and that respects different opinions (Lovink, 2012). Nevertheless, this can only be achieved if the underlying infrastructure complies with the requirements of a modern, open-minded and forward-looking society. Debates about spatial appropriation, advertising, legal restrictions, institutionalization, domestication, censorship, the quest for freedom and privacy, as well as the questioning of hierarchies – which in the context of today's street art are still tied to the framework of the physical city – have to be transferred to the net(s). The current but decisive challenge for street artists will be to critically scrutinize familiar conventions, mechanisms of control and exclusion within existing, (de)centralized network structures.

The fact is that the net(s) and their central nodes are places of decision making which inevitably display the current (infra)structures of power. Against this background it seems to be crucially important to no longer understand the internet as a tool, but as an inseparable part of our political, economic, social and cultural processes (Lovink, 2012). Walled gardens like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+, much like the

internet in general, no longer are – and perhaps never were – a free infrastructure. Rather, the whole cultural, political, economic and educational landscape is strongly influenced by its networking structures, its algorithms and its mechanisms of coordination. It seems to be no gesture of emancipation to disconnect from commercial and centralized platforms like Facebook. A much more promising approach lies in the usage of the internet and (yet available) online infrastructure; and not in its refusal (Lovink, 2012). A first step may be to utilize free software and support open source communities that have already brought into being initiatives like Diaspora, Ello, Lorea, Crabgrass and GNU Social (Lovink, 2012). The key point is that as critical thinking enters the level of networking, knowledge will be translated into code (Lovink, 2012: 96).

### Notes

- 1 See Derwanz, (2013: 151-155). Banksy, however, is the undisputed number one of (mainstream) daily media (Derwanz, 2013: 153).
- 2 See Salman (2014) with reference to Schiller (2014).
- 3 See Dave the Chimp (2014).
- 4 See Lovink (2012) with reference to McDonald (2007) and Schreyach (2007).

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## Preserving Urban Heritage and Creativity: The Reuse of the AXA Building in Porto

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### Abstract

*This article addresses the interaction between urban regeneration and cultural policies. Planning and developing urban transformation may foster positive and experience design through the experience economy, targeting a cohesive cultural narrative and identity. The discussed case study discussed here concerns the reuse of the AXA Building in the historic center of the city of Porto, in Portugal, as an alternative to classical integrated urban cultural policy and the promotion of free access dynamic leisure activities. In this case, the reuse of a historical building resulted from a hybrid project. Characterized by fusion, the design combined urban rehabilitation, heritage conservation and maintenance, cultural institutions, environments and experiences, social interaction, recreation, and programs aimed at improving the quality of life of both residents and visitors.*

**Keywords:** Urban Creativity, Building Reuse, Cultural Sustainability, Experience Economy.

### Introduction

Urban spaces are tangible material constructions and also intangible immaterial spheres, resulting from cultural ways of inhabiting and participating in the city. In addition to this, through subjective ideological representations, the city becomes an emotionally appropriated place, to live in, to enjoy, and to experience. Therefore, urban regeneration encompasses tangible and intangible goals.

Aesthetic and symbolic creative agents are increasingly intervening in different activities and dimensions, which include connecting culture to economy to the urban space, and feeding the discussion of the potential of such multi-party connections. This linkage may help explain the rationale behind the image of a city. Through territorial marketing, tourism promotes destination places as products, which may be helpful as a tool in devising and designing strategies to revitalize urban heritage, namely historical buildings.

In the presented case study presented here, the Porto AXA Building offered offers some insight into the potential of urban revitalization strategies. An abandoned historical build-

ing, as architectural heritage, was subject to reuse. The main façade, windows and balconies were transformed into a vertical music hall, while the inside houses art galleries and exhibitions. The former insurance company office building was converted into a multimedia cultural performance. Additionally, this transformation had a domino effect. Overlooking the Porto main square, Avenida dos Aliados, and the historical building of the City Hall, the creative cultural reuse operated offered a 'blood transfusion' to the decaying neighboring area, revitalizing local commerce and creating new business opportunities. Experience-oriented projects have thrived within the city environment. Urban regeneration and cultural policies may become opportunities to build a more active citizenship and culturally sustainable city, enhancing the subjective dimension of the public space and public amenities.

### 1. Urban Regeneration since the 20th century

The concept of urban regeneration became relevant in the 19th century, during the industrial revolution, with the need to adapt urban systems to the incoming demographic flow of workers to the city. At the time, this originated urban sub-



urbia based communities, leading to the decline of urban center populations and consequently to a gradual decline and growing weaknesses on a social, economic and cultural level (Benévolo, 2001).

In the late 1920s, the International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) in the late 1920's recognized the need to address the new reality of the urban center. It triggered an awareness of the role of preservation and conservation, as forms of monetizing urban heritage, namely historical buildings, and due to their role at different levels – architectural system, urban context, and the construction of identity.

In 1929, the second meeting of the association presented significant approaches to the social dimension of the design process, seeking greater centrality for the human being in the development of interventional proposals. Between 1931 and 1933 new conferences were held, culminating in the Charter of Athens. This document set the foundations and goals for urban and architectural intervention (De Fusco, 1985). Later, following the destruction of European territories during World War II, it was necessary to rethink their structure and organization, according to social, economic, and institutional frameworks. The reconstruction process allowed contemporary needs and strategies to be addressed, by moving populations to more fitting areas, in search for better and more sustainable living conditions, with better employability and safety, thus implying a change in the principles of urban planning. Post-war reconstruction witnessed serious social and economic problems, discussed in the International Conference on Modern Architecture, which followed the Second World War (Benévolo, 2001). These meetings introduced new urbanism and architecture, whose main concern was the city identity, in a new understanding of the network and connections defining the contemporary quality of life.

The relationship between citizens and housing, the way users relate and react to the surrounding environment, the identity of a place and similar concepts were gradually inserted into political discourses, linked and developed in 1964 with the Charter of Venice (also known as the International Bill of Restoration) (Moutinho, 1999) and more recently with the New Charter of Athens in 2003, in the IV International Congress for Modern Architecture. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, the traditional urban cultural attractions such as theaters, works of art and museums saw the addition of

new features and other cultural resources not bound to a specific location, but rather free to flow, move and change in a liquid reality (Bauman, 2001), such as cultural events, self-identity and the revitalization of historic center. According to Bauman, reality is liquid, fluid, volatile, characterized by uncertainty and insecurity and it opposes the rigid 'solid modernity' (Bauman, 2001), informed by numerous moral references, which were set aside and gave way to the logic of now, of movement.

A paradigmatic example of this is the permanent revolution of historical centers, showcasing a relentless mutation/change. Urban interventions sought to re-insert these spaces in the urban fabric, by becoming qualifying factors for those urban centers, to the point of being requested by urban populations in small, medium and large cities. The urban space may be construed as the place for strangers to meet. According to Sennet (1978) this meeting has particular traits: there is no before or after meeting; the event has no past or future, there is no continuity to the story. In this sense, urban life requires a social activity the author calls civility. It is the ability to interact with strangers without using their strangeness against them. Bauman (2001) believes we live in a world with more urban spaces than civilian spaces.

Another perspective proposed by Trueman (cit. in Jay, 2006) suggests an urgent need to analyze the urban space as a brand, considering the wide variety of interested sponsors, for example, the local business community. According to this author, it is possible to examine the city as a brand, using conventional branding types and considering different stakeholders. Through this sort of propositions, a specific discourse may be set for the city, as a tourist, professional, and housing product, creating its very own identity. Kotler (Kotler et al. 1993) argues that in a global economy, each destination city competes with others in search for commercial advantage. According to Kotler, places are in fact products, whose identities and values must be designed and marketed. Failing to adequately market a place means a risk of stagnation and economic decline.

In this sense the economic prosperity of a country, city or culture is directly linked to the mystique of a place - its heritage, culture, people, and its business and financial systems. They must all work together to create more sustainable policies and strategies.

According to Gartner (1993), the destination image is formed by three interrelated components: cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component is the set of beliefs and attitudes leading to an internally accepted image of attributes. The affective component is related to the motives for choosing one destination instead of another. The conative component concerns the images developed during the cognitive stage and evaluated during the affective stage (Gartner, 1993).

Destination image is crucial in the touristic decision making process because all decision making factors such as money, time or family are based on the image of each destination, influencing the decision maker's motivation, and their intention to visit and to revisit a given destination (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010).

The interpretation and requalification of architectural structures is a creative exercise deeply connected to design principles. Redesigning redefines spaces in specific environments, in a creative fashion. According to Manzini (2011), as the limits of the planet become more clearer apparent, people begin to realize and interpret them spaces in different ways (in terms of economy and also health) requesting new systems with more responsive resources. Thus, design presents an asset to society, urban planning and the local economy.

### 1.1. Urban Policies and Creativity

Cultural approaches spread throughout many cities in Europe, encouraged in many cases by EU funding. The introduction of urban cultural policy has been much slower than the commoditization of urban culture. On a European level, academic circles only began an explicit debate on this area in the 1990s. Bianchini and Parkinson (1993) A pioneering debate on the subject and with a collection of essays that explored a range of Western European cities and addressed the effect of cultural policy in urban regeneration. Bianchini (1993) identified a set of dilemmas still relevant today: spatial dilemmas such as tensions between center and periphery (the risk of gentrification); economic development dilemmas on whether to encourage production or consumption; cultural financing dilemmas, on whether to offer ephemeral support to events and festivals or to rather supporting per-

manent infrastructures. In order to solve these dilemmas, Bianchini advocates cultural planning, as alternative to traditional cultural policies which that are still grounded in aesthetic definitions of culture as art (Bianchini, 1999, p. 41).

The discourse on cities touches on social inclusion, performing arts, urbanism, economics, culture, and innovation – , including the ability to implement intersecting interventions beyond old dichotomies and conflicts in terms of fields and forms of action: economy vs. culture, public vs. private, ephemeral vs. permanent, local vs. global. Due to an interesting political repercussion, cities are allowed to rehearse political, institutional, and governing solutions that are represent creative and innovative means to deal with new urban realities and the difficulties of most of the traditional forms of performance forms (Costa et al., 2007). Discussions on cultural planning have evolved with the urban cultural policy debate, partly because of its more ambitious and holistic nature. A consequence of this is that the culture approach in the scope of urban policy tends to be made in purely functional terms, instead of prioritizing the question of what culture can add to the economy.

According to Lorentzen (2009) draws on the concept of the experience economy, created by Pine and Gilmore (1999), to argue that , cities can progress, drawing on and he believes that the economy is not just based on culture, entertainment or tourism, or even the cultural and creative industries, but also on local services (restaurants, the wellbeing industry, etc.). Therefore, territorial development requires a co-localization of the consumption experience with production, to the extent that it invites people to enjoy and spend their money both as residents and as visitors and tourists (Lorentzen, 2009).

The convergence between culture and economy in the urban context has increased since the 1990s with the expansion of city marketing techniques and city branding strategies. Identifying the city as a branded product allows the recognition of an organized cross-system of goods and services for citizens and visitors to appreciate. In order to ensure that urban cultural policies maximize their role in shaping contemporary cities, the mandate of cultural policy must be further expanded in a way that addresses the complex and multifaceted nature of urban culture. Bianchini (1999) suggests that this can only happen through a radical change in our understanding of how to plan and develop city policies:



“What urban planners and policy-makers need today is perhaps the creativity of artists. This is the creativity of being able to synthesize; to see the connections between the natural, social, cultural, political and economic environments, and to grasp the importance not only of ‘hard’ but also of ‘soft’ infrastructures. The knowledge of how to use soft infra-structures [daily routines of working and playing, rituals location, ambiances and atmospheres, people’s sense of belonging] is crucial for successful policy implementation” (Bianchini, 1999, pp. 42-43) .

Cities require a more holistic and flexible understanding of cultural policy, combining the sphere of the arts with the economic, political, social, educational and environmental spheres of cities. Cities house skilled workers, infrastructure (cultural facilities), specialized schools, major cultural events, and transportation facilities. This means that they can meet the flexibility requirements of the new economy and the “creative city,” a term coined by Bianchini and Landry in 1995. According to these authors, creativity arises as an alternative to instrumental thinking.

The dominant intellectual traditions shaping urban policies are deeply rooted in instrumental, rational, and analytical thinking. Bianchini and Landry (1995). The authors describe how creative thinking is a way to abolish inflexible prejudice and to address complex phenomena that cannot always be dealt with in a strict logical way. Genuine creativity involves thinking about new problems by adopting as main principles experimentation, originality, and the ability to rewrite rules; to be unconventional; to find common grounds in seemingly conflicting areas; to look at situations laterally and flexibly. These ways of thinking and acting encourage innovation and generate new possibilities. In this sense, according to Bianchini and Landry (1995), creativity is a “modernist” concept, defending progress, novelty, and relentless change (1995).

## 1.2. The Portuguese Case

In Portugal, the evolution of urban policies did not keep up with the country’s process of urbanization process.

The late urbanization (second half of the 20th century) accelerated, leading to serious imbalances in the territory. These imbalances and disqualifications were due to the absence of territorial planning policies, caused by an unfavor-

able political context. While in Europe, territorial and urban planning met its heyday between 1929 and 1979, according to Ferreira (2004), Portugal faced dictatorship (1926-74) and revolution (1974), which resulted in setbacks regarding in the planning system.

The national territorial planning system began in the 1970s with various regulatory instruments such as the General Urbanization Plans (1971) or and the Law of Land Management (1976). However, the goals and guidelines of the various plans could only be met in 1998, with the Law of Land Management and Urbanism (LBOTU – Lei de Bases do Ordenamento do Território e do Urbanismo), which integrated all territorial management tools in a hierarchical system based on principles such as coordination, compatibility, equity and participation (Ribeiro et al., 2012). Concerning the city, this trend is even more evident, as programs with regulatory character, such as the Municipal Master Plan, shift to strategic and collaborative sector programs, such as the Partnerships for Urban Regeneration, a tool of city policy regulated under the Regional Operational Programs of the QREN (2006-2013). According to Domingues (2003), until the end of the 1990’s, the Portuguese urban policies were scarce, under-financed, and disconnected among from both each other and from the various levels of government.

The POLIS XXI Cities Policy opened a new cycle for urban policies, recognizing that the development of the country is was directly linked to the role of cities as competitive places for citizenship and quality of life; that a good city policy should develop surrounding areas; and that the implementation of this policy should be sustained in cooperation with urban actors such as municipalities, associations, and companies (Ribeiro et al., 2012). This was a milestone in urban policies, introducing important innovations. The first one was to extend the interventions made in the historic centers to other areas of the city and even its outskirts. A second innovation was the combination of several dimensions: physical interventions to transform cities into areas of social cohesion, economic competitiveness and environmental quality (Conde and Resende, 2007: p.55). The third aspect was the promotion of forms of governance based on public participation and partnerships with various actors/ urban agents (Ribeiro et al., 2012). In this regard, partnerships with various actors allowed the growth of cultural and artistic communi-

ties, which contributed to the regeneration of urban space.

Urban renewal and revitalization through culture is growing in Portugal. However, it is associated with an increased understanding of the relationship between culture and more conventional techniques, such as spatial economic development, and the planning and revitalization of buildings and spaces. The transformation carried out in the first Portuguese cities proved that culture is an economic motor, through physical facilities such as theaters, parks, gardens and movie theatres. However, for these spaces to be experienced and felt as part of a collective culture, as new public spaces, there is still a long way to go.

Political power in Portugal, regardless of philosophical inclinations, has come to allow some autonomy to the cultural ground. Since 1995, public cultural policy has had a traditional attitude, understanding culture as a world view. According to Silva (1997: p. 44), public policies in the cultural field are indispensable and must increasingly incorporate elements of stimulation and co-responsibility of the plurality of actors and interests expressed in the so-called civil society.

## 2. Case Study: the Porto AXA Building

This century witnessed an increase in building restoration and the requalification of underpopulated city areas through historic preservation. Rehabilitation has become a research object for engineering, architecture and design. In Portugal, economic concerns and ecologically sustainable development fostered the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and the subsequent requalification of old urban centers, resulting in economic restructuring.

Classified as a World Heritage Site in 1996, the urban historic center of Porto progressively concentrated service industries, commerce, banking, and insurance head-offices, suffering from high traffic -volume, pollution, the degradation of buildings, streets, and roadways, the loss of identity, and a growing exodus of the resident population exodus. Desertification had a significant socioeconomic impact. To face it, and the increasing patrimonial degradation, the built landscape was object of subject to rehabilitation works. Although important for the new city dynamics, the most relevant element for change was the adaptive reuse of the AXA Building, which became a benchmark in the urban space

and cultural life of downtown Porto.

Near the Porto City Hall, the AXA building is a seven - storey building with fifty rooms and over 4,500 square meters. The building, is the property of the AXA insurance company. It is now a core element in the new urban space syntax, in a context of intense urban dynamics, touristic flows and leisure and cultural activities. The AXA Building is currently the headquarters of the “1ª Avenida” (1st Avenue), an Economic and Social Development Project of Downtown Porto, sponsored by the local authorities. In addition to institutional partnerships, the cultural intervention showcases works from young artists and curators, in artist-in-residence programs, and includes a professional dance school (“Balleteatro”). The space is divided in over 7 floors with more than 50 rooms hosting cultural activities, especially exhibitions and music concerts. The AXA Building established a symbiotic environment, combining informality and interactivity with visitors. The reuse of the AXA Building contaminated cascaded to the surrounding area, disseminating meeting spots, smaller performances and audiences, and promoting memorable events for locals and tourists. It translated into a metamorphosis of the economic landscape of the city, by enhancing entertainment, experiences and memories, by offering the building and the city a second life supported by art and culture, and by improving the residents’ well-being and quality of life.

Cultural sustainability is an essential dimension in the representational and symbolic domain. In a city with high-quality museums and art galleries, a new center of attraction served by a vast network of public transport, and catering and accommodation establishments, creates a cultural and leisure epicenter, promoting a larger shopping complex, and improving the city experience:

participation in leisure activities has been assumed to increase subjective wellbeing. Leisure is important because it is more under personal control than other sources of life satisfaction” (Brown et al., 2015: 135).

Hence, cultural spaces should be experienced and embodied in the experience of local population as social spaces and, positive sources of life satisfaction. They should be living spaces inspiring a common understanding of the place, performing as unifying elements and helping to form a public identity, ownership, freedom and responsibility.

Contemporary urban tourism has also diversified from historical, patrimonial tourism, and it is now based on targeting stimulating life-pulsing urban landscapes, exhilarating experiences and meaningful recollections. Traditionally, urban tourism centers offered the possibility to combine shopping, sightseeing, and leisure activities. Now, in addition to the fascination with the historical benchmarks of monuments and architecture, there are new aesthetic factors: lifestyles, quotidian routines and atmospheres. In a recent study, a positive association was found between participation in sport, heritage and active-creative leisure activities, and life satisfaction but not between participation in popular entertainment, theatre hobbies and museum/galleries (Brown at al., 2015). This is paramount to understanding the new urban market for tourism and leisure, based on improved upgraded attractions, events and environment, considering the city as a source of wellbeing, positive emotions and higher life satisfaction.

The economic ecosystem of the downtown Porto received a 'blood transfusion' from the AXA building, reviving a declining system. The increase of in revenue and the offer of a diverse, and unique experience occurs in a dynamic relationship with other people and objects, with the influence of multiple contextual factors and that boost the quality of the individual experience. All neighboring streets were affected, and the city experience was revalued. Although prices have increased, so have the number of visitors and residents, at a 'glocal' scale, with longer working hours in new establishments such as bistro-restaurants, second-hand boutiques and guesthouses.

There was a domino effect prompted by the reuse of the Porto AXA building. It is an iconic building for the new urban paradigm in which the interaction between buildings and urban space triggers momentous experiences, attracting new clientele all -year round and promoting the use and enjoyment of public spaces. In the 21st century, government, local authorities, and the private sector combine funding efforts to promote memorable experiences through culture, with daring events and seemingly impromptu public concerts, using the static urban city and architecture as a stage.

The city appeals to the five senses, to perception and emo-

tion, as a 'skin' to wear and enjoy, and as a place to revisit, re-experiment, and re-create. The Porto AXA Building is a socially relevant space of cultural intervention. It is not depleted by structural limitations , on the contrary, it is filled with a series of cultural activities, exhibitions of emerging artists, and music concerts on the building façade stage overlooking the City Hall.

We increasingly desire a new kind of space –, at the same time no place and every place, nothing and everything, as little as possible in expression, and as much as possible in potential and variation – ; a space that can fit, with few resources, our future existence. Physical spaces require a versatile language that does not limit their possibilities. The repeated experience of enjoyment and circulation through different spaces and their re-use generates a dynamic stimulation of the senses. In fact, participation in leisure activities, which are active and promote social interaction, has been assumed asserted to increase subjective wellbeing. To insist on this dynamic reconstruction/reuse of social space allows us to politicize the space itself, because it:

allows representativeness, transforming power and subject entity (not just object identity) to the local community, before the hegemonic significant force (...) of those who design, finance and administer urban spaces for public use" (Balbrea, 2003: p.50).

The AXA Building project established a fluid bond, discursively constructed with the glocal community, who have become a protagonist of the meaning of the identity associated to with the space. According to Ribeiro (1998), it is possible to create spaces for a community to identify, recognize and revitalize through 'works of cult' taking place, and according to this author, that is the ultimate purpose of design.

## Conclusion

The importance of culture, cultural policies, and creativity for urban regeneration has been playing played a very important role in policy-making for the cities since the 1990's. It allows the emergence of the so-called cultural districts or cultural quarters, often defined as creative clusters, because they constitute local-scale industries and economies.

This article reflects the need to record for the future that urban regeneration also happens through spaces of imagina-

tion, of surprise, of collective expression, and by emancipating places, as in the case of the Porto AXA Building. This return of the human senses to the city was explored by cultural mediation and more precisely by cultural agents. They recognized new features and new dynamics in spaces that the urban fabric had been unable to appropriate and return to the public and individual sphere. They kept in mind the importance of leisure as a source of life satisfaction that is more under personal control, and envisioned motivation as the driving force behind all behavior.

Considering tourism, cultural interventions can also be seen as instrumental for destination image and motivation, because what drives a tourist to visit a particular destination is very critical for cities that are not country capitals, as in the case of Porto. By abolishing the hindering conventions concerning private and public, what is culturally consecrated and what is not (consecrated), such reuse may be regarded as a form of resistance to a symbolic strict symbolic order, aiming at improving the quality of life in the city, impacting on tourist satisfaction and revisiting intention, with significant managerial implications for destination marketing managers.

This case study suggests that the colonization for cultural purposes of a space mediated by creative culture may enhance the appreciation of heritage, the and public participation in the process of cultural creation, and may also have a domino effect on urban regeneration. This has implications for policy makers and leisure service providers, especially those associated with heritage recreation. Economic measures should be considered alongside subjective wellbeing measures, such as life satisfaction.

Although this article is not focused on cultural democracy and cultural reception, nor on shortening the distance between creation and reception, the author hopes to inspire public and private institutions by showing that the requalification of urban abandoned buildings may be a tool for communication and the promotion of image, identity, and brand. This can foster tourists' happiness and improve customer satisfaction, which lead to increased customer loyalty, higher profitability, and greater market share, alongside the generation of better goods and services and enhanced subjective wellbeing. In short, it brings better living conditions in a more sustainable economy.

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## The “Banksy Effect” and Street Art in the Middle East

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### Abstract

*The English street artist known as Banksy has in recent years become an important figure in the contemporary art world, garnering both critical acclaim and commercial success with his work. The “Banksy effect” is a term coined to describe the increased interest in street art that has emerged in the wake of Banksy’s popularity. Although the Banksy effect is not universally applauded, it offers a useful lens through which to consider the emergence of street art as a means of popular expression in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This paper considers three places in which street art has been intentionally deployed as a vehicle of political protest or as a means to generate tourism in the face of political unrest: street art in the Palestinian territories; street art in Egypt, particularly Cairo; and the Djerbahood project in Tunisia. A brief discussion of the way in which street art is created and received in each particular area is provided, followed by some observations on how the Banksy effect may be at play in that particular context. The paper concludes that the idea of the Banksy effect has relevance in discussions of street art in the MENA region and that both the positive and negative aspects of the Banksy effect are seen in the region.*

**Keywords:** Street Art, Urban Art, Banksy, Graffiti, Middle East, North Africa

### Introduction

Once relegated to subway trains, abandoned buildings, and seemingly inaccessible areas of the urban landscape, street art has emerged in recent years as a critical element in political commentary on current events. This is in no small part due to the unprecedented rise of Banksy, a “writer” from the English city of Bristol whose anonymity, ubiquity and creativity have garnered him an international following among the art establishment and the general public. Banksy’s visual commentary on contemporary social and political concerns has taken many forms and his fame, public validation, and commercial success have helped pave the way for other street artists to emerge as key players in the global art market – the so-called “Banksy effect.” This increased publicity and market for street art can be seen as a positive result of the Banksy effect, but critics have argued that the popularity of Banksy’s work encourages the adoption of a similar visual style and has led to an over-commercialization of the genre. This article summarizes the concept of the Banksy effect, positions the term as a tool for critical discourse about street art, and uses the concept as a lens through which to analyze

three examples in the Middle East and North Africa: street art in the Palestinian territories; street art produced in Cairo during and after the revolution of 2011; and the Djerbahood project in Tunisia. The conclusion of this analysis is that the Banksy effect can be felt in both positive and negative ways in the rise of street art in the MENA region.

### 1. The Banksy Effect

The pseudonymous English street artist Banksy has become a cultural phenomenon in the two decades or so since he emerged onto the art scene in the 1990s. His well-crafted, stenciled works of street art provide satirical commentary on contemporary politics and social issues, or just on life itself, in ways that are somewhat enigmatic, leaving the viewer to complete their meaning. Speaking of his early time bombing walls in the Barton Hill district in the English city of Bristol, Banksy has described the evolution of his signature stencils. Describing an incident in which the British Transport Police arrived on the scene as Banksy and other graffiti artists were painting a train, the artist recalls hiding from the police under a truck:



As I lay there listening to the cops on the tracks, I realized I had to cut my painting time in half or give it up altogether. I was staring straight up at the stenciled plate on the bottom of the fuel tank when I realized I could just copy that style and make each letter three feet high (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013b: n.p.).

However, he has also acknowledged the particular political power of the stencil style, stating that:

*As soon as I cut my first stencil I could feel the power there. I also like the political edge. All graffiti is low-level dissent, but stencils have an extra history. They've been used to start revolutions and to stop wars* (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013b: n.p.).

In addition to his street works, Banksy also gained notoriety for the museum interventions that he performed occasionally for several years, beginning in 2003 with his insertion into a gallery of the Tate Britain an altered painting of an English landscape which he titled *Crimewatch UK has Ruined the Countryside for All of Us*. These incursions into the museum space share themes with his street art in their tongue-in-cheek questioning of authority, presentation of multiple avenues for interpretation and their subversion of popular expectations for images and text. By both utilizing and destabilizing the museum environment, these works call into question a specific kind of authority: that of the art establishment itself. Banksy continually walks the line between joining and rejecting that establishment. His choice of the street as the primary location for his imagery and the sarcasm he displays toward cultural authority suggest a wholesale rejection of the “white box” of the gallery.

Yet Banksy also employs art market strategies such as the creation and retailing of prints and multiples and mounts his own exhibits to sell his work. In so doing, he embraces, or at least flirts with, the structure of the contemporary art world and the expectations of its patrons. When Banksy mounted his 2006 debut exhibition “Barely Legal” in Los Angeles, he created a spectacle that rivaled those of international art fairs and that attracted a similar set of well-heeled visitors from the arts and entertainment industries (Wyatt, 2006).. That the show also attracted its share of street artists and fans of Banksy’s stenciled graffiti highlights the complexity of his work and its impact.

While continuing to produce street art in England and abroad, throughout the first decade of the 21st century Banksy also built a thriving studio practice, creating prints and canvases that have skyrocketed in value over the years. His altered Damien Hirst painting, *Keep it Spotless*, sold at a charity auction in February 2008 for \$1.8 million – a record for the artist. This high price was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the proceeds from the sale went to charity and that the work incorporated a painting by Hirst, whose pieces regularly sell for millions of dollars. However, more typical works by Banksy still fetch in the \$300,000 - \$500,000 range at auction (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013a).. As with the graffiti art popularized in the 1970s and 80s and brought into galleries by artists such as Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat, Banksy’s work employs a style that seems to confound curatorial and critical categories while simultaneously engendering tremendous popularity among the general public and the cognoscenti of the art world. The 2009 exhibit “Banksy vs Bristol Museum,” in which the artist staged numerous interventions in the galleries of the city’s public art museum, attracted so many visitors that queues stretched for blocks during the entire run of the show, which was extended for several weeks to accommodate the crowds. The artist’s 2010 film *Exit Through the Gift Shop* was nominated for an Academy Award in the documentary category. His month-long residency in New York in the fall of 2013 received wide national and international media coverage and sent New Yorkers and visitors alike rushing around the city in search of each new Banksy creation.

The CNN correspondent Max Foster is generally credited with originating the phrase “the Banksy effect” in reference to increasing interest in street art seen during the years that Banksy was gathering attention and respect for his work (Foster, 2006).. The term as originally coined focused on the way in which Banksy’s increasing popularity in the “legitimate” art world paved the way for other street artists to enter the mainstream of galleries, art fairs, and museums. However the Banksy effect also had a commercial aspect, as prices for Banksy’s works, as well as those by some other street artists, began to rise substantially along with the artist’s critical success. This rise in popularity and value was not universally applauded, however, and some within the street art community questioned whether Banksy had sold out and

strayed too far from his roots as a graffiti artist. In a 2007 blog post Marc Schiller of the Wooster Collective alluded to an ongoing debate over whether the Banksy effect was actually a good thing for the street art movement and concluded that the benefits outweighed any negative aspects:

Like Andy Warhol before him, Banksy has almost single handedly redefined what art is to a lot of people who probably never felt they appreciated art before...The fact that Banksy's book *Wall and Piece* is in every bookstore imaginable, including *Urban Outfitters*, is a statement unto itself. The fact that Banksy's work is now selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars at Sotheby's is a statement unto itself... There are now a lot of people that have money and want to spend it on art. Their entry point into buying "urban art" is now Banksy. They read about Banksy selling his work at Sotheby's and they want to be in on the action. But not many can now afford to buy a Banksy piece any more. This is actually a good thing for artists who are talented and want to make money from their art because those people who can't afford "a Banksy" are now learning more and searching out and buying work from other talented artists who are part of the movement (Schiller, 2007: n.p.).

Indeed the Wooster Collective itself, a collaborative that "showcases and celebrates ephemeral art placed on streets in cities around the world" (The Wooster Collective, 2015: n.p.) through its website, books and public lectures, arguably owes at least something of its own success to the Banksy effect. The Wooster Collective was founded in 2001, launched their website in 2003, and achieved public and critical acclaim for their 2006 street art show, the "11 Spring Street Project," following a timeline that parallels Banksy's rise to prominence in the contemporary art scene and his commercial success. Indeed, "Barely Legal," the show which launched Banksy's career in America, was held in Los Angeles in September 2006, just months before the "11 Spring Street Project" took place in New York. Shepard Fairey, the American street artist who would garner fame as well as criticism for his 2008 portrait of President Barack Obama, was building a career and a following throughout the decade as were artists such as Faile and Pure Evil, street artists who have achieved commercial success by translating their style to formats such as prints, graphic design and album covers. In addition to the "Banksy vs Bristol Museum" show, several other major museums featured exhibitions of street,

or urban, art. These included a 2008 show of commissioned street art at the Tate Modern, a 2009 survey of the work of Shepard Fairey at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and "Art in the Streets," a 2011 exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. The Wynwood Walls complex in Miami, which mixes high-end bars and restaurants with commissioned street art, sprang up in 2009, the brainchild of a local property developer. The warehouse complex, located just blocks from the heart of Art Basel Miami and supported by sponsors such as American Airlines and Heineken Beer, firmly established the nexus between street art, the global art scene, and commerce. In what might be cynically seen as a bid for authenticity, the project brought on as a contributing artist Martha Cooper, the legendary photographer of New York graffiti art in the 1970s and 80s. However Wynwood Walls, with its international crowd of art lovers, is a far cry from the train sheds and abandoned rail yards where the artists whom Cooper originally chronicled practiced their craft. For some, the existence of a place like Wynwood Walls symbolizes a negative side of the Banksy effect: the taming and gentrification of street art in such a way that it becomes almost completely divorced from its true urban roots.

### 1.1 The Banksy Effect and Street Art in the MENA Region

The proliferation of street art in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), particularly during and in the wake of the Arab Spring of 2011, has been widely documented through social media, websites, and several published photo essays. To speak of the Banksy effect, whether seen as a positive or negative development, in a context of war, political upheaval, and loss of life may seem to trivialize the important role that street art has played in liberating the voices of the people of this region during times of revolution and change. I argue, however, that an exploration of the Banksy effect in the MENA region can offer a useful lens through which to consider the emergence of street art as a means of popular expression and the different ways in which it has been generated and used in different countries.

The Banksy effect as I use the term here refers to the increasing popularity and acceptance of street art, the commercialization of street art, and the use of a particular style (stencils) associated with Banksy and employed specifically as a vehicle for political and social protest. I look at three examples of countries in which street art has been intention-



ally deployed as a vehicle of political protest or as a means to generate tourism in the face of political unrest: street art in the Palestinian territories; street art in Egypt, particularly Cairo; and the Djerbahood project in Tunisia. In each case I briefly discuss the way in which street art is created and received in the area and then offer some observations on how the Banksy effect may be at play in that particular context.

## 2. Banksy in the Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian territories present a unique example of a possible Banksy effect on street art in the MENA region as they are the one location in the region where Banksy himself has produced work. During Banksy's 2005 trip to the West Bank barrier, or separation wall, between Israel and Palestine he painted a series of nine images that called attention to the wall's function of, in his words, "turn[ing] Palestine into the world's largest open-air prison" (Parry, 2005: n.p.). These ranged from a simple stencil of a girl holding a bunch of balloons which lift her off the ground in an apparent attempt to float over the wall, to more visually complex trompe l'oeil paintings which seemed to open the wall onto a vista of sandy beaches and palm trees. Banksy reported that he was harassed at least once by an Israeli soldier who encountered him while painting and on his website shared a conversation with a Palestinian man which has been often repeated in discussions of the Palestine project:

*Old man: You paint the wall, you make it look beautiful.*

*Me [Banksy]: Thanks.*

*Old man: We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall, go home (Parry, 2005: n.p.).*

While many critics have written approvingly of Banksy's choice to embed art commenting on the Palestinian and Israeli divide directly at the physical site of that divide, this quote represents another (not unusual) opinion of any attempt to beautify the separation wall. That Banksy himself shares the exchange may act as an acknowledgement of the complicated responses surrounding his politicized imagery and to give space to dissenting as well as supporting voices. Nonetheless, the Palestinian man's derision deterred neither Banksy nor the many international street artists who came to Palestine in the wake of Banksy's visit to make their own mark on the separation wall. Of course, Palestinian street artists also became active contributors to the growing body

of work on the separation wall and the relatively blank canvas that Banksy encountered in 2005 has today become a palimpsest of overlapping and sometimes competing images commenting on the conflict and the restrictions placed on Palestinian citizens.

Banksy returned to Palestine on two other occasions after his 2005 visit. In 2007 he and several international and Palestinian artists created a number of new paintings in Bethlehem. In addition to the new street images, Banksy also organized "Santa's Ghetto," a temporary exhibition and sale of works by various artists that was set up in Bethlehem's Manger Square, next to the Church of the Nativity. The Santa's Ghetto concept was six years old by that time; since 2001 Banksy had created a pop-up gallery with the same name in London each December to sell affordably priced works by himself and other urban artists (Brown, 2006). By 2007 the annual shop had become so well known and popular that its removal to Bethlehem received substantial attention from the UK and international press. The Bethlehem iteration of Santa's Ghetto is a clear example of the Banksy effect in operation. Banksy's own participation in the event did much to encourage attention and the success of the operation relied on the fact that the artist had already capitalized on his growing notoriety and popular appeal to set up a successful model in London. Importantly, the shops in both London and Bethlehem included not only works by Banksy himself but featured a number of street and urban artists who were able to find an audience and market for their work through Banksy's name. If you wanted to buy one of the works on display in Bethlehem you had to do so by placing a bid on site at the pop-up gallery. As one of the participating artists, Peter Kennard, wrote:

*This was important, because Bethlehem is being starved of its tourist trade as visitors are bussed in to see the Church of the Nativity and bussed out an hour later back to Israel. All proceeds from the sale, which exceeded \$1m, went to local charities (Kennard, 2008).*

While the Banksy effect, along with the political commitment of Banksy and a group of like-minded artists, appears to have generated a positive result in the case of the Santa's Ghetto project, his work in Palestine subsequently became embroiled in a controversy that arguably also had its roots

in the Banksy effect. In August 2011 the Keszler Gallery opened an exhibition in Southampton, New York that included two Banksy works that had been removed from their original Bethlehem locations. The works, referred to as Stop & Search and Wet Dog, had been created during the 2007 visit and removed from their original locations shortly thereafter. The two works were never authenticated by Pest Control, the PR arm of the Banksy operation, and the gallery came under substantial scrutiny for how they were acquired and criticism for putting them up for sale (Corbett, 2011).. Writing in the British newspaper The Independent, Guy Adams summarizes the controversy:

*The debate highlights the problems that emerge when the soaring contemporary art market turns what some view as petty vandalism into a prized commodity. These days, Banksy pieces can fetch as much as \$1.9m, meaning that his public works are often thought to be worth more than the building they originally graced (Adams, 2011: n.p.).*

In short, the Keszler show highlights a negative outcome of the Banksy effect.

Banksy's most recent project in the Palestinian territories was undertaken in Gaza in early 2015 when he apparently snuck into the city through a network of tunnels in order to paint four new works, including a text only piece that reads, "If we wash our hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless we side with the powerful – we don't remain neutral." While his intention to draw attention to the plight of the citizens of Gaza appears genuine, Banksy retains a sense of irony and humor with comments such as this (referring to a painting of a kitten playing with a ball of rusted wire): "I wanted to highlight the destruction in Gaza by posting photos on my website – but on the internet people only look at pictures of kittens" (Street Art News, 2015: n.p.). Only a few months after the works were created, however, the greed and opportunism that sometimes follow Banksy's work appear to have surfaced in Gaza. In April 2015 various news outlets began to report that the family on whose abandoned house Banksy had painted the work Bomb Damage had sold the piece (painted on a wooden door) to a local artist for just \$175, not recognizing the work's potential value. The painting was subsequently confiscated by the police and is being held while the ownership dispute is adjudicated. The incident may reveal both a positive and negative

aspect of the Banksy effect. The artist who purchased the work, Belal Khaled, has himself adopted a street art style in his altered photographs of rockets detonating in Gaza. When confronted about the purchase of the recent work, he claimed that his motivation was "to protect the Banksy mural from neglect and that he had always wanted to own something from the renowned street artist" (RT, 2015: n.p.rt.com).. However, the incident also highlights the fact that as prices for Banksy's work have risen people have used questionable means to acquire them.

### 3. Revolutionary Street Art in Egypt

The street art produced in Egypt, particularly in Cairo, during the 25 January 2011 revolution has received more attention than that produced in other countries during the Arab Spring. This may be due in part to the fact that Egypt was relatively accessible to outsiders shortly after the revolution and to the fact that a number of Egyptian scholars and journalists have themselves chosen to comment on the street art produced at that time. The attention may also stem from the novelty of the street art that emerged during the revolution. As Mia Gröndahl writes in her book *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt*, prior to the revolution "[t]he Egyptian youth didn't write without permission on public surfaces. The wide spectrum of street art—individual tags, stencils, pieces, and murals—that usually belong to an urban landscape, had escaped Cairo" (Gröndahl, 2012: ix-x). Gröndahl goes on to quote Egyptian street artist El Teneen on his experience of the opening up of public spaces to visual forms of comment and protest:

*It was the first day we actually took control of the [Tahrir] Square. There was a large portrait of Mubarak, and Ganzeer sprayed 'Down with Mubarak' on it, something I had always wanted to do; and after that we continued to put our mark on the walls around the Square. The protesters hadn't seen graffiti before; the idea of writing something in a public space was new, but they liked it (Gröndahl, 2012: 43).*

Lina Khatib of Stanford University notes that the use of street art in the 25 January revolution was particularly significant in that it "made visual expression a key tool in political protest, catalysing the use of street art in other revolutions that followed in the Arab world, such as in Libya and Syria" (Khatib, 2013: 299). The images have various subjects and refer-

ences: political leaders, martyrs of the revolution, democracy and voting, gender rights and more.

The street art that emerged in Cairo at this time can be categorized by style as well as by theme or subject. Styles included simple stenciled works that functioned almost as logos, free-form paintings that often occupied large surfaces, and text-only works that looked more like the traditional tags found in urban locations throughout the world. Some artists and protestors also adopted the poster and sticker technique popularized in the United States by Shepard Fairey; these artists sometimes directly copied Fairey's designs, including his signature "Obey Giant" character. Some of the street art referenced historical Egyptian motifs, such as King Tutankhamen and ancient tomb paintings, while other images seemed to go in their own direction; these often expansive and complex murals are reminiscent in scope, if not skill, of works created by Mexican muralists of the mid-20th century. Aesthetically speaking not all of the street art is very good, but it is important as a record of the struggle for political change as well as the development of an artistic genre that had previously been virtually absent from the visual culture of contemporary Egypt.

It is in the stenciled works that we see the greatest impact of Banksy's style on the street art of the revolution. These works sometimes directly referenced Banksy stencils – his image of a young girl frisking a soldier that first appeared in Bethlehem was copied on a Cairo wall, for example – and other times relied for their effect on the same kind of simple but immediately identifiable and critical message that Banksy's smaller stencils carry. This visual similarity merits investigation as an example of the international reach of Banksy's work, particularly in the MENA region. Two particularly compelling examples of the effective use of stencils are the recurrent motif of the blue bra found in street art throughout Cairo and the image of Nefertiti wearing a gas mask which is found in stencils as well as on stickers and posters.

As the journalist Soraya Morayef has noted, a number of street artists in Cairo, both men and women, used their work to focus specifically on issues of women's rights and to condemn violence against women in Egyptian society (Morayef, 2013a). One of the iconic images of such violence that emerged from the Tahrir Square protests is that of the so-called "girl in the blue bra," the female protestor whose beat-

ing at hands of military police was documented in video and still photographs. The blue bra rapidly emerged as a symbol for street artists, a kind of shorthand reminder of the brutality of the regime and particularly of its mistreatment of women. In some works, the blue bra itself was simply stenciled as a stand-alone signifier of both a particular act of violence and of the systemic inequities faced by Egyptian women. In others, artists used a free-hand style to represent the act of the beating as captured in the most widely circulated photos of the event. The stenciled works may be seen as more in keeping with Banksy's style in terms of both their creative presentation and their reliance on a single motif to make a point. The freehand works, however, are embedded in an alternative style of Egyptian revolutionary graffiti, one that exhibits a more narrative quality.

Another image that seems to employ strategies from contemporary international street art – Banksy's stenciling combined with Shepard Fairey's use of stickers – while also connecting with Egypt's history, is that of Nefertiti with a gas mask by the graffiti artist Zeft. This is a seemingly simple subject that carries complex layers of meaning. The figure can be read as a symbol of Egyptian women's resilience and commitment to the revolution, standing alongside the men of Tahrir and facing the same dangers, such as tear gas attacks. The graffiti image was then transferred to a poster format by the artist, who added symbolic splatters of blood to symbolize the assaults against women in Tahrir and beyond (Morayef, 2013b). The image is thus complicated by adding imagery alluding to women as victims of male aggression and sexual assault and was appropriated by activists for women's rights in Egypt and beyond.

The commercial aspect of the Banksy effect on Egyptian street artists is not yet entirely clear. Some writers on the topic, such as Morayef, see a burgeoning interest in this art following the revolution:

*Cairo's street artists today are being sought after by art galleries, cultural institutes, international art exhibitions, advertising companies and many more. Some have gone on to create art for magazine covers, others have exhibited in Europe, and others have seen their stencils recreated on t-shirts that are worn by the young revolutionary segment of Egyptian society (Morayef, 2012: n.p.).*

Indeed, Ganzeer, the artist who sprayed “Down with Mubarak” across the dictator’s Tahrir Square portrait in 2011, had a solo exhibition at New York’s Leila Heller Gallery in early 2015. The urban art gallery Station 16 in Montreal has featured a number of Egyptian street artists and recently released a limited edition print by the artist Shehab.

The print, titled *No to Stripping the People*, features the iconic stenciled image of the blue bra. It is worth noting, however, that works by these artists are not commanding high prices. Shehab’s print, for example, retails for approximately \$120. Critic Giacomo Crescenzi sees a more complicated picture surrounding Egyptian street art, one in which the attention paid to the genre may be obscuring other contemporary art activity in Egypt and giving a false sense that the art market there is healthy and growing. Additionally, Crescenzi questions whether the perceived exposure given to Egyptian street art is really as substantial as suggested. Writing on the website [egyptianstreets.com](http://egyptianstreets.com), Crescenzi draws attention to the problems faced by contemporary artists in Egypt:

*Despite the fact that street art is only one small component of the art scene in Egypt, this newly found media interest may have had a positive impact if the public interest was translated into concrete opportunities for street artists as representative of a new era for art in Egypt, but very little has been done to this date...If so much media attention is reserved to Egyptian street artists why is no one compelled enough to bring their work where art is being made today? And what about the majority of Egyptian artists who have nothing to do with street art? Why haven't they been empowered as representatives of a culture that needs to soften its politicization?* (Crescenzi, 2013: n.p.)

Crescenzi goes on to address the absence in 2013 of Egyptian artists at two significant events in the region: Art Dubai and the Sharjah Biennial (at least one Egyptian artist is represented in the 2015 edition of the Biennial).

Crescenzi raises legitimate and important questions about the true impact of the attention received by the street art of the revolution, questions which suggest that the potentially positive aspects of the Banksy effect on Egyptian street and Egyptian contemporary art more generally have not been fully realized.

#### 4. The Djerbahood Project

The small Tunisian island of Djerba is a quiet place known for its beach resorts. Although a number of tourists pass through those resorts each year few travel to any other destinations on the island, limiting the benefit that tourist spending brings to the community. That may be changing in the small town of Er-Riadh, previously known primarily for housing the oldest synagogue in Africa, but now receiving international attention as an open-air street art museum featuring works by 150 international artists. The project, called Djerbahood, was initiated by Mehdi Ben Cheikh, and completed over the summer of 2014. The French-Tunisian Ben Cheikh is the founder of Galerie Itinerrance in Paris, a gallery focused on street art. According to Ben Cheikh, “[w]hat I would like to do is talk about the Arab world in a different way, a positive way” and the Djerbahood project helps to foster that conversation (Stone and Bubriski, 2015: n.p.). The artists whose work is included in the project range from the well-known to emerging talent. Some, such as the French-Tunisian artist El Seed, whose calligraphic works have been shown throughout the Middle East, are familiar with the region; others came from locations as diverse as Europe, Central and South America, and the United States and adapted their usual styles to fit the architecture and character of Er-Riadh. Several residents of the village have cited the opportunity to meet and interact with artists from such diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds as a benefit of the project (Hossenally, 2014).

The Banksy effect is at play in the Djerbahood project in several ways, beginning with the existence of a gallery devoted to street art that could summon the financial resources and permissions needed to launch such a large-scale art project.

The scope of the Djerbahood project is closer to that of an international art fair or biennial than to a typical exhibition of street art. Certainly the particular economic and cultural conditions of Er-Riadh contributed to the success of the project but Ben Cheikh also needed to obtain financial support from private sources for the project, which does not generate any revenue from merchandising and which financially supported the participation of at least some of the artists. To do this requires an acceptance of street art as a legitimate means of artistic expression – not as graffiti or vandalism – that arguably did not exist before Banksy primed the international art community for the support of this genre. The support given

by El Seed to the project was also of great importance. In terms of critical acclaim and exhibition opportunities, the Tunisian street artist might be considered the Banksy of the MENA region. His work has been commissioned in his native Tunisia as well as in the United Arab Emirates and beyond the Middle East in locations as diverse as Brazil and Paris. He credits the events of the 2011 Jasmine revolution in Tunisia with opening the space for him, and other street artists, to create work in that country despite the fact that graffiti is still officially considered a crime by the government.

Despite the positive hype surrounding the Djerbahood project, a critical question remains. Writer Christine Petre has posed this on the website [middleeasteye.net](http://middleeasteye.net): "Can an open-air graffiti museum lure tourists back to Tunisia?" (Petre, 2015: n.p.) While many articles commenting on the project either claim or suggest that it will, actual statistics are hard to come by. The March 2015 attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis, in which 17 tourists were killed, is likely to further dampen an already shaky tourist trade. Meanwhile, Djerbahood remains a young project with great potential; ideally, the organizer, the artists and the village will be able to capitalize on a continuing international interest in street art to eventually reap the rewards of this substantial effort.

## Conclusion

In the past several years, the practice of street art in the MENA region has emerged as an important social, political and cultural tool, and as a means of public expression. While the diverse circumstances faced by countries in this region make it impossible to identify a single style or function for street art in the Middle East and North Africa, there are themes that are shared across countries. In addition to the use of street art for political expression both during and after the 2011 revolutions, the genre has evolved for many cities and countries into a means to generate and sustain a tourist economy and to establish a presence in the international art community. The Banksy effect, with its positive and negative connotations, is one useful construct through which to view and analyze the development of a street art culture in the MENA region. The rising acceptance and popularity of street art will likely result in increased attention and some commercial success for artists in a region that is still often marginalized in the global art market. However, the attention

of that market comes with its own risks and one of those is the possible co-opting of street art for commercial and touristic purposes, representing a departure from its intensely political and emotional origins. While the future for street art in the MENA region remains unclear in some respects, there is no doubt that the work of established and emerging street artists will form a critical element of contemporary art in the region for years to come.

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# Mapping Creativity through Socially Engaged Visual Arts, Art Projects in two Amadora Neighborhoods

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## Abstract

*This article addresses the notion of the socially engaged visual arts. The first part explores some fundamental historical periods to help understand this practice, from the Greek concept of *teknè* until the present time. Then, the idea of a machine for the emancipation of creativity is explained, as well as its operation in two neighborhoods of the Portuguese city of Amadora. Finally, as a result of this immaterial machine, the focus turns to a detailed description of an archive of audiovisual elements that represents each activity undertaken within the project.*

**Keywords:** Social Art, Multimedia, Machine, Creativity, Emancipation, Participation, Atlas.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of the present article is to characterize the socially engaged visual arts and to present two multimedia art projects developed under the title The Creativity Emancipation Atlas. As a starting point, with the objective of focusing on the hybridization between the arts, Bulat Galejev's system for the differentiation between them is analyzed. Departing from this theory, some historical key moments are taken into consideration, surrounding the ideas of art and technology, such as: the Greek and Roman notions of *teknè* and *ars*, respectively; the modern art period of the first decades of the 20th century; the visual art movements with social and political interests that occurred in the second half of the 20th century; and the art works of collaboration and participation that were developed in the 1990s until the present.

The second part of the text is concerned with the presentation of two visual art projects, which have the intention of being both symbolic and fruitful to society. The works have occurred in a couple of neighborhoods of Amadora, a satellite city of Lisbon. The main purpose of these projects was the development of participatory activities in the field of multimedia, the consequent improvement of the social cohesion

between the neighborhood residents, the cultural revitalization of the place where they live, and their involvement with skills that stimulate creativity.

In addition, this paper also focuses on some important postulates that this art investigation is based upon. First of all, the idea of a machine that has the objective of producing a set of audiovisual elements mounted in the form of an atlas. In turn, the machine has two main aspects informing its functionality, which are the particular notions of creativity and emancipation.

## 2. A social axis between the arts

The existence and development of various artistic media have always resulted in an attempt to frame them within a proper discipline, being the identification of territories and the interactions between these, as the main concern for both artists and theorists. The first in-depth study on these issues was developed in the 18th century by the German philosopher Gotthold Lessing. This resulted in the work entitled *Laokoön* (1766), a book that explores the specificities of painting and poetry, as well as the interaction between them. Subsequently, the North American art historian Thomas Munro, in

the book *The Arts and Their Interrelations* (1949), continued the same line of investigation and differentiation among the different artistic practices. The French philosopher Étienne Souriau, with the work *La Correspondance des Arts* (1947), is another relevant example concerning the same thought. The purpose of these investigations, in addition to the classification of the arts, was the establishment of a hierarchy between them. In the course of the 20th century, with the emergence of new technologies and experimental forms of artistic expression, reflection on these issues has become more urgent (Galeyev, 1991).

According to Galeyev, the perception of the dynamics of interaction between the arts led to the notion that it is an open system where it is possible to include new practices, in particular, new artistic expressions of a hybrid nature, or the result of using new techniques and technologies. In this context, Galeyev developed a method for the organization of these new artistic forms, the purpose of which is to check the unity of the evolutionary system of the arts, to

understand its inherent specificities, and to determine how to place everything within the artistic culture. The “system of art forms” initially proposed by Galeyev takes as its starting point the opposition principle between regressive and progressive dynamics defended by Sergei Eisenstein. It is a graphic diagram that identifies and locates, within a precise structure, a set of significant characteristics of the “creative individual”, which is an entity that serves as a reference measure between the axis of figurative/ expressive arts and the axis of audiovisual arts (Galeyev, 1991).

Over the structure created by Galeyev, where two axes are designed to represent all forms of art, it is suggested that a new parameter be included - a social axis, towards the characterization of the various artistic expressions according to their involvement with issues concerning society. This is intended to demonstrate that the social dimension is a quality that exists in most of the arts and a shaft with two poles - the more self-centered arts, focusing further on the medium itself; and the more social arts, pointing out a more functional and prolific interrelation with society (Figure 1.).

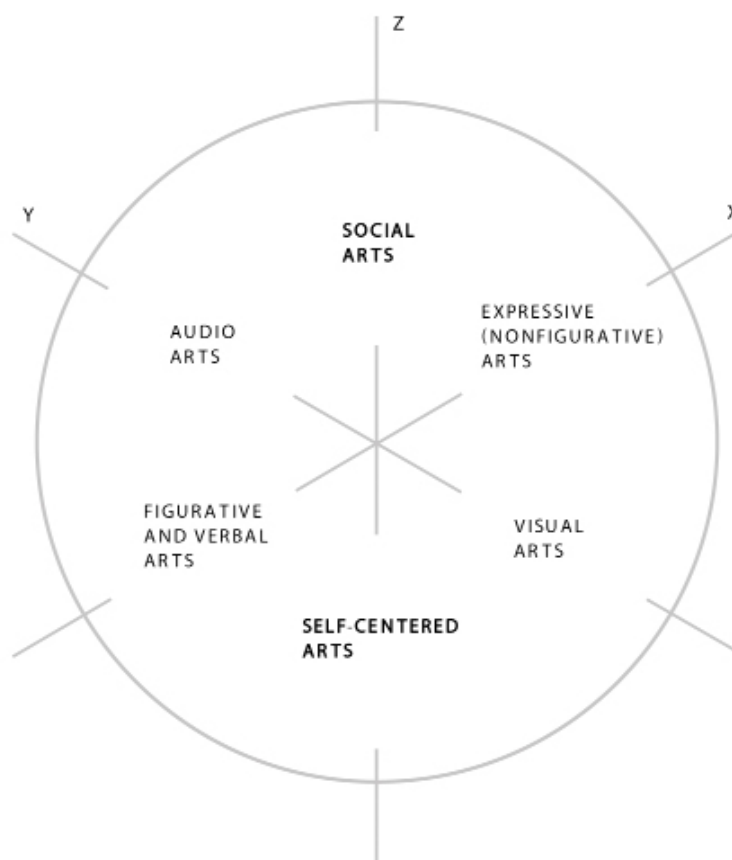


Figure 1. Galejev's organization of all the art forms and the inclusion of a social axis (Gorgel Pinto, 2015).



### 3. The intersection of art and technology I

Other relevant aspects to focus on are the notions of art and technology, in particular how they have evolved since they emerged, up to the present. The separation between these concepts began in the 17th century. Before this period the distinction between artists and craftsmen had not yet been made. It was a time where all of the various forms of artistic expression were referred to as techniques (Ingold, 2001).

The period where art and technique were together in the same concept dates back to ancient Greece, in which the word *teknè* signified both domains. This Greek concept was related to an empirical knowledge that by being systematized and taught had this designation. In other words, it was an organization of knowledge to give meaning to the notion of craft and all of the arts, as well as medicine and politics (Rawsthorn, 2013).

Both in the Greek and the Roman period, the terms *teknè* and *ars* were used with the same intent to describe a single profession and its activities concerning the production of objects. Although the society of this epoch did not distinguish between these concepts, the people knew how to make use of these professionals and distinguish utility value from aesthetic quality. During this time, regardless of the means used to produce a certain object, a greater relevance was given to the skill of the producer performer (Burford, 1972).

The idea of craft became reduced to its technical particularities and to the mechanical implementation of predefined operations. This way of thinking remained in society at the same time that art has evolved with the notion of being a superior kind of intelligence in which “the creative exercise of the imagination” occurs. As a consequence of these facts, near the end of the 18th century, there was a break between the work of art and the artefact that promoted the connotation of some creative practices of a useful nature with the field of technology, regardless of the expressive and sensitive characteristics of these kinds of hybrid practices (Coleman, 1988; Ingold, 2001).

### 4. The intersection of art and technology II

At the beginning of the 20th century there was also a transformation of the meaning of technology, which came to be understood as a logic with guidelines and specifications to enhance the production apparatus. Previously, technology was understood as a set of concepts and theories informing

productive practices and after a while it became reduced to a mere plan for the determination of production. Nowadays, the analysis of the concept of technology is excluded from most scientific studies that focus on existent techniques, centering almost restrictively on how the worker develops their own practice and implements specific techniques. Thus, the worker became a simple operator “bound to the mechanical implementation of an objective system of productive forces, according to principles of functioning that remain indifferent to particular human aptitudes and sensibilities” (Ingold, 2001: 18).

Although art and technology are related concepts and have a common origin, the idea of the separation between them arose in modern society, which developed the notion that technology is reduced to operation, while art is restricted to meaning. This rupture, which took the concept of technology far away from the territories of culture and society, contributed to a non-holistic understanding of the fact (Ingold, 2001). During the same period, in the field of aesthetics, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin created a number of theories relating the fields of art, technology and politics. This author, referring to Surrealism, argued that this movement developed a revolutionary action that was related to technological issues but with the objective of putting these means to serve the interests of the most disadvantaged social classes (Benjamin, 1996-2003).

In the 1930s, Benjamin’s fundamental concern was based on the question of the constitution of the artwork and its relation to the constraints of production. The influence of the photographic reproduction of the artwork promoted an easier understanding of these kinds of objects and a new interaction between these and the technological means. Until then the works of art were valued by their uniqueness, authenticity and originality, all of which contributed to the creation of an “aura” over these objects. Benjamin refers to this notion arguing that it is a materialistic view, protecting the economic value of the work and the social class of its owner. In this context, the art object can be misunderstood, if it is taken from the social and political context. In this sense, taking into account the new technological possibilities, the artwork conquered its autonomy and transformed its social function, no longer based on its ritual role and assuming a political character (Benjamin, 1996-2003).

## 5. Hybrid visual arts with social focus

With regard to art's social and political skills, it is pertinent to understand the critical sensitivity developed around some of society's problems. It is a kind of expression placed between art and politics that has the main objective of stimulating the viewer's awareness of the existence of "domination mechanisms" and transforming the viewer into a conscious actor with regard to the evolution of the world. In this context, it is possible to consider that aesthetics contains a political character, while politics has its own aesthetic. The aesthetics that are provided with a political character led art through two possible ways: the annulment of art because of its dilution with life, and the art practices that are developed with political objectives, knowing that politics is not their true domain. In this sense, this kind of critical art, located between art and "non-art" forms, has developed an activity based on the relationship between different speeches, thus being capable of a double communication (Rancière, 2006).

This interaction between heterogeneous elements largely manifested itself in the context of Dadaist collages, denouncing the claim of art to be part of life; later in Pop Art, pointing the aspiration of art to isolation; recently, using the same language of shock, other heterogeneous collages intended to expose the various layers of information existent in the artwork. The combination of divergent aspects denoted the juxtaposition of different critics, revealing, on the one hand, the capacity of art for self-criticism and, on the other hand, the criticism of the state system and the dominance of the market (Rancière, 2006).

Russian Constructivism introduced this critical sense in the first decades of the 20th century, which united the arts, design and architecture for the benefit of society. In the second half of the 20th century it reappeared associated with the ecological culture and the eclectic practice of the Situationist International group. Later there were a series of avant-garde architecture groups such as Archigram, Ant Farm, Archizoom and Superstudio. Recently, social art and design has become a transdisciplinary field with specific objectives regarding the development of society.

## 6. Participation as a medium in the social visual arts

The experimental art practices undertaken in a participatory way are characterized by the random use of various media.

During the 1990s, a set of artists, such as Maurizio Cattelan, Pierre Huyghe and Rirkrit Tiravanija, developed several interaction possibilities with participants in artistic events. However, these kinds of projects, covered by the concept of "relational aesthetics," had as their main purpose presentation in the museum space. Later this art language assumed a different character, where participation was incorporated into the artistic process as a means of social and political action. In the course of this transformation, and depending on the degree of autonomy shared with participants, the artist moved away from the production model, which was restricted to his action, and assumed a shared authorship within which the participants also have a creative key role (Bishop, 2012).

The viewer's participation in the artistic event is a fact that depends on their engagement with the art object. The observation of a piece is already a form of participation, which in turn may vary in intensity and eventually grow to a kind of authorship. However, analyzing the phenomenon in more detail, it is possible to distinguish between various types of participation: in "nominal participation" the observer passively contemplates and reflects on the work; in "directed participation" the observer contributes to the realization of the piece; in "creative participation" the observer produces certain contents provided by the author; and in "collaborative participation" the observer is, with the artist, co-responsible for the preparation and systematization of the contents of the artistic project. In "collaborative participation" and "creative participation" the inherent details are usually developed over long periods of time; while in "directed participation" and "nominal participation", the works are done in encounters especially for that purpose (Helguera, 2011).

The fundamental objective of contemporary social art practices that are developed within certain communities is to emancipate the people involved, so that they feel encouraged by the experience of participating in the development of the art work, and eventually to produce the same effect on other people for the benefit of the social body. This emancipatory action is usually comparable with the social activity of other agents operating with a conventional approach in relation to the visual arts, making it often difficult to distinguish between what belongs and what does not belong to the domain of aesthetics. The difference lies in the objectives to be achieved, since the social action is restricted to the exercise

of certain ideals such as justice and social inclusion, while the artistic practices, in this context, in addition to the reflection and exploration of the same ethical values, are mainly intended to highlight the existent social problematic in order to promote a reflection on them in society (Helguera, 2011).

**7. The creativity emancipation atlas**

The aim of The Creativity Emancipation Atlas is the representation of two Amadora neighborhoods, in a city nearby Lisbon, namely the Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damia and the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. The idea is to produce one atlas for each group of participatory activities, which were based on learning activities in the fields of computer literacy, for adults, and photography, for youngsters. The atlas, as a medium for the representation of social action, is a way of mapping the functionality of an immaterial machine, which was specifically designed to stimulate the

creativity of the resident participants. The main objective was to contribute to the cultural development of the participants so that they lose any preconceived sense of inferiority when comparing themselves with other elements of society. It was expected that these two projects developed within the respective neighborhoods would have a positive cascade effect that could, somehow, contribute to the qualification of the place.

Concerning the machine and its goals, it is relevant to emphasize the need of a kind of software for its functioning. This program is informed by a philosophy of education around the idea of emancipation and an aesthetics ideology as a powerful way to develop the intersubjectivity related to social awareness. Lastly, The Creativity Emancipation Atlas aims to contribute to a reflection about more socially sustainable ways to reduce the problematic situations that usually occur in degraded and deprived urban areas.

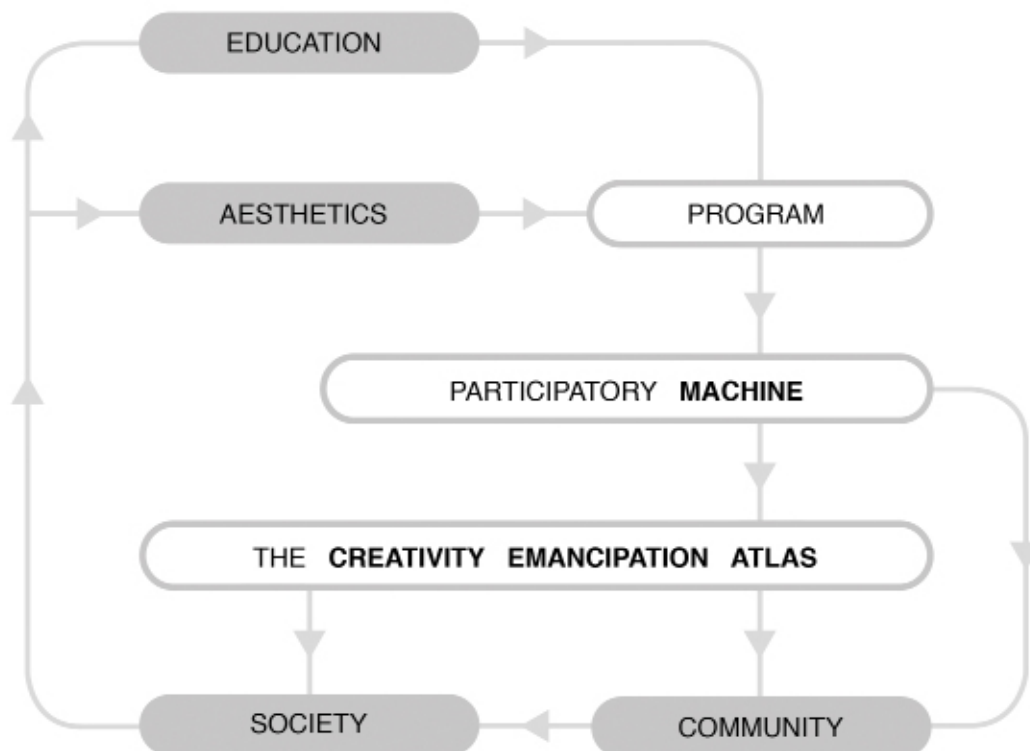


Figure 2. Machine operational scheme (Gorgel Pinto, 2015).

### 7.1. Machine

The designed machine for the creativity emancipation of the participants (Figure 2.) is based on the assumption that there is no division between human beings and their creations. In other words, the notion that the objects invented by the human being, due to technological skills, produce considerable transformations such as those that are related to its functionality, as well as to other changes that are perceived in thought and contribute to the evolution of intelligence. This is a philosophy focused on a particular notion of technique, which considers the transformation of something as well as how it affects human thought. In this sense, the technique is also a way of thinking in which the human being reflects on their actions. It is a machine logic that implies a set of “artificial automatism”, in which there is no need of a physical object to put everything into practice. For the artistic actions in question, what justifies the need of a specific machine are the various functionalities surrounding the participants (Vengeon, 2009).

### 7.2. Creativity

One of the most important elements in the present projects is the use of a universal notion of creativity, which is a quality that is common to everyone in humanity and also a value of exchange with more logic than capital and profit, whose effects have dominated the development of the recent culture. Creativity is one of the most powerful characteristics in every human with creative sensitivity, being a quality that is not limited to the genial character or to a rare aptitude of an individual in particular.

In this sense, according to the principle that creativity is a common good in society and not an exclusive quality of artists, it is possible to engage participants in the social project activities and stimulate them for their own advantage. Consequently, through their emancipation, it is expected that they can later repeat this kind of behavior and actively contribute to the development of a freer society. In other words, this expanded idea of art points out that every human being has creative capacities that can be boosted in order to stimulate their involvement in the transformation of their own urban community and so on, in a resonance effect, throughout society (Beuys apud Gomes, 2010).

### 7.3. Emancipation

In the course of the participatory actions in question, a learning process based on guessing is used. In this context, the artist also functions as a teacher guiding each participant every time they lose focus in learning. Thus, the interaction between the artist and the participants in the learning activities is not the submission of one intelligence to another, but a relationship that enhances the connection among wills. In this sense, the most important element lies in the initial ideas and orientations of the artist followed by the free exploration of the participants, who collaborate with each other and indicate other sources of knowledge, such as the stories and interests that are shared by everyone during the actions.

The residents’ will, and the artist’s’ capacity to emancipate, are the most sensitive issues in the development of participatory activities. This art project follows the Universal Education principle, in which there is the objective of learning anything and, consequently, relating it to other knowledge “according to the principle that all men have equal intelligence.” Following this philosophy, the pre-existence of social disadvantage is a reality that must not be boosted in the learning process. In contrast, it is important to enhance the equality among participants at the outset, and not as the main purpose. Therefore, the artist must be sensitive to the knowledge that the participants already have and both must be placed in the same zone of understanding from which they can start sharing information (Rancière, 2002).

### 7.4. Atlas

The participatory actions that occurred during the projects are represented through a set of audiovisual fragments that, in turn, constitute an archive of the developed work. Each neighborhood project has its own archive, which is a form of showing everything done to the non participant residents, to the urban community, as well as to other individuals interested in this kind of transdisciplinary work.

However, the archive in question, instead of being a dense set of all the audiovisual elements representing the art project, is a kind of atlas that has a selection of the most significant reproductions, as well as some drifts somehow connected to it. This way of mapping the participatory practice within the neighborhoods is organized by a group of guidance panels, which have the objective of revealing clues,

where gaps between images can guide the viewer to other thoughts (Didi-Huberman, 2010).

The concept of the atlas is a kind of visual knowledge based on the interaction between the aesthetic and epistemic thinking models, in which “the sensitive dimension, the diverse and the lagoon-like nature” that is present on every image is enhanced. Another atlas relevant feature is the eventual inclusion of dissonant notes, which allow the counteracting or expanding of what is pre-established by intelligence. In this sense, departing from a particular intelligible analysis, this type of media promotes the diversification of thoughts and freedom of reasoning, launching alternative perspectives for the viewer with the objective of questioning the “self-proclaimed certainties of science convinced of its truths, as the art is convinced of its criteria” (Didi-Huberman, 2013: 11-13). Another important possibility given by this kind of archive is the appearance of “interstitial” spaces of exploitation between the selected images, which emphasize the continuous possibility of formulating new ideas. Contrary to this perspective are the prevailing “ideals of uniqueness, specificity,

purity and integral knowledge.” The role of imagination for the atlas’ understanding should also be noted, since this is the characteristic that allows a “transversal knowledge” and other possibilities of understanding every time the viewer is confronted with an assembly of unlikely elements (Didi-Huberman, 2013).

### 8. Art projects in two Amadora neighborhoods

The socially engaged art projects were developed in two disadvantaged urban neighborhoods from the city of Amadora, named Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia (Figure 3.) and Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. The city is close to Lisbon and has other urban areas with the same characteristics, such as illegal construction and the lack of support from the Government and City Hall to fix situations like poverty, low education levels, and crime, among others. The population of the places in question is mostly comprised of immigrants, and their descendants, from Portuguese-speaking African countries.



Figure 3. Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia, Video frame (Gorgel Pinto 2015).





Figure 4. Local association, Video frame (Gorgel Pinto 2015).

The projects were developed more or less at the same time in both neighborhoods. One of the relevant aspects is the definition of a methodology to be repeated in similar future projects. Before all else, the social intervention must be proposed to a local association (Figure 4) that has the residents' confidence and, in collaboration, the artist and the association, begin planning many details. During the first meetings, it was essential to understand the cultural needs of the local residents, and also to think about useful activities that could develop the creative energy of the residents. It is fundamental to emphasize that the actions to be established – namely the work with multimedia and audiovisuals – should be based on the artist's main practice – . Both projects had a first phase dedicated to computer literacy with adults (Figure 5.), and a second phase about photography for youngsters (Figure 6.). This second part has, to date, only applied in the Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia, but will also occur, in the near future, in the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. After the outline of the project activities, the initiatives were spread in the neighborhoods, which had no problem in receiving people with interest in participating. It is also important to mention the collaboration, (in both projects), of multimedia students from a local high school.

The artistic practice developed within the projects had two different moments. The first one is based on a participatory

learning system, which was implemented with the objective of later constituting a symbolic art piece that stimulates thought about the place and the community where the actions took place. During the participatory activities of the first part, both the people, who acquired new knowledge, as well as the artist and the students who collaborated, exchanged information and gave some ideas for the actions in the course. Despite the participatory activities being previously prepared by the artist in collaboration with the association's responsible persons, it was crucial to be open to the residents' ideas and to follow their own interests. At the same time, DSLR cameras were always present at the learning activities, with the aim to capture some video footage, photographs and audio recordings, to later integrate into the projects' archive.

The second moment, a work that is still ongoing, is concerned with the observation of the archive and the subsequent selection of audiovisual fragments that may represent the socially engaged art project. In this sense, the archive is being designed, for each set of participatory activities and its respective neighborhood, as a multimedia atlas with the title *The Creativity Emancipation Atlas* (Figure 7.). The goal of the atlas is to confront the viewer and refer them to a deeper meaning in a space of multiple referents.



Figure 5. Computer lessons for adults, Video frame (Gorgel Pinto 2015).



Figure 6. Pinhole photography workshop for youngsters, Video frame (Gorgel Pinto 2015).



The multimedia atlas will be permanently placed online, in a specific web design composition, as well as temporarily in a physical location. The objectives of this double presentation are to: (1) recognize and praise the culture of the citizens who live in these disadvantaged neighborhoods, (2) confront the rest of the urban community about the common interest concerning the development of these kinds of places and

the government entities about their responsibility in solving problems such as social and cultural inclusion and, finally, (3) question the visual arts about its awareness of this and other social problematics. The Creativity Emancipation Atlas online and place exhibition to the local community, and to the public in general, is scheduled for the year 2016.

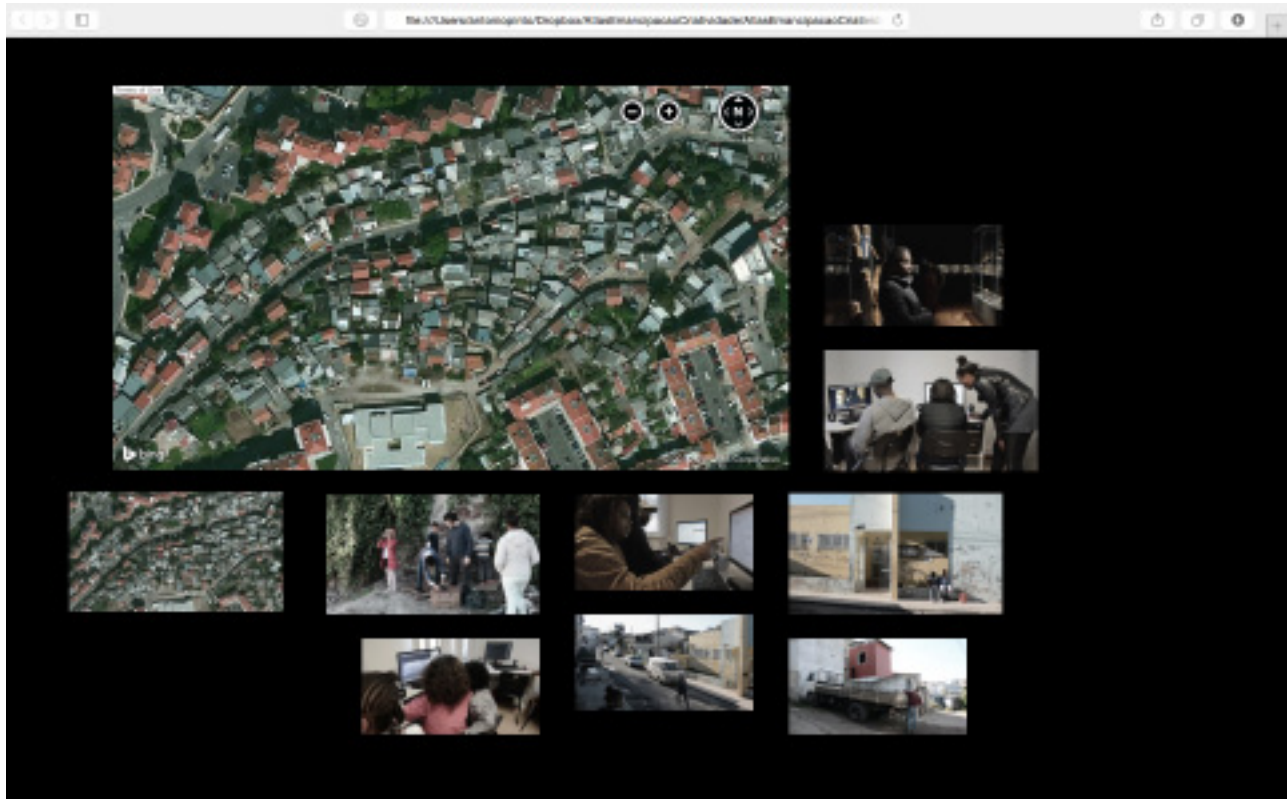


Figure 7. The Creativity Emancipation Atlas, Website screenshot (Gorgel Pinto 2015).

## 9. Conclusion

The aim of this socially engaged visual art research project was to emphasize the potential of the arts, and the visual arts in particular, for a different and useful perception of the various issues that interest the common good. This is an ethical and aesthetic kind of knowledge with the objective of promoting a better understanding of the social problematic. What is in question is the development of a kind of sensory intelligence that has a powerful effect in the dissemination of intersubjectivity and that can contribute to the evolution of a more sustainable society.

Over the history of the visual arts and technology, there have been some significant periods in which the interaction with society to produce something practical and more useful was a clear objective. Thus, it is important to understand these periods of time in detail in order to develop other synergies between society and creativity.

The art practice under development in both neighborhoods was informed by various dimensions of knowledge with the objective of being simultaneously symbolic and prolific to society. This is the reason that it was designed as an immaterial machine for the emancipation of creativity, with the aim of helping to improve the socio-cultural community context.



As foreseen, the valorization of the existing creative energy in these kinds of disadvantaged urban areas is a form of reducing the gap between local residents and other citizens that belong to higher social classes and have better education levels.

After the definition of the methodology of this socially sensitive multimedia visual art practice, the aims for the near future are to complete all of the works associated with the two projects described in this paper, as well as continuing this theoretical and practical research through the development of related projects with other urban neighborhoods around Lisbon.

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## From squares to walls: contemporary murals of OSGEMEOS, Nunca and Bicicleta sem Freio in Lisbon

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### Abstract

*Recently there has been a resurgence of murals in several European and American cities. Street art visual practices have privileged murals as one of the most suitable formats to address public spaces. Despite the increasing recognition and significance of murals for the visual culture of these cities, this contemporary urban art practice has not received much attention from recent literature. This paper provides a literature review on contemporary murals, giving an account of their popularity, their relation to location-specificity and global presence, as well as the means of dissemination of such art expression. The study will then focus on a set of case studies in Lisbon, regarding the paradigmatic shift from sculpture commissioning to mural commissioning within Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationships. The works of OSGEMEOS, Bicicleta sem Freio and Nunca will be discussed in this framework, questioning what the contributions of contemporary mural works might be for the public spaces of the city.*

**Keywords:** Contemporary murals, Street Art, Lisbon, Portuguese-Brazilian Culture Relationships.

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary commissioned murals are the most mediated public art works in the urban spaces. Not only because they are embedded in the arena of visibility that the walls have come to represent for humanity but also because they fit the social digital network environment and its ways of dissemination. By foot or by car, murals are available to be photographed quickly and posted and shared. In the last century murals had been elected as the means to portray historical processes by Mexican muralists. The making of the work and the medium employed constituted a metaphor for the integration of the individual into the collective, if one considers the technique of fresco as a kind of populist medium. Today, mural interventions have been reborn as a popular art expression in the streets although not in respect to the symbolic evocation of a collective labor technique. Perhaps the flat format of the work as well as the performativity of the making are particularly suited for photo documentation and digital network publishing.

Pop art and surrealist characters as well as abstract supre-

matist shapes meet and challenge the visual languages of public art interventions that have furnished the cities in the past centuries. In this paper, contemporary murals will be discussed from the viewpoint of art representation in the city by considering other forms of public art. Within particular contexts such as the Portuguese – Brazilian cultural relationships from which this study is driven, the shift from commissions of statues and monuments to street mural interventions will be traced. Although a quick search on the internet shows empirical evidence of mural interventions being a popular expression among street art festivals and other public art events in our cities, the contemporary manifestation of this public art form is less studied in the research field of art. For this, a literature review will contextualize the need to research further contemporary mural art expression due to the enormous quantity of examples available in the cities and the little research covering this art field. The argument will move further to case studies regarding the public art produced among Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationships with examples that illustrate the paradigmatic shift from the phenomenon of statues and monuments placed in squares to mural interventions on the walls of buildings. The paper

will characterized the works of OSGEMEOS, Bicicleta sem Freio e Nunca in Lisbon, while confronting the global art expression of the authors and the works conceived, especially in Lisbon. In this analysis, the features that characterize visually their global art works and its adaptation to the specificity of place will be further discussed, while questioning these contributions for the public spaces of the city.

## 2. Mural art as street art expression

In recent years murals have become a substantial part of the urban art displayed in the cities. A quick view in a search engine after typing “arte urbana” or street art will show a great diversity of non-commissioned and commissioned mural works. In such murals, artists intervene on the street wall, creating site-specific works, often appropriating architectural elements as urban ready-mades or interacting intertextually with the meanings of places (Elias et al., 2013; Elias et al., 2014), and picture the city as a living palimpsest of images shared locally and globally in social digital networks. Murals are suitable formats to photograph, publish and share in the social networks of the world global village (Irvin, 2012). Public art festivals, mural art city programs, and gallery commissions have also increased the practice of this art expression. Whether officially or unofficially, mural art has been requested in the past century in quite different manners according to different political and cultural contexts (Elias, 2007; Elias and Leonor, 2012; Loeb, 2013). City squares, once elected as the space to place public artworks, are now dismissed in favour of walls or spaces left over after planning. In terms of commissioned works there is a shift from commemorative statues, busts, or abstract sculpture to large-scale murals. Particularly in the context of Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relations, whose subjects, means of representation, and discourses have become detached from the commemorative rituals raised in the nineteenth century and are now tuned with this mediatized street art expression (Elias, et al., 2014). During the 20th century most of the production of public art within this cultural relationship was dominated by statues and commemorative monuments which related the historical past of the two countries (Elias et al., 2013). In the 21st century, street murals became part of this cultural relationship while displaying visual languages rooted in the graffiti and street art practices of a young and globalized generation of artists (Elias, et al., 2015).

In the scope of urban art, concepts of graffiti and street art are not consensual. Street art is considered a derivation of graffiti, offering a more flexible attitude towards institutionalization (Lewisohn, 2007) whereas writers continue their illegal graffiti on-street practice (Campos, 2009) along with commissioned works. Although contemporary murals are considered as the main outcome of graffiti and street art works (Irvine, 2012), there is a lack of a deeper analysis of this particular art expression in the city. Urban sociology and cultural geography studies address graffiti and street art practices in their cultural dynamics (Ferro, 2011; Silva, 2011; Anderson, 2009). Gender studies are concerned with issues of practices of gender and relation to power (Machado, 2013). In visual anthropology (Campos, 2010) and art history (Simões, 2013) mural paintings are referred as masterpieces that show the artistic skills of the writers. There is also a common agreement to relate the, “the world is our canvas” attitude of graffiti and street art with the expanded field of the artistic practice in the seventies (Simões, 2013; Irvin, 2012). Nevertheless, there is much to relate with these contemporary approaches. Surrealist statuophobia and involuntary sculptures, or futurist manifestos and De Stijl’s statements on colour in buildings can also be discussed in this context as they already experienced the city as a working site (Careri, 2003; Marques, 2012). Authors discuss street art in relation to suprematism, constructivism and abstraction (Lewisohn, 2011), and the land art definitions of site and non-site (Irvin, 2012), mentioning as well pop art collage, appropriation, remix, and repetition. However, murals are not the subject of research in terms of process work, meaning, composition, or site-specificity. These can be the main dimensions of murals to analyse further. In *Walls of Empowerment*, Latorre (2008) wrote that the concept of ‘mural environment’ refers to the site-specificity that is originated with the location and physical space that encompasses and is included by the mural. Known (2004) drew attention to the definition of site specificity, or the actuality of the site, by describing the development of the relationship between the work and the site. The notion of site specificity has been discussed in the frame of street art but not focused particularly in the features that generally compose mural intervention (Kuttner, 2014). Although the question of what makes a mural site-specific has been answered street mural art is not the main focus of such research (Abdelrahman, 2012).

### 3. Mural interventions in Lisbon: cases of the Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationship

In the scope of public art, the Portuguese–Brazilian cultural relationship has been traditionally represented in public spaces by statues and monuments. In Portugal these works were mostly framed by the political and ideological context of the Portuguese dictatorship political system that ruled almost half century (1933-1974). After this period, Portuguese democracy (1974-) has been open to different ways of commissioning art works, which impacted as well on the kind of public art proposals created within this cultural framework. Other public art practices began to emerge with the opening of new media, variety of subjects, and visual languages as well as the involvement of new promoters. Such is the case of the works of OSGEMEOS, Viñals, Bicicleta sem Freio and Nunca, who were invited by Underdog Gallery to display public art works in Lisbon. At the same time, Lisbon is now a welcome city for such public art works, with the help of the City Council Urban Art Gallery. These works place the Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationship in a global and mediatized context thus calling for a culture of fruition of the city visibly distinct from the previous orders that framed this cultural connection. The murals of OSGEMEOS, Bicicleta sem Freio and Nunca in Lisbon address issues of mediatisation, authorship, and site-specificity that may characterize some aspects of contemporary murals.

#### 3.1 - OSGEMEOS in a business boulevard of Lisbon

This recent intervention by OSGEMEOS was promoted by the CRONO Project and by the Council of Lisbon (CML). A partnership between the Azafama Citadina Association, the CRONO project and the Gallery of Urban Art of the Council was developed during the years 2010 and 2011 with the objective of welcoming projects of graffiti and street art in various public spaces in the city. The former idea was first launched by a group of people aiming to facilitate the presence of an art available to all in the city space. Considering the public and private institutions and associations involved in the spaces of the city this kind of commission shows us an example of a social process running in a Down / Up basis. The proposal was designed and then the Lisbon Council joined the initiative to officially support the intervention (Neves and Lopes, 2015).

The Brazilian artists OSGEMEOS are famous because of their murals conveying political and social messages featured by the yellow characters that label many of their works in various cities of the world. In Lisbon, OSGEMEOS have developed their work without predetermination of any assignment or subject. In this intervention, they drew the usual yellow character with a scarf hiding the face. There is a particular detail in the label of the scarf. In the place of a brand there is the saying “I love vandalism” (Fig. 1.).



Fig. 1. Works of OSGEMEOS and Blu at the Fontes Pereira de Melo Avenue. Source: Elias, Marques and Leonor (2014)



Blu's mural, painted on the same street, marks the same political statement by showing us an opulent character with a crown in which the ornaments are the signs of the multinational oil companies. These works use the intertextuality between the local and the global, which goes beyond the recognition of characters that BLU or OSGEMEOS usually create in metropolitan centers around the world. These works are located in one of the busiest boulevards that connect two centers of business, trade and financial areas - Marquês do Pombal and Saldanha Squares. Because of this placement, the works have a site-specific context since they address the issues of capitalism and globalization (Fig. 4.). Indeed, after these interventions, the fruition of Saldanha / Marques de Pombal junction cannot be dissociated from these new aesthetic proposals of urban art. The presence of these interventions does not go unnoticed and the works contribute to a new understanding of this space, which was formerly aesthetically depressed. These street murals with a monumental scale question the local and global economic

powers represented in the cities and thus publicly challenge the citizen through their social and political message (Elias et al., 2014).

### 3.2 Lisbon is a girl

The bicileta sem Freio were invited by Underdogs to create a public art work in Lisbon in 2012. The intervention by Bicicleta sem Freio in Cais do Sodré takes the motto of the sea and features a waving composition structured by marine elements tiding a girl, the main character of the mural.

The group of designers and illustrators, Douglas, Victor and Renato, is known by their dynamic, 70s inspired colored compositions, with drawings of girls as the characters of their public art works. Besides the 60s/70s imaginary of commercial hand-painted illustrations of products such as tanning oil, the girls of comics, and Lichtenstein's female characters that may come to the mind of the viewer, these girls recall somehow Botticelli's Venus or the representation



Fig. 2. Bicicleta sem freio, LA. Source: Artslant. [Online]  
Available at: <http://www.artslant.com/9/articles/show/40000> [Accessed 16/11/2015].

of Medusa by Caravaggio and Bernini. The Bicicleta sem Freio murals are fully dynamic by the way the long hair and other features are shaped and spread in several directions (Fig. 2.), thus replicating intrinsically similar lines that organize the features of the composition.

In the case of the mural of Lisbon (Fig. 3.), it is impossible to deny the relationship between the preexistence of the place and the new features of the mural as they re-frame moments of the history of the city and symbolic images associated with Lisbon's imaginary. The words Clube Naval de Lisboa report the usage of the building and become meaningful for the mural work as they integrate the composition and link some of its features. The words also help to give a direction to read the image composition. Clube Naval is read along the two first walls of the building performing the revolving sea waves that envelop the body. Lisboa is read on the top of the face of the girl as if her name was the name of the city. In this sense, it is possible to nominate a portrait of Lisbon as a marine figure staging dramatic stories of boat journeys in the sea.

### 3.3. Nunca Pedro Álvares Cabral

Nunca is a Brazilian artist who has been creating characters that are meaningful for the places where murals are displayed. In Brazil, the artist confronts the country with its original past, drawing characters that resemble the native Brazilians (Fig. 4.). In Berlin, Nunca has created a punk character. Near London he has conceived a character that symbolizes the Queen, as a bee, recalling issues related to colonialism and the power of the nation. As for the intervention in Lisbon, he was invited by the Underdogs Gallery to create a large street art mural. The work is directly related with the historical past of the two countries since Nunca portrayed Pedro Álvares Cabral (Fig. 5.), the Portuguese navigator who arrived at Brazil in 1500 and opened the colonization of the land to the Portuguese and other Europeans.

Nunca draws the character in order to offer a critical view about the actuality of the country. Pedro Álvares Cabral holds a can and is begging for money, a pose that is represented by the few euro coins about to land inside the can. Nunca uses a mix of techniques that are symbolically laden. It is possible to recognize the graffiti roots of the artist through the spray can contour applied to trace the



Fig. 4. Mural of Nunca, Brazil. Source: Wikimedia [Online] Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mural\\_of\\_Nunca,\\_Brazil,\\_%C5%81%C3%B3d%C5%BA\\_Narutowicza\\_Kili%C5%84skiego\\_Streets\\_corner.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mural_of_Nunca,_Brazil,_%C5%81%C3%B3d%C5%BA_Narutowicza_Kili%C5%84skiego_Streets_corner.jpg) [Accessed 16/11/2015].

features on the wall. The use of the plain shade to contrast with the background may also have similarities with the pop art techniques. But it is the black lines crossed over the plain shapes that most characterizes his work and attaches the features to the history of image production, when engraving and drawing were the predominant media for producing images. The application of crossed lines to create tonal and shading effects is called crosshatching. A specialty popular in the fifteenth century, this is an artistic technique to create the illusion of depth by varying the quantity, thickness, and spacing of the lines (Petherbridge, 2010). Regarding the native past that Nunca carries in his work, crosshatching can be seen as the appropriation of techniques of dominant cultures of other times.





Figs. 5, 6, 7. The work of Nunca in Lisbon. Plain shape and crosshatching technique.  
 Source: Photos by André Santos & José Vicente | DPC | CML 2014 [Online] Available at:  
<http://www.stick2target.com/pedro-alvares-cabral-by-nunca> [Accessed 16/11/2015].

#### 4. Conclusion

Ultimately, the public art produced in the frame of Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationships follows the phenomenon of the global resurgence of mural works. This cultural relation was once represented in public spaces by the exchange of state commissioned busts, statues, and monuments. Contemporary murals inhabit the walls and building facades of cities worldwide. Partly, the wide recognition of the authorship of street murals depends on the mediatization of these works, the systematic employment of visual elements by the artist, and their ways of engagement with the sites where murals are displayed. This means to consider the documentation and publishing of the public performance

of the artist while making the mural, as well as the sets of techniques, sort of compositions, characters, and response to the urban surroundings that the artist might take as their label. The recognition of the author through the work displayed may be rooted in graffiti's attitude towards the urban territory, namely the identification of marks created by individuals in public space. But the use of certain media, sets of techniques, characters, or color charts are also markers that quickly reveal who is the artist, whether the viewer is walking in the city, browsing on the internet or watching a commercial.

The systematic employment of such markers may also recall some aspects of authorship in modern art, namely the fascination with the identification of an author's gesture, medium,

and techniques. What makes the site-specific notion in these global authorial marks of murals interesting is how the artist responds to the urban features, culture, and pre-existences of the place. In Lisbon, the works of OSGEMEOS, *Bicicleta sem Freio*, and *Nunca*, while positioning the Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relationship in a global and mediated arena, show different approaches to site-specific engagement with the city. Os Gemeos' yellow character calls attention to Lisbon's capitalist and globalized boulevard, whereas *Nunca*, using his crosshatching technique, updates the image of the historical character Pedro Álvares Cabral. *Bicicleta sem Freio* takes advantage of the surrounding physical environment and the urban features by proposing a composition that addresses the subject of the sea, thus recalling some of the history and symbolism of the city.

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## OSGEMEOS and the Institutionalization of Street Art: Cyclical Narratives

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### Abstract

*When discussing the paradox of displacing the street art aesthetic, i.e. commissioning street artists to create work for art galleries, museums, or public murals, one inevitably has to address issues of co-opting, appropriation, and the institutionalization of a movement that began as a countercultural form of expression. Two commissioned pieces by OSGEMEOS are used as a case study. This paper parses through the discourse surrounding their production and removal. The goal therein is to break down these narratives and gain insight into the mechanisms at work and the inherent contradictions in the process of institutionalizing street art.*

**Keywords:** Street Art, Institutionalization, Co-opting, Appropriation, Grafite

### 1. Introduction

The Brazilian artist duo OSGEMEOS, twin brothers Otávio and Gustavo Pandolfo, have gained international recognition over the years and have almost become the poster-children for grafite in São Paulo.<sup>1</sup> They began as young grafiteiros on the streets of São Paulo, building their reputation both in the graffiti scene and in the street art world for their innovative style and fantastical characters.<sup>2</sup> Since 2002, they have been taking on commissions for large-scale public works and have been involved in gallery and museum exhibitions with increasing frequency. Nevertheless, they continue to produce uncommissioned and unauthorized works of street art and graffiti, both in their hometown of São Paulo and internationally. For this reason, their work represents an intriguing case study for the intersection between the “art world” and the street art scene, or the problematic relationship between the dominant culture and a movement that began as a countercultural force.

The countercultural aspects of street art and graffiti in their various manifestations have been well-documented by various cultural theorists. In the 2014 Lisbon Street Art & Urban Creativity conference proceedings, a detailed

analysis of the complex relationship between street artists in São Paulo – OSGEMEOS in particular – and their urban environment is presented (Kuttner, 2014). Even in works that neither explicitly present political messages nor at first glance seem to embody the violence of the “anti-discourse” proposed by Jean Baudrillard (1993) OSGEMEOS as well as other grafiteiros in São Paulo dialogue with and counteract the hegemony of the modernist urban environment, restoring human interaction to spaces that had been rendered voids or non-places due to urban development plans strategically implemented to reinforce social divisions and exert control. In the case of OSGEMEOS, they expose the absurdity of these structures by repopulating the voids with fantastical and colorful characters, forming an alternate society and thus breaking down the wall’s functionality as a boundary to interaction. The work of OSGEMEOS and their peers in São Paulo functions in this way when applied on a large scale throughout an urban environment, spontaneously and without authorization or official sanctioning of any kind. Yet, what happens when the dominant culture ceases resistance to such a movement, begins to officially sanction it, or moreover, even begins to commission it? At what point is this aspect of the movement’s significance lost? There is a

certain paradox involved in the promotion and dissemination of a countercultural movement, in that it inherently involves subverting, trivializing, or co-opting it to some extent.

Surely, when street artists are commissioned or given official authorization to complete a work on a public or private exterior wall, even if this work is thematically and stylistically identical to the works that are created illegally, the result must be categorized as a work of public art. However, it may still make reference to the countercultural movement iconographically or stylistically, or to put it simply: it may embody a street art aesthetic. This has also been referred to as an “urban aesthetic” by Peter Bengtsen (2014: 76) who differentiates between street art, which is primarily unsanctioned in nature, and urban art, which describes “commercial art products made by artists who are somehow associated with the street art world” (Bengtsen, 2014: 66). Bengtsen (2014: 76-77) also cites Patrick Nguyen who (somewhat disparagingly) provides a list of “urban art cliché subject matters” or tropes as the primary method of visually connecting urban art to street art. Despite the presence of such visual connections, the way that a street artist’s commissioned work interacts with the public space is fundamentally altered due to the circumstances surrounding that work’s creation, and its removal as well. In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Nicholas Riggle (2010: 243) argues that street artworks “are largely disconnected from the artworld because their significance hinges on their being outside of that world.” However, more importantly for this article, when a street artist produces a commissioned work in a public context, that work becomes a part of public discourse and the subject of reflection, criticism, and debate. So regardless of whether or not one still considers the results of these works to be “street art” – and surely most people concerned with the semantics of the issue would not – these kinds of authorized projects still tend to generate a form of coded discourse in the public sphere that can be used to gain insight into the relationship between street art and the dominant culture.

Having previously dealt with the issues of spatial theory regarding OSGEMEOS and street art in São Paulo, at this point the discussion will turn to the complex problems concerning both the suppression and authorization thereof, as well as the process of being co-opted or institutionalized. Although a variety of sources will be used for statements on OSGEMEOS’ work (newspaper articles, catalogue texts, and interviews), the critical analysis of these statements will be primarily based on a text that was published before

OSGEMEOS established their reputation in São Paulo and internationally: “Resistance and appropriation in Brazil: How the media and ‘official culture’ institutionalized São Paulo’s Grafite” by Neil E. Schlecht (1995). Schlecht provides an excellent overview of the problematic relationships between the dominant culture and counterculture in the early stages of São Paulo’s grafite scene, at a time when the young Pandolfo twins were just beginning as local grafiteiros. These relationships will be reexamined here in light of two major works by OSGEMEOS: the piece they created for the 2008 exhibition titled “Street Art” at the Tate Modern, London, as well as one other “giant” painted in the Anhangabaú district of São Paulo in 2009. The current paper parses through the written documentation of the public discourse surrounding the commissioning, production, and removal of these two works by OSGEMEOS. The goal therein is to break down these narratives and gain insight into the mechanisms at work and the inherent contradictions in the process of institutionalizing street art. Furthermore, by comparing the discourse surrounding these works to the research conducted by Schlecht (1995) this paper challenges the popular narrative that the development of the discourse surrounding street art’s acceptance can be described as a finite linear progression – gradually emerging from a status of rejection to one of complete assimilation by the dominant culture – and proposes that the process could more accurately be described as a cyclical dynamic. So although this phenomenon may not be limited to one particular region, São Paulo and the work of OSGEMEOS are used here as a case study. Further studies of similar processes in other areas, such as New York City, Lisbon, or Berlin may potentially help create a more all-encompassing theory.

## 2. A Tale of Two Giants

In the summer of 2008, the Tate Modern commissioned several street artists to add a distinctly urban aesthetic to the northern façade of this art institution, resulting in 6 large-scale works by Blu, Faile, JR; Sixeart, Nunca, and OSGEMEOS. This exhibition, which may have seemed somewhat unconventional for the Tate, was simply titled “Street Art.” The starting point for this analysis is the figure painted by OSGEMEOS for this exhibition (Fig. 1: <http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/projetos/street-art-2/#!/2893>). The piece was not officially titled, but is part of OSGEMEOS’ series of Gigantes (Giants).



The Giant is a standing yellow figure depicted directly from the front, with a height of approximately 25 meters. The male figure is nude with the exception of his shoes, a small pouch on his chest, and an orange head covering, which masks his mouth and hair. The two-dimensional figure is painted with outlines in a style similar to cartoons and comic books, with light shading giving the torso a sense of fullness, despite being supported on two emaciated legs. Dangling from his right hand, the viewer sees a bundle of CCTV security cameras hanging from their cables. One imagines that this hooded giant was a human rights vigilante who marauded the city of London, snatching up any surveillance equipment he came across. The specific physical characteristics of this comic-like figure, the yellow skin, almond eyes, bony limbs, are hallmarks of OSGEMEOS' oeuvre, having placed numerous such figures on walls, bridges, and other urban structures in their hometown of São Paulo, Brazil, as well as countless other cities worldwide.

Although this work was commissioned by the Tate – that is, it was not a late-night “bomb” or illicit act of graffiti or street art – there are several distinctive features that allude to the street art aesthetic, such as the figure's orange head-wrap and the bundle of seized surveillance cameras. The head covering is a clear reference to the act of creating illegal works in public spaces, where graffiti and street artists cover their faces with some sort of cloth for two purposes, both to protect themselves from excessive inhalation of fumes and to conceal their identity. This kind of head covering is a motif that repeats itself frequently throughout various works by OSGEMEOS and other street artists. Ironically however, with this work having been sanctioned and commissioned, the transgressive act of unsolicited street intervention appears only in symbolic form.

The bundle of security cameras is an equally direct reference to the transgressive, but this is not a recurring theme in their work. Surveillance poses a threat to all street artists who create unsanctioned work, thus making it a popular thematic element and one of the tropes listed by Nguyen (in Bengsten, 2014) yet OSGEMEOS' use of this motif here is decidedly site-specific, referencing the massive amount of CCTV cameras in the streets of London. Although the image suggests a rebellion against the panopticism of London, the edge of its critique is arguably blunted by the fact that it is located within a sanctioned space and therefore does not represent a direct intervention. This commissioned work is connected to the street art aesthetic due to the presence

of symbolic references to rebellion, anonymity, and illegality, but does not embody several of the transformative aspects that characterize OSGEMEOS' street interventions in the urban environment of São Paulo.

At the end of August 2008, after the six massive murals had transformed the Tate façade for their allotted three months, they were removed as scheduled. This event happened with relatively little fanfare or protest. After all, it had been clear from the outset that these were meant to be temporary works and would not become the permanent face of the Tate. The museum cooperated with a firm called “Graffiti-Busters” not only for the removal of the pieces, but also during the planning phase to ensure that the works would not cause permanent damage to the brickwork. The façade was treated with a protective layer shortly before the commissioned works were executed. This allowed the pieces to be removed using hot, high-pressure cleaning systems without harming the landmark's façade. According to the company website: “All six areas of ‘Street-Art’ were removed successfully over a three week period to the client's complete satisfaction.” (Graffiti-Busters, 2013: n.p.) There was little confusion or doubt about the motivations for the removal, although it may have almost seemed like an inside joke that a group called the “graffiti-busters” came to the site with their banner on the crane during the cleaning process.

In November 2009, slightly over a year after the Tate “Street Art” exhibition had concluded, OSGEMEOS were given the authorization to paint another massive mural on the side of a building in São Paulo, in the area called “Vale do Anhangabaú” adjacent to a park and directly in the central business district. The work (Fig. 2: [http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos\\_gigante.htm](http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos_gigante.htm)), commissioned by the Sesc, a government-sponsored organization for culture, recreation, and education, was yet another figure in OSGEMEOS' series of giants, and on a similar scale to the Tate piece, spanning the entire façade of an eight-story building.<sup>3</sup> The figure, depicted frontally, has a form and pose comparable to the giant on the Tate, but in contrast to the previous work, this giant is clothed, barefoot, and his face exposed. He is wearing tight-fitting brown pants and a multicolored shirt buttoned all the way up. The face is painted in OSGEMEOS' trademark yellow with thin outlines and light shading. The figure's wide mouth implies a very slight but awkwardly subdued smile. The work was titled *O Estrangeiro* (the Foreigner) and could thus be interpreted as a celebration of one of the most diverse cities in Latin America. Furthermore, it was created in

conjunction with a cultural festival to commemorate the Ano da França no Brasil (Year of France in Brazil). Prior to the creation of this figure, OSGEMEOS had created a similar mural of the same character in Heerlen, Holland for the “Cultura Nova” festival. There they also collaborated with a French artist collective named *Plasticiens Volants* to create a giant inflatable puppet that was 20 meters high (Nobile, 2012). The figure at Anhangabaú was based on the previous works in Heerlen, and the puppet was then resurrected for an appearance at a ceremony in the Vale do Anhangabaú upon the completion of the project. This event drew three thousand visitors according to local newspapers:

At the end of 2009, OSGEMEOS had a positive demonstration of their popularity in the central district. Nearly three thousand people walked through the Vale do Anhangabaú to see the open-air show “The Foreigner,” which gave shape to the characters created by them, such as the giant 20-meter puppet that gave the event its name (Canto, 2009: 5)<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the giant on the Tate, there are not many elements that symbolically link this work to the underground world of illegal street interventions or to rebellion against a system. Only in one detail can a slight allusion to this be found; the buttons in the figure’s shirt are round faces, and the uppermost of these is depicted as wearing a ski mask. Aside from that, *O Estrangeiro* appears somewhat quirky and awkward but non-threatening. OSGEMEOS have been known to incorporate a variety of fantastic elements in their work that are (to varying degrees) inspired by or in direct reference to the folkloric traditions of northeastern Brazil, e.g. the “*bumba-meu-boi*” folkdance (Manco, 2005: 66). However, this particular image of *O Estrangeiro* (in contrast to the previous version in Holland) has very few aspects that fit that description. The somewhat rustic garments allude to the traditional fashion of that region, and there is also a small figure (about the size of the giant’s nose) dancing on the giant’s head and wearing a large seahorse-like creature on his back. The blank expression on the face of *O Estrangeiro* shows that he is either incognizant of or unperturbed by the smaller creatures. Whether or not these particular figures directly reference a Brazilian folkloric tale, these are the kinds of fantastical creatures in OSGEMEOS’ work that are often cited as being inspired by that tradition.

When the painting of *O Estrangeiro* was commissioned, it was agreed upon that it would stay up for 30 days

before being removed. However, due to the popularity of the piece, it was allowed to stay until the demolition of the building, which had been planned to take place within a year.

‘The Foreigner,’ was supposed to remain on the wall for 30 days. Local officials said that due to the wide acceptance of the work, the Commission for the Protection of the Urban Landscape would authorize the figure to gain a permanent dwelling in that space until the demolition of the property (Moura, 2012: C8).<sup>5</sup>

The property was in fact demolished in early 2012, a bit later than expected, but not without controversy. Prior to the structure’s demolition, *O Estrangeiro* was “buffed” or painted over with gray paint, leaving only the shadow of the figure in its wake. No explanation was given for this action, but local reports indicate that the artists knew of the city’s plans. Gustavo Pandolfo is quoted as saying, “we were aware that he was going to be painted over now.” (Moura, 2012: C8)<sup>6</sup> Initial reactions from journalists, bloggers, and residents who were not informed about the city’s plans or the temporary nature of the piece ranged from neutrality to sarcastic outrage:

The ‘disappearance’ of the grafite generated polemics yesterday in social networks. ‘One more example of the lack of support for culture in Brazil’, wrote one internet user. Another ironically stated ‘It’s only not allowed to erase the corruption.’ (Moura, 2012: C8)<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that this perceived government suppression was mostly based on erroneous assumptions, the dialogue surrounding the placement and the removal of the giant shows a large degree of tolerance among the general public for the street art aesthetic, at least in its sanctioned and sponsored form as public art created by street artists, or a “street art mural.” At the same time, OSGEMEOS continue to put up illegal works that gather less public attention and may not survive as long as *O Estrangeiro*. Although *O Estrangeiro* may superficially appear similar to those works in terms of the style and kind of figures portrayed, it lacks some of the critical anti-establishment tone that is more frequently seen in their non-commissioned pieces. However, *O Estrangeiro* may indeed retain some of the functionality of their other street work in São Paulo in that the colorful giant similarly combats the monochromatic hegemony of the concrete landscape in that district and helps counteract a certain degree of loss of social interaction in public space,



especially taking into account the public gathering that took place upon its completion.

Nevertheless, this work cannot be seen as a forceful reappropriation of public space, and furthermore, one could argue that O Estrangeiro lacks any capacity to function in the same way as their illegal works simply due to the fact that it was permitted and commissioned by a government institution. Despite the stylistic and thematic connections to their grafite, O Estrangeiro should technically be labeled “public art.” However, because this distinction is not always made by journalists, politicians, and laymen commenting on the issue, especially in Brazil where the grafite is generally used to denote both sanctioned and unsanctioned works, public discourse surrounding sanctioned works by street artists can also be used to gauge public opinion on street art in general.<sup>8</sup> Despite the widespread conflation of terms, a subtle but important distinction is provided by the legal system, even though it may have been unintentional; according to the local São Paulo newspaper, *Estado de S. Paulo*, the law “2007 Lei no 14.451” established the anti-pichação (anti-tagging) program in the municipality.<sup>9</sup> This program, however, “excludes grafite which has been executed on private property or municipal property that has been authorized by the owner or a qualified municipal authority.” Brandalise, 2009)<sup>10</sup> The terminology is interesting, as the word “grafite” is still used in the law to refer to authorized works. The law, on the other hand, is not referred to as an “anti-grafite” law in this article, but “anti-pichação” instead, thus revealing the conflicting associations with these two forms of painting on walls. Nevertheless, the law that the article refers to is in fact part of a larger project called *Cidade Limpa*, or “clean city,” enacted in 2007 to combat visual pollution in the urban environment, which also banned large-scale billboard advertisements in the city. A later article in the *Folha de S. Paulo* commented on the consequences for grafiteiros who are willing to work in approved spaces:

Sides of São Paulo buildings that used to harbor giant advertisements before the “Clean City Law” of 2007 are now being freed up by the city government for grafiteiros and muralists (Correa, 2011: C1).<sup>11</sup>

The editorial briefly summarizes developments in public and official opinion regarding grafite over the last five years, leading up to the decision to permit works sponsored by the property owners. To paraphrase, the article refers to the city’s “ambiguous” relationship with grafite, but sug-

gests that major changes have occurred in the last five years (2006-2011), with the term no longer being associated with vandalism mainly due to the international reception of Brazilian street art in the U.S.A. and Europe, such as the Tate Modern exhibition. The article concludes:

In any case, by institutionalizing urban art, turning it into something commercial and official, the city without billboards and poster ads could turn into the world capital of grafite.<sup>12</sup>

Some authors have indicated that the international reception of OSGEMEOS specifically, as well as their involvement in public affairs in São Paulo, have been key factors in the recent change in public opinion and official policies on grafite. In the 2012 catalogue for the OSGEMEOS exhibition at the Boston ICA, Pedro Alonzo states:

OSGEMEOS [met] with the mayor of São Paulo, Gilberto Kassab, in 2008. His ‘Clean City’ campaign enacted policies prohibiting most forms of outdoor advertisements and aggressively enforced the cleaning of graffiti. OSGEMEOS tried to convince Kassab to stop the ‘buffing’ of walls and instead preserve the city’s extensive urban art. Although no official policies were enacted, São Paulo’s city government is increasingly tolerant of graffiti, reserving cleaning activities for specific neighborhoods. This presents an ironic situation given that São Paulo outlawed public advertisements, which in turn expanded space for more graffiti (Alonzo, 2012: 114).<sup>13</sup>

Alonzo echoes two important sentiments expressed in the *Folha de S. Paulo*. Firstly, he too observes that the *Cidade Limpa* Act of 2007 is in fact beneficial to grafiteiros in that the ban on billboards frees up more space for street artists and graffiti writers. Secondly, Alonzo also sees the increasing tolerance of grafite as being a recent development, in part driven by OSGEMEOS. As evidence, Alonzo cites the fact that OSGEMEOS, following their meeting with the mayor, were permitted to recreate a large-scale piece that had been buffed. Furthermore, still others have suggested that it is no coincidence this meeting took place in the same year that OSGEMEOS and Nunca adorned the Tate’s façade. According to an article in *ARTnews* by Carolina Miranda, the recognition given to the grafiteiros by this international institution helped shape public policy in São Paulo:

The Tate Modern exhibition has had the side effect of getting at least one city to reconsider how it deals with graffiti. [...]

But just as Tate Modern was honoring the brothers' work, the city of São Paulo was busy whitewashing their murals in the interest of eliminating "visual pollution." One official told a reporter that the cleanup was an embarrassment to the city: "You have the English pampering our graffiti art, and we're not giving it the least bit of value?" São Paulo will now establish a registry of street art to be preserved (Miranda, 2008).<sup>14</sup>

These policies are a stark contrast to the arbitrary nature of punishing grafiteiros as described by OSGEMEOS eight years earlier in an interview for the graffiti magazine *Art Crimes*: "There is an anti-graffiti law, and they punish writers with jail time. But really each police officer makes his own law. It depends on the place where you paint. Maybe nothing happens, or maybe you will go to jail" (OSGEMEOS, 2000).

Looking at these statements made within the same time span that OSGEMEOS were developing from local grafiteiros to international street artists, it is tempting to see the trend as a gradual linear development towards public acceptance and government tolerance of grafite in their city of birth. Furthermore, as OSGEMEOS have become the poster-children for São Paulo grafite in recent years, it would seem reasonable to assume that they were the main driving force behind this development. However, there is one major issue with this narrative: this process had already taken place almost two decades earlier. In an article published in the 1995 edition of *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, titled "Resistance and appropriation in Brazil: How the media and 'official culture' institutionalized São Paulo's Grafite," Neil Schlecht expounds on the evolving relationship between grafiteiros, public opinion, the media, and government policy during the 1980s and early 1990s in São Paulo. The content of his analysis not only helps to illustrate the grafite zeitgeist in which OSGEMEOS grew up and began their career, but it also provides a foundation for the evaluation of later statements concerning OSGEMEOS' role in influencing public opinion and policy in the following decades. By comparing Schlecht's (1995) analysis to the discourse surrounding OSGEMEOS' work, the assumption of a linear development in the relationship between street art and dominant culture reveals itself to be a false narrative. Instead, that relationship, as well as the discourse that constructs it, appears to take on a cyclical form.

### 3. Revisiting Neil E. Schlecht and the Institutionalization of

#### São Paulo Grafite

According to Schlecht, upon his arrival in 1988, grafite in São Paulo had undergone a significant transformational process through its interaction with elements of dominant culture.

From an obscure, marginal—not to mention unauthorized and illegal—expression, it had evolved into an issue of considerable social and political significance, elevating selected grafite artists [grafiteiros] to media celebrities and government spokespersons, while others struggled to maintain their marginal/outsider status and the essence of their expression (Schlecht, 1995: 37).

Although Schlecht's research was conducted when OSGEMEOS were just beginning to create grafite in São Paulo, long before their first sanctioned works, his statements can still be used to place later comments about the reception of their work (and grafite in general) in context. It seems that OSGEMEOS' predecessors had already been through similar interactions with the media and government. They too struggled with the dichotomy between gaining celebrity and retaining "marginal/outsider status" or what may more commonly be referred to as street cred. The grafite landscape in São Paulo at that time was fundamentally similar to later years in terms of its diversity of form: figurative images, patterns, tags, and words were interwoven in the same spaces, sometimes even by the same artists. Several of the biggest names in São Paulo grafite in the 80's, such as Alex Vallauri, Maurício Villaça, and Rui Amaral also worked with comic-like figures or fantastic imagery, as OSGEMEOS and their contemporaries continue to do today.

Schlecht (1995) continues by describing the result of the interactions with dominant culture as a form of co-opting. Thus, according to Schlecht, the process of institutionalization and appropriation had already reached its ultimate conclusion before OSGEMEOS even began to work internationally, implying a linear narrative. Nevertheless, Schlecht acknowledges that this process is a two-way exchange, that the subculture did indeed exert influence on the dominant culture in both the perception and formation of public space. Therefore, although Schlecht's (1995: 37) focus is on "elite appropriation of the marginal," he leaves the door slightly ajar for the possibility that current and future grafiteiros such as OSGEMEOS may retain a certain amount of countercultural critical validity, even though the grafite movement in general may have already been institutionalized by dominant culture in São Paulo. This distinction between institutional-

ization/marginalization as a group vs. on an individual level is reflected beyond São Paulo in street art as well, albeit inversely, as Peter Bengtsen (2013: 67) has stated: “I would argue that it is really only a relatively few artists, who generally also produce commercial artwork, who have been accepted, while street art as such remains marginalised.”

A major factor in the subversive potential of grafite lies in the relationship between the grafiteiro and the urban space in which they operate (Kuttner, 2014). Although Schlecht (1995) touches upon that concept, instead of expounding upon the transformative potential of grafite, he focuses on the loss of that potential in three stages:

Three stages of cultural domination–rejection, domestication, and recuperation–were all discernible in the media’s portrayal of grafite [...] The media assisted in transforming grafite into an institution, extracting it from its oppositional spatial, symbolic and linguistic contexts and repositioning it in dominant culture contexts (Schlecht, 1995: 39).

The first stage, rejection, is essential for differentiating the movement from the dominant culture, and in the case of grafite can be exemplified by its illegality, the risk of arrest mentioned previously in the OSGEMEOS interview, or simply by publicly labeling it a sign of social and moral decay, as has often been the case in similar movements worldwide, like the graffiti writers of New York City in the 70’s and 80’s. This kind of reaction has been analyzed by some researchers, such as Joe Austin (1997), in terms of a “moral panic.”<sup>15</sup> Yet this oppositional polarization also gives the movement more subversive power and an increased appeal, especially among youth culture (e.g. perhaps also the Pandolfo twins during their youth) and the disenfranchised.

Domestication, the second stage according to Schlecht, was mainly driven by media outlets, which began to shift the paradigm of grafite away from its associations with vandalism and first conferred the title of art to it. This title had apparently been used to discuss grafite in São Paulo long before OSGEMEOS started exhibiting in art galleries at the beginning of the 21st century. Furthermore, Schlecht describes how the media awarded celebrity to grafiteiros, who then in turn willingly participated in the domestication of grafite. This process, “while seemingly establishing grafiteiros as cultural spokespersons, in fact reduced them as a group to colorful, exotic media personalities” (Schlecht, 1995: 39). This sets a precedent for OSGEMEOS’ television interviews and appearances in Brazilian media that would

occur in the next two decades. The reductive aspect of the media exposure is debatable, since the media outlets are not in a position to exert any influence on their work in the streets. However, there is certainly an aspect of selection involved; the media may choose to spotlight artists who are deemed more palatable to a wider audience.

As a result of the domestication phase and setting the stage for the recuperation phase, a second movement was still lingering in the phase of rejection, one which has attracted far more vitriol: the pichação movement. Over the last three decades, pichação has completely taken over the São Paulo urban landscape, permeating it to a previously unimaginable extent. The extreme proliferation of pichação, as well as its strong rejection of any aesthetic flourishes or color, had the effect of making grafite seem harmless by comparison, even though many grafiteiros (including OSGEMEOS) incorporate pichação into their works of grafite. Thus, Schlecht (1995: 45) reports that in “1989, the focus of media criticism shifted to pichação.” In a sense, as grafite was finishing the domestication process and being prepared for recuperation, pichação was assuming the role as the quintessential subversive force in urban visual culture. In the book *Graffiti Brasil*, the contrast between the public perception of grafite and pichação is described as a driving force in the commissioning and permitting of murals done by local grafiteiros:

The constant presence of pichação on every public wall, particularly those that are the most prominent, certainly helps the permission process. Walls in São Paulo in particular never stay clean for more than a few weeks, and property managers often see their way to an arrangement for a mural in the hope that it will keep the wall in their charge free of pichação (Manco, 2005: 46).

Whereas grafite was once seen as the lesser of two evils, at one point it became seen as an aesthetic protective layer against a pichação attack. However, this strategy was nullified to some extent when pichadores began targeting grafite murals specifically for this reason, most notably those of OSGEMEOS; Torkel Sjöstrand reports in a 2012 issue of *UP* magazine: “several large murals by the famous twin brothers OSGEMEOS have been destroyed by pixadores” (Sjöstrand, 2012: 31). As a result of these “attacks,” the distinction between the “domesticated” grafite scene and the obstinate anti-aesthetic of pichação has only further solidified in public discourse since Schlecht’s (1995) research.

The strong distinction between the two forms is reflected in the statements of Celita Procopio de Carvalho, the president of the board of trustees of the FAAP, sponsor for the 2009 OSGEMEOS gallery exhibition *Vertigem*. In her introduction to the catalogue, she states:

Likewise, graffiti and graffitist are no longer seen in the same way. They are no longer labeled as vandals, a status they shared until very recently with the taggers and today their images compose the cityscape (Procopio de Carvalho, 2009).

In this catalogue, the Portuguese words “grafite” and “grafiteiro” are translated as “graffiti” and “graffitist” even though most of the works the author is referring to would more accurately be described as “street art” in English. However, the word “tagger” is used as the English translation of *pichador*, further exemplifying the dichotomy in public opinion and official policy towards the two different forms of street intervention in Brazil. The irony in this statement is that OSGEMEOS also at times incorporate *pichação* lettering into their street grafite pieces. However, Carvalho ignores that fact and – in order to justify the foundation’s decision to exhibit works by the grafiteiros OSGEMEOS – she drives home the message that grafite is a domesticated and fully recuperated cultural movement, now firmly situated within dominant culture.

These statements, made in 2009, serve as an example of the third stage described by Neil Schlecht: recuperation. After neutralizing grafite’s potential as a countercultural and critical tool in the domestication phase, recuperation means that the now emasculated object is redefined within the dominant culture paradigm. Referring back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, Schlecht explains:

Concurrently, however, a media backlash directed at grafite, critical of its supersaturation in São Paulo, began to gain strength. Journalists [...] decried grafite for having renounced its foundation as protest and alternative, subaltern expression. Thus the media confirmed the process of cultural transformation and domination, [...] grafite was recodified as a commercial and cultural product: stylized, artistic and safe (Schlecht, 1995: 47).

Once again, it must be noted that all three stages of this transformation took place during OSGEMEOS’ youth, as they were first being integrated into the grafite culture. That is to say, they grew up in an environment where local media outlets were turning their predecessors into local celebrities during this “domestication” process. Moreover, they were

also immersed in the recuperation phase as it was propelled not only by São Paulo media, but also government institutions and the media. According to Schlecht:

[The] authorities of cultural institutions, the political system and government bureaucracies, first recognized and then assimilated, co-opted and redefined grafite, transforming it into a component of hegemonic society (Schlecht, 1995: 51).

If this statement from 1995 is taken at face value, one would have to assume that OSGEMEOS as well as other grafiteiros from their generation all function within the paradigm of hegemonic society, and one could reference quite a bit of visual evidence to support this position, including sanctioned and/or commissioned works where the critical value – at least from a countercultural standpoint – is not easily perceptible, such as *O Estrangeiro* at Anhangabaú. Furthermore, it is problematic to regard OSGEMEOS as pioneers in the sense of bringing grafite into museums and galleries, since Schlecht (1995: 51) reports: “Most art associations and museums, by the end of the 1980s, also offered their approval and support of grafite.”

Therefore, although some recent critics, curators, and journalists have credited OSGEMEOS with being a major driving force toward a paradigm shift concerning the relationship between grafite or street art and dominant culture in Brazil, it is clear from Neil Schlecht’s (1995) analysis that many São Paulo grafiteiros had already lived through similar developments even before OSGEMEOS began to garner international acclaim. As OSGEMEOS’ style was evolving, placing less of a focus on their bubble letter pieces, and more on the proliferation of their distinct brand of characters with folkloric references, local perception of their form of expression had already gone through major shifts that simultaneously paved the way for them to promulgate their work while also potentially subtly undermining its countercultural significance through appropriation and co-opting.

This issue is further complicated by street artists such as OSGEMEOS who commercialize their work by entering the art market via gallery exhibitions or otherwise. The illegal work on the streets could also be seen as a way to boost the image and thus also the value, of the work to be sold in the galleries. Peter Bengtsen (2014: 126) notes how Eddie Colla uses street work to critique institutionalization while participating in it: “The street artwork can therefore also be construed as a means to promote his commercial work[.]” Analogously, OSGEMEOS have also been known to create

unsolicited street art pieces in cities where they have major exhibitions, thereby opening themselves up to similar questions about possible commercial motivations for doing so.

Despite the fact that contemporary commentators attempt to pack OSGEMEOS' career trajectory into a linear narrative of grafite reception that Schlecht describes as having already occurred in the 1980s, the same sort of discourse and debates concerning the location of unsanctioned forms of art in relation to the dominant culture have been continually re-emerging with such frequency that it appears to be more than just a case of collective amnesia. Granted, some aspects of the debate remain unresolved, such as the potential of street art, graffiti, or similar forms of expression to retain elements of subversion even during or after the process of being co-opted by hegemonic culture. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to describe the discourse as a stasis with entrenched camps on either side. Instead, it resembles more of an ebb and flow dynamic. These processes and stages, rather than being regarded as a finite linear development, may in fact be more accurately described as cyclical. Therefore OSGEMEOS can be seen as part of a second generation of São Paulo grafiteiros who are navigating the socio-political landscape of the reception and rejection of their form of expression, not as explorers of new territory, but as native speakers of the language of the politics of graffiti, street art, and public art, and with an acute awareness of the tightrope they walk between these cultural spheres.

Neil Schlecht summarizes the ambiguous position of grafite in São Paulo in the mid-nineties: "As semi-legal, officially authorized expression, grafite was positioned in a cultural no man's land—one foot in the dominant culture, the other outside" (Schlecht, 1995: 56). It is this in-between position that came to define the location of OSGEMEOS' body of work as a whole, which is aptly symbolized by the two particular giants selected for this analysis. Like their "foreigner," *O Estrangeiro*, OSGEMEOS' work may at times feel awkward and out of place in both cultural spheres. In the case of the Tate giant, despite being naked and exposed, he nevertheless tries to remain mysterious by covering his face. More importantly, his feet are firmly positioned at the edge of the white cube, directly within the interstices of these two cultures.

## Notes

1 - The Portuguese word, grafite, is selected here because labeling OSGEMEOS' work is otherwise problematic. In Brazil, grafite refers to the application of colored paint on surfaces, which encompasses street art as well as most graffiti writing. It is also generally used in Brazil to describe public works by these artists that are similar in style and content. This is differentiated from pichação, a specific style of tagging with black letters originating in São Paulo, or arte nas ruas, which denotes the use of non-paint media, such as posters or stickers. OSGEMEOS mainly produce grafite but have at times worked with pichação. Their grafite, however, includes work that would be classified as street art in English as well as other work that would be classified as graffiti writing.

2 - Grafiteiros is a Portuguese term for someone who produces grafite.

3 - SESC is an acronym for Serviço Social do Comércio.

4 - [Original text: No final de 2009, 'OsGêmeos' tiveram uma demonstração positiva da sua popularidade no Centro. Perito de três mil pessoas passaram pelo Vale do Anhangabaú para ver o show ao ar livre 'O Estrangeiro', que dava forma a personagens criados por eles, como o bonecão de 20 metros que deu nome do evento.] This was reported slightly inaccurately, as the puppet and the painted figure were both representations of "the foreigner" and therefore the event was not only named after the puppet.

5 - [Original text: 'O Estrangeiro', deveria ficar na parede por 30 dias. A prefeitura diz que a grande aceitação da obra fez com que a Comissão de Proteção à Paisagem Urbana autorizasse que o personagem ganhasse moradia fixa no espaço até a demolição do imóvel.]

6 - [Original text: "'Tínhamos conhecimento de que ele ia ser apagado agora.'"]

7 - [Original text: "O 'sumiço' do grafite gerou polemica ontem nas rede sociais. 'Mais um exemplo da falta de incentivo à cultura no Brasil', escreveu uma internauta. Outro ironizou: 'Só não vale apagar a corrupção.'"]

8 - Further evidence that these concepts are often conflated in Brazil, Tristan Manco (2005: p. 46) "Brazilian writers also tend not to get as hung up on the distinction between legal and illegal work as their North American and European counterparts. While writers elsewhere knock each other for 'only doing legals', it isn't something you often hear in Brazil."

9 - *Pichação* is often translated as "tagging" for the sake of simplicity but actually denotes a specific style of tagging.



Pichação is a codified form of rune-like lettering with black paint that originated in São Paulo and is unique to Brazil. The primary objective of pichadores is to prolifically tag as many buildings, as high up, and as prominently as possible.

10 - [Original text: “excluídos do programa os grafites efetuados em imóveis particulares ou próprios municipais, autorizados pelo proprietário ou autoridade municipal competente.”]

11 - [Original text: “Laterais de edifícios paulistanos que, antes da Lei Cidade limpa, de 2007, abrigavam anúncios publicitários gigantes, estão sendo agora liberadas pela prefeitura para grafiteiros e muralistas.”]

12 - [Original text: “Em todo caso, ao institucionalizar a arte urbana, tornando-a algo comercial e oficial, a cidade sem painéis publicitários pode se tornar a capital mundial do grafite.”] Correa introduces the term “arte urbana” or “urban art” here, which seems to be used as an umbrella term to include grafite and arte nas ruas (in both their sanctioned and unsanctioned forms) and perhaps pichação to some extent.

13 - It should also be noted that although Alonzo chooses the word “graffiti” in this text, he is most likely referring to both graffiti writing and street art in Brazil, or grafite as well as pichação.

14 - Again, note that there is a conflation of terms in this text, probably a result of the linguistic differences in terminology.

15 - See also Kimvall (2014).

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Fig. 1: OSGEMEOS - Street Art Exhibition. Tate Modern, London, 2008. <http://www.osgemeos.com.br/en/projetos/street-art-2/#/2893>

Fig. 2: OSGEMEOS - O Estrangeiro. São Paulo, 2009. [http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos\\_gigante.htm](http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos_gigante.htm)



## Graffiti, Street Art, and Culture in the era of the Global City: The Ana Botella Crew case

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### Abstract

*What is the role of art in the reinforcement or rejection of current models of public space management in our cities? To answer this question, we must attend to the ties of all artwork with public institutions, and whether or not it questions the dominant order. In this article, I will focus on the works of the Ana Botella Crew, a group of artists from Madrid, as an example of “artivism” that challenges the City Council’s management of public spaces in Madrid. My aim is to explore how useful internet tools can be to articulate artistic interventions that challenge the hegemonic uses of public space, in what Sassen has called the global city.*

**Keywords:** Graffiti, Culture, Public space, Internet, Hegemonic urban models.

### 1. Introduction

What is the role of art in the reinforcement or rejection of current models of public space management in our cities? To answer this question, we must attend to the ties of all artwork with public institutions, and whether or not it questions the dominant order. Unlike official public art, both graffiti and street art, far from showing satisfaction with its aesthetic, offer a radical and different point of view of the city. We are talking about artistic interventions that invite us to look at the other side of the urban landscape, in which citizens play an active role by building, repairing,, and imagining the public space. The role that the internet plays in some of the initiatives related to street art is key, especially if we want to understand their political dimension, and the way they challenge the dominant order. As we shall see, internet provides very useful tools to articulate ideas that challenge the strict regulations that determine the use of public spaces.

In this article, I will analyze the works of the Ana Botella Crew (ABC), a group of artists from Madrid, as an example of “artivism” that challenges the City Council’s management of public spaces in Madrid. ABC’s work is based on collab-

orative actions through the web in order to mock the figure of Ana Botella, who pushed through an extremely restrictive legislation on graffiti as town councilor for the environment in 2009 (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2009) The ABC developed its projects in a climate of great hostility towards graffiti projected by the local government in Madrid. This hostility has not only meant the creation of a new and restrictive legal framework, but also institutional messages that refer to the hiring of graphologists to identify graffiti artists and to make it easier to establish sanctions. There was an immediate reaction to all of this –in just a few weeks- the ABC group was formed, willing to fight for a space in the streets of Madrid (see Figure 1.).

My aim is to explore how useful internet tools can be to articulate artistic interventions that challenge the hegemonic uses of public space, in what Sassen (1991) has called the global city. To do so, I am going to discuss the case of Madrid by trying to answer two questions: 1) what is the role of virtual tools in articulating these initiatives? 2) How can we interpret this from a political perspective? To do this I will use the following structure: First, I will discuss the role of culture in the hegemonic urban models, in order to explore the

way that practices such as graffiti and street art connect with these. Secondly, I will study the public management of graffiti and street art, carried out by local governments, emphasizing the aspects where there is “zero tolerance.” Thirdly, I will analyze the specific case of ABC, exploring the use they have made of the internet to develop their collective actions, combining online and offline activity. Finally, I will discuss my findings.

## **2. The role of culture in the new hegemonic urban models**

We are living in the context of great changes in Western cities. The paradigm shift from an economy based on the manufacturing industry to one based on the service industry is not only reshaping the economic and business spheres of our urban environments, but also the social sphere (Sassen, 1991) and its public spaces. These changes have created emerging conflicts between the motivations related to private and public interests. It is not easy for local governments to harmonize the interests of capital with democratic legitimacy (Deutsche, 1996). That is why, as some authors state (see Zukin, 1982 and 1994; Deutsche, 1996; Ferrell, 1996; Delgado, 2007; and Kramer, 2011), it is increasingly common to find urban areas where private interests prevail over the public interest. Conflicts between the private and the public are often silenced under the veil of stability and “consensus” (Mouffe, 1999). This leads us to the question: What is the role of art in the reinforcement or rejection of current models of public space management in our cities? To answer this question, we must attend the ties of all artwork with public institutions, and whether or not it questions the dominant order.

Deutsche (1996: 56) defines official public art as: *a practice that is within the built environment, is involved in the production of meanings, uses and forms for the city. With this capability, you can help reinforce the consent to the renewal and restructuring which is historically the form of the advanced capitalist urbanism.*

The idea of an art that reinforces the official model of public space is something that Deutsche (1996) related to beautification, which is dominant in cities like New York. This notion of “beauty,” or the symbolic organization of public space under a certain aesthetic and social order, leads to a process of

exclusion in which everything that does not fit the dominant aesthetic model is stigmatized or destroyed.

Unlike official public art, graffiti and street art, far from showing satisfaction with this aesthetic, choose a radically different use of the city (Caldeira, 2010). We are talking about artistic interventions that invite us to look at the other side of the urban landscape, in which citizens play an active role by building, repairing and imagining public space. These interventions show us new ways of living this urban landscape (Young, 2014: 94).

The cultural dimension, by becoming a resource (Yúdice, 2002), has turned into one of the main ways to extract economic benefits from public spaces. This is achieved thanks to the “symbolic economy” (Zukin, 1994), or the ability to produce using the symbols and spaces of culture; and what Logan and Molotch (1987) called “growth machines.” Culture has three basic uses in this context: a) Attracting capital flows; b) Establishing a new social order; and c) Regenerating the degraded urban fabric.

### **1.1. Attracting capital flows**

According to Harvey (2001) the competitive logic of capitalism entails a tendency to monopolization. In urban areas, once these monopolies have been imposed, they compete to attract capital flows in the form of investments. These monopolies have a contradictory nature: they compete under the coordinates of globalization, leading to large doses of homogenization, and at the same time, they compete by highlighting the uniqueness and authenticity of their territories, in order to show characteristics that distinguish them from other competitors. One of the key tools to highlight the uniqueness of each territory and that, therefore, functions as a magnet for tourism (Zukin, 1994), is cultural heritage (monuments, museums, art, etc.). This is where what Harvey calls “collective symbolic capital,” based on the concept developed by Bourdieu, is activated. The paradox beneath this is that the continuous use of collective symbolic capital, whilst creating elements of distinction, motivates a homogenization in the international context. This process generates a circular logic of homogeneity and distinction in which the more cities try to escape, the more they will be trapped.

, As Hervey (2001: 433) asserts, that is why:

*to not destroy uniqueness completely, as it is the basis of the appropriation of monopoly rents, capital must support a form of differentiation and allow divergent, and to some extent uncontrollable, local cultural developments, that can antagonize with the stability of its own accumulation process.*

This is what Smith (2012) has called an appropriation of the aesthetic of the “new urban frontier,” that is, wealthier classes (re)conquering space at the expense of the social majority, which is comparable to the legendary conquest of wild and virgin lands in the Far West. The appropriation of the aesthetic of these “territories” has a symbolic dimension; it highlights the domination of patrician classes over popular classes. Nevertheless, it also has an economic dimension, encouraging the use of popular subcultures for commercial purposes. These practices have divorced the social context (Zukin, 1994) whilst stealing the potential conflict from it. However, this context will maintain a certain “subversive” aesthetics in order to be attractive. “The Capital’s problem is finding ways to absorb, subsume, commodify and monetize such differences in order to accumulate the monopoly rents they generate” (Harvey, 2001: 433).

## **2.2. The establishment of a new social order**

Culture is not only used as a resource to obtain profit, it can also serve to establish a new social order by redeveloping public space. We have already mentioned the concept of “symbolic economy” to refer to the way public authorities can generate both symbols and spaces. This concept played an important role in the late 1970s, mainly due to the transition from an economic model based on the industrial sector to one based on the service industry. In this context, culture is placed in the center of urban development and will be considered an “economic asset” and “a valuable generator of marketable city spaces” (Garcia, 2008: 113). A strategy of “symbolic economy” we may recall is what Zukin (1994) calls the “Disneyfication” of public spaces. In fact, Disneyworld is a perfect example of the management of public space under these parameters, which apply to theme parks in a unique way: privatization of management, visual coherence, and social control.

First, we must recall the fact that the commitment to a model of management based on privatization has its origin in the US during the decade of the 1970s. At that time, funds from

city coffers were decreasing, progressively enabling the private sector to enter in municipal management. The case of New York was striking: the fiscal crisis that hit the city mid-decade (Harvey, 2007) served as a pretext to reduce the weight of the public sector. This led to the deterioration of public services, particularly suburban transport (Austin, 2001). This process meant that:

*the collective space -the public space- was being represented as a commodity. Even when you do not pay for it, [...] the public space has been integrated into the commercial space, thereby promoting corporate values (Zukin, 1994: 260).*

Secondly, the symbols and images generated from public institutions aimed at creating a visual coherence or aesthetic sanitation led to the reinforcement of a new model of public space. Now, what some authors have called an “aesthetic of authority” and an “aesthetic of fear” would prevail. The first concept “embodies an affection for authority, a pleasure in the way property looks when it is under the firm control of its individual, corporate, and government owners” (Ferrell, 1996: 180). The second concept refers to how culture is “capitalized for eventual privatization and militarization of public space” (Zukin, 1994: 11). The Disneyworld model is not only important because it confirms the importance of cultural power to apply effective social control, but because it offers a model of privatization that handles social diversity. This provides a framework of meaning to the city (Zukin, 1994) that replaces a model of coexistence with the market (Delgado, 2007; see also Balibrea, 2010).

## **2.3. Regeneration of degraded urban fabrics**

One of the major phenomena that have favored urban regeneration processes is what is known as gentrification. Based on the concept of the “urban frontier,” Smith (2012) makes an exhaustive analysis of the economic and social processes through which international capital has transformed cities in recent decades thanks to the conquest of space. In recent times, we have witnessed how the wealthiest classes have “recaptured” the degraded urban centers after years of economic disinvestment and institutional neglect.

To talk about the role of culture, and more specifically art, in the process of gentrification, we must highlight the work of Deutsche and Ryan (1984). These authors emphasize that

the economic impact caused by artists and art galleries is not positive in the communities in which they operate. They actually reinforce the process by which people who are most in need must move in favor of the wealthy classes. In many cases, street art has a main role rather than a secondary one. Abarca (2009) has analyzed its role as a regenerator for processes in the urban sphere. One of his main theses is that street art provides a dose of “authenticity” which is stripped of all the “unfriendly” aspects associated with graffiti.

### 3. The governance of graffiti based on “Zero Tolerance”

Graffiti and street art, as autonomous artistic practices, face the institutional pressure of local governments that are permanently concerned about having everything that happens in public spaces under control. This pressure is applied through two different channels: prohibition, involving the prosecution and punishment of any artist working in the streets without authorization; or institutionalization, which would entail the cooptation of the practices carried out by these artists. This dichotomous and ambivalent way to address graffiti and street art can be classified as schizoid, not because of the contradictions in its objectives, or the strict control of any dissenting artistic practice, but by its practical consequences: on one hand, prohibition, persecution and punishment, and on the other, promotion of graffiti and street art as standard artistic practices.

Under the prohibitionist perspective, graffiti is understood, not as a matter of aesthetic nature, but as a real social problem (Ferrell, 1996). The social and political classification of a problem is always a collective construction directly linked to the perceptions, representations, interests and values of the actors involved (Subirats, 2008: 126; see also Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Public authorities take this approach with the firm intention of building a problem, a moral panic (Cohen, 2002), thereby drawing a clear line between the desirable and the undesirable, between “them” and “us” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009) and setting up a space in which the identities created must cope antagonistically (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987). All this is well inserted into what Mouffe (2013: 299) calls the “moralization of politics” where the “opponent is not defined in political but moral terms,” and the consequence of this is that “these opponents cannot be seen as opponents but as enemies.”

Indeed, denying any democratic legitimacy to the opponent in this case, the group of graffiti writers and therefore denying any possible dialogue, has been the standard pattern followed by local governments since the first tags and pieces appeared on the walls of Philadelphia and New York. This moralistic approach to conflict has its corollary in creating an ideological basis that underlines the hegemonic narratives against graffiti and, by extension, against all unregulated artistic practice in public space. Their principles are based on the theory of broken windows, established by James Wilson and George Kelling in an article they published in 1982 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In it, they asserted that disorder, through the metaphor of a broken window, was an embryo from which serious criminal activity is generated.

Thus, the proliferation of behaviors indicative of neglect would lead to the flourishing of serious crimes and, consequently, would negatively impact on life in the community “An unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window” (Wilson and Kelling, 1982: 5). Therefore, we would be facing two categories of disorder: social, which could include behaviors such as “loitering”, littering, drinking in public, begging or prostitution; and physical, which includes abandoned buildings, sidewalks with trash, or graffiti (Harcourt and Ludwig, 2006). Indeed, graffiti, under this approach, would contribute to the physical degradation of a given space and, therefore, be a clear example of disorder.

Despite the soundness of such claims there is no empirical evidence to support the theory of broken windows (Harcourt, 1998; Harcourt and Ludwig, 2006; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999) nor that the consequent zero tolerance policies would determinedly contribute to reduce violent crime (Harcourt and Ludwig, 2006). On the contrary, other measures that do not imply a fight against disorder seem to have a direct effect on reducing crime. These include collective efficacy, defined as the merger of social cohesion through the expectation of society’s active control of public space (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). In a study developed in the city of Chicago, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) were able to confirm that disorder has a modest correlation with serious crime, but this was more connected to the characteristics and background of each quarter. These decisive factors for crime, which have nothing to do with disorder, seem to be both a structural disadvantage and an attenuated collective efficacy (Sampson and Raudenbusch, 1999:

638). Zero tolerance policies, far from being effective, have managed to blame the individuals who have suffered successive socio-economic crisis in cities like New York.

How is it possible for a theory with such a lack of empirical evidence to be so successful among the public authorities many large cities? The answer to this is its utility to implement policies that have contributed to establishing a particular economic model in a significant way (Kramer, 2011). This model is based on what Logan and Molotch (1987) have called Growth machines. These machines are based on the linkage between the public sector, through local political elites, and the private sector, mainly composed by corporate and financial elites, to extract economic benefits from land use at the expense of the residents (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Harvey, 2001). The ideology that accompanies these growth machines is what Kramer (2011) has called privatism. This term refers to the role of the public sector as an enabler for the flow of capital towards the private sector through tax incentives and the creation of a specific infrastructure. There seems to be a clear correlation between the logic of growth machines and privatism and the way in which the political elites respond to practices such as graffiti (Kramer, 2011: 13). Growth machine interventions, despite their dysfunctional consequences in social terms, are remarkably functional from the real estate market's perspective (Smith, 2012).

#### **4. The Ana Botella Crew case**

##### **4.1 Madrid, Global City**

In recent years, the aim of public authorities to place Madrid in the global context, has led to the progressive financialization of its economic model. This has led to the emergence of a new economy of advanced services that has reshaped the business of the city in favor of the interests of international capital (Rodríguez, 2007). The pressure of economic globalization, and the hegemony of neoliberal thinking, has made local governments adopt strategies to strengthen local economic competitiveness in a global context. Thus, the main role of cities would not be to ensure a certain level of social cohesion but to promote local economic growth, often at the expense of generating greater inequality and socio-spatial segregation (Blanco and Subirats, 2012: 21). This process has also had an impact on a new configuration of

public space for two reasons: it encourages a purely commercial logic (public space as a place of transit for potential consumers) and it implements a new model of development based on the standardization and individualization of ways of living (Calvo, 2007). All this has its counterpart in the field of culture. The municipal authorities in Madrid inextricably connected culture to the development and wealth of the city (Carrillo, 2009: 201).

Closely related to this is the construction of infrastructures that serve as major exhibition venues, as well as the organization of major cultural events to revitalize local economies (Evans, 2005; García, 2008; see also Cocola, 2009). These initiatives are often developed without adequate long-term planning, which means that there is not a "balanced distribution of benefits, nor socially, nor spatially" (García, 2008: 112). In addition, betting on the architectural spectacle of the "cultural city" effectively endorses a model that is detrimental for more local, accessible and creative cultural provision (Costa and Lopes, 2013). Therefore, it is detrimental to the cultural practices and experiences associated with the daily life of the communities that some authors, such as Evans (2005), have identified as key for the development of social projects in the community. The district of Lavapies in Madrid is a paradigmatic case. As Carrillo has stated (2009), while most of the social, cultural and political spheres of the neighborhood were dismantled, large and oblivious cultural containers for the cultural dynamics of the district were built. Good examples of this are the cultural center La Casa Encendida, the Valle Inclán theatre or the extension of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

##### **4.2. The paradoxical management of graffiti and the activist response**

The policies developed by the Madrid city council in recent years regarding graffiti fit perfectly in this schizoid category: on one hand, zero tolerance, but on the other, the promotion of events that are aimed at assimilating graffiti and street art as standard artistic practices. There is an anecdote that perfectly exemplifies this dual drive. In 2007, only two years before the new legislation and the rise of ABC, a couple of street artists, Asier and Murphy, painted several murals in the capital of Madrid in response to a statement of Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, the former mayor of Madrid: "We must put an end to this false expression of any kind of artistic atti-



tude.” On one of these walls, which the mayor soon ordered to be demolished, Ruiz-Gallardón was represented with the ironic slogan, “Gallardon loves graffiti.” The paradox here is that the same artists who represented Ruiz-Gallardon were also awarded prizes in the Young Artists’ Competition organized by the Madrid City Council, and it was the mayor who had given them a check for 3,400 euros (El Mundo, 2008).

In any case, how did ABC articulate their actions? It was under collaborative and reticular logic. Using their Flickr account, they disseminated a template with Ana Botella’s signature (see Figure 2.) for any internet user to download. The action, therefore, was raised by a leading group but could be executed by any person with internet access. Thus, connectivity, interactivity, and collective creation become fundamental concepts in order to understand their actions. To the concept of collective creation, we must add the concept of “carnival,” in which personal identities are replaced by other identities (see Figure 3.) assumed in performative processes (Carrillo, 2004).

In that sense, ABC is heir to a tradition of collaborative practices developed in recent decades in the capital of Spain. Among them, we can mention those carried out by the Preiswert Arbeitskollegen (Unalienated Working Society) group, who raised a number of situationist actions throughout the 1990s (Pujals, 2004; Carrillo, 2009). The most frequent interventions of this group consisted in the dissemination of ironic political messages in public space using templates and sprays (see Figure 4.). Another important reference is Sabotaje Contra el Capital Pasándoselo Pipa (SC-CPP), that developed, among other things, the initiative YO-MANGO (détournement of the name of the Spanish textile brand MANGO) that consisted in “kleptomaniac guerrilla” actions in big stores (see Figure 5.). That is, actions that, through the theft of small items, aimed at denouncing the consumerist inertia of today’s society. The most important aspect of their activity, apart from the use of irony and sense of humor, is the use of the web to deposit and collectivize the tools or information inherent in their actions for general use (Carrillo, 2004).

#### 4.3 New forms of street art through the internet

Manuel Castells uses the concept of informational capitalism to refer to his contemporary model of the intensification of

informational flows and the multiplication of multidirectional communications. In this context, some “artist” groups have made the most of the possibilities that the new expansion of ICT has offered (Carrillo, 2004) in order to stand against the new values that informational capitalism has entailed: competitiveness, hyper-individualization and the atomization of social life. These works have led to the proliferation of proposals that are committed to collective action, in opposition to the idea of individual artistic genius. Thus, the factors of collectivity and anonymity constitute defining features of the latest form of activism on the web. Therefore, the actions of ABC are heirs to this tradition, as they oppose light and nodal collective action to the bureaucratized, uniform, and centralized machinery of public institutions. They not only defied the repressive actions of Madrid’s local government but also, above all, the ideological values it represents.

ABC articulates its activity by combining online and offline action. Their online activity uses the Zapatista’s strategies to connect with net art, a “tactical” challenging of the greater powers combined with the channels of the information era (Castells, 1997). On the other hand, for their offline activity, ABC’s actions combine graffiti related strategies (tagging, getting up, etc.) with typical street art strategies (use of templates, conceptual sophistication, détournement, etc.). As a result, we have a hybrid that combines the best aspects of both practices, foremost amongst which is their defiance of the rules for the use of public space.

It is important to note that ABC’s actions, although imbued with a clear intention to challenge the local government, merely highlight their position of weakness against them. Madrid City Council, because of its inability to read social reality and see the demand for other ways of political participation beyond the traditional electoral channels (Blanco and Subirats, 2012), has failed to articulate other means of participation that go beyond cooptation and submission to the institutional channels. This condemns all social or cultural actors who do not want to submit to the dynamics of persuasion, assimilation, and standardization imposed by the local government to endure their own systematic coercion. This means that alternative responses of opposition to the institutional order have been placed in the field of what Michel de Certeau (2001: 367) called tactical, understanding that this concept includes actions in which the lack of a defined place to establish rules is an essential characteristic:

*The lack of this place undoubtedly allows mobility, but requires a greater ability to adapt to the vagaries of time by instantly catching the possibilities of each moment. They need to be vigilant to make the most of the failures, and the particular junctures that open while monitoring the authorities.*

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the role of culture in hegemonic urban models and in the ways that local governments manage public spaces. We can find three main tasks: First, culture plays a key role attracting capital flows in form of tourism and investments. Secondly, culture can strengthen a particular social order in public spaces. Thirdly, culture has been manipulated skillfully as a tool for gentrification in degraded neighborhoods. I have also analyzed the role of certain artistic practices in challenging the dominant urban models and the management that local governments have undertaken of these practices. Graffiti and street art can be found within these practices that operate outside the traditional channels of the art system. Governance of local governments typically responds to a schizoid dynamic: at the same time it prohibits, pursues and punishes, it also co-opts and normalizes.

The Broken Windows Theory of Wilson and Kelling (1982) set the theoretical foundations for zero tolerance policies. Although empirical evidence has not confirmed their thesis, many municipal governments have followed it faithfully. We find the explanation of this paradox in the utility of this theory for the process of privatization and profit extraction regarding public assets, which is related to what Logan and Molotch (1987) have called "growth machines." Zero tolerance has not stopped artists and graffiti writers, who have continued to defy the dominant social and aesthetic order in cities through all kinds of strategies. Here we analyzed the case of a group of artists called the Ana Botella Crew, who, in response to an upsurge of the public administration of the City of Madrid, invited anyone that wanted to participate to do so by filling the Spanish capital with the signature of the former city councilor for the environment.

What is the role of virtual tools in the articulation of these initiatives and, therefore, antagonizing the hegemonic urban models? Alternatively, what is the role of online action in the development of offline activities and in the achievement of the goals set by these initiatives? As we have seen, Inter-

netthe internet offers possibilities related to collective, non-hierarchical and reticular action. To which we should add the festive and carnival component, where humor and sublimation allow us to scoff at the identity of those who represent the symbolic capital of order. By using virtual tools, in this case Flickr, the group was able to multiply the presence of Ana Botellas throughout the whole world in an easy, cheap and accessible way. This is what allowed their actions to reach, in a very short period, a much larger audience than if a limited group of people had executed them. The fact that their actions were quickly exposed in a Flickr profile gave them a multiplying effect. The platform thus fulfilled a dual function: 1) The dissemination of the materials and tools necessary to execute the actions, and 2) demonstrating the results and reinforcing the idea of ubiquity.

What are the political conclusions of all this? It is true that we can classify this initiative in what Michel de Certeau has called the field of tactics, that is, that area in which the lack of power to define the rules forces you to use the loopholes that can favor the articulation of an action that challenges the dominant order. Adopting a tactical role towards the established power is a result of what Chantal Mouffe calls the moralization of politics, that is, the refusal to provide political entity to the opponents of institutional power. Because of this, they will not be considered adversaries, but enemies. The management of the local government of Madrid shows that politicians, far from providing graffiti writers and street artists with a political entity that would enable them as interlocutors, refer to them as a moral entity as if they were a social evil that must be eradicated.

The way that public authorities impede the right of certain social and cultural actors to show their disagreement regarding the ways in which our public spaces are managed should alert us to the poor quality of our democracy. The guarantee that the votes obtained in the process of electoral participation provide should not be a blank check that allows governments to shirk their obligation to explore other forms of participation in public life. In short, it is not only the right of graffiti and street artists to intervene without authorization in the street that is at stake which would open another vector of analysis but the right of citizens to articulate democratic ways of responding to the dominant political, social and cultural order, as well as the right to have institutions, that far from being an adversary, are allies in these processes.

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Figure 1. Action of ABC



Figure 2. ABC template for stenciling





Figure 3. Members of ABC with masks of Ana Botella



Figure 4. Action of Preiswert Arbeitskollegen

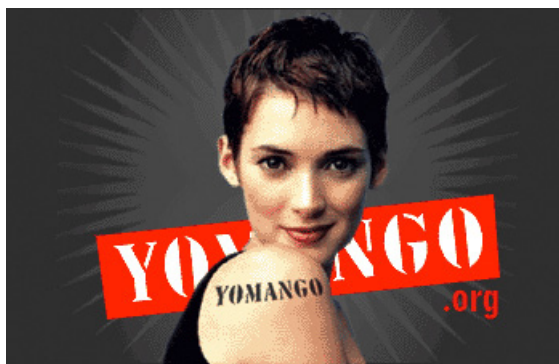


Figure 5. One of the "logos" of YOMANGO

## Street Artist: Urban *Flanêurie*

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### Abstract

*It is the goal of this paper to aesthetically rethink Street Art's artistic process and question its narrative in urban and public space. We intend to highlight the anonymity, ephemeral, and transitory element as a key feature of its artistic creation. To this end, we will use as a starting point the relationship between the street artist and Baudelaire's flanêur, to reach Foucault's point of view, which somehow finds the key to the street artist's aesthetic features, synthesized in the understanding of Baudelaire's modernity, understood not as a mere historical period, but rather as an "attitude."*

**Keywords:** Street Art, Flanêurie, Modernity, Anonymity, Transitional, Ephemerality.

The purpose of this working paper is to characterize the Street Artist's creative process, from an interdisciplinary approach that establishes relationships between poetry, philosophy and the art world.

We intend to highlight the anonymity, the ephemeral, and transitory element as a key feature of his artistic creation, by using as a starting point the relationship between the street artist and Baudelaire's famous flanêur: For whom it is an immense joy to see the world and remain hidden, as a voyeur, "enjoying the fact of being incognito throughout the entire city" (Baudelaire, 1988: 43). The flanêur's visual message spreads throughout the urban space and proliferates insidiously. The street is actually, 'Just as good a place to publish,' as Banksy recently stated – an artist whose true identity remains veiled (Raychaudhur, 2010: 52).

The flanêur has a cosmopolitan personality – his home is the major city. To the French poet the crowd, or "the mass is so intrinsically present that vainly we seek for it in the poet" (Benjamin, 1999: 115). The crowd is a framework that orchestrates urban movements. For this man of the crowds

the street is his home, as it is the large city. Indeed, the individual that crosses the webs of the large urban centers, dipping into the "great desert of men" (Baudelaire, 1988: 173), is searching for something specific: Modernity. In Baudelaire's conception, "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" (174). It is in this transience that the modern artist recognizes the value of his own work. Unlike the traditional aesthetic conception, in which beauty would be identified with the universal and with the unchanging, Street Art has in the transient the true motive of its inspiration; in urban life it finds what it wants to represent.

It is within the city in motion that the artist will see their condition radically transformed. In the poem "The loss of halo" stated in Paris Spleen, Baudelaire describes metaphorically how the poet crosses a busy avenue, and sees his halo falling from his head, as an effect of shock. As a consequence of the loss of this emblem, the artist loses his quasi-divine and angelic status and acquires anonymity, and seeks to take advantage of this by remaining incognito in the crowd, as a fallen angel or an anti-hero. Benjamin focuses on this poem, including the theme of the loss of "aura," in his critical

analysis of the modernity in the book: Charles Baudelaire: a lyric in the rise of capitalism.

The crowd is omnipresent in the poet. The flâneur arises from the practice of observing the galleries that decorate Paris, of wandering through the crowds of those who pass. Now this is where the subversive activity and the unknown street artist meet Baudelaire's conception of modernity, which represents the transient, the fleeting and the contingent (1988). Unlike the traditional aesthetic conception, in which beauty would be identified with the universal and with the unchanging, Baudelaire finds in the transient the true reason for the artist's inspiration.

The street artist is aware of the ephemerality of his artwork; being one of the essential characteristics of this kind of art, to such an extent that video or photography (expertly diffused by modern media, like the internet and social networks) are often the only record of these works. Street art as a global movement has grown unconstrained through Web image sharing.

Like the flâneur, the street artist's subversive and unconventional activity seems to be a response to capitalist law. The street artist does not want to feed the market and his art is not suitable for consumption. The transience of the work also reveals such nonchalance. Street art is for everyone, but is nobody's. Baudelaire's aspirations seem to echo in the very essence of street art: an unconventional art that creates colorful and subversive scenery for the walls of the big city. The street is the canvas and the infrastructure of street art, but it is simultaneously also the space that surrounds mainstream art. Consequently street art should not be seen as a further category of conventional art, but as a category of its own. Baudelaire's poet has the audacity to make the affirmation of transience, of the moment that quickly turns into remembrance, of the intensity of the "here and now" and its near end.

Foucault's views on Baudelaire can shed light on the street artist's aesthetic features, synthesized in the understanding of modernity, not as a historical period but rather, as an "attitude". That is, the attitude of becoming eternal through the transitional, where nothing stays the same, implying: "recover something eternal not beyond the present instant, nor

behind it, but in it" (Foucault, 2008: 342). Therefore, the role of the artist is "to extract the eternal from the transitional" (Baudelaire, 1988: 173).

The modern poet would then be attained by "a willingness to turn here the present moment" (Foucault, 2008: 343). However, this "became here" has something "ironic" in itself, that is, the attitude of modernity does not aim to "sacralize" the moment, to then keep it in the absence of all change. The artist's attitude is a game of creation and freedom within which the artist shapes their own life as a creative process. What Foucault recognizes in Baudelaire's work, and what we identify with the attitude of the street artist, is the claim of an aesthetic life, an aesthetic way of existence that has its focus on the urban *flanêurie*.

The figure of Baudelaire's flâneur, which we here have taken the liberty to associate with the street artist, introduces an aesthetic form of existence. This aesthetic mission does not exist to embellish reality, but exists for individual self-realization. The street artist is not alone in his creative process, but within society: the big city. He operates his own transformation as he expects also to transform the walls of the streets.

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## Letting the walls of the city speak: The route of a sociological research project on Lisbon's street art<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article sets out to show how a sociological research project on the production of street art in Lisbon was built, from the construction of an object of research to the development of a methodological approach that enabled the collection of a diverse set of expressive data. The notion of 'route' serves not only as a valuable instrument of research in the first stages of an investigation in urban sociology, but also as a powerful visual depiction of the development of a specific methodology and the set of techniques adopted. The diverse set of interrogations about the object that stem from these incursions, as well as the specific urban context at hand, allowed the researcher to conceptualize street art as a component of contemporary urban space and as a visual means to reveal social dynamics between the several actors involved in its production, and the city itself. Therefore, in this paper it is briefly shown how this object is theoretically framed, namely in what concerns the street artists and the way they build an artistic path and attribute meaning to the act of intervening artistically in the streets of the city, and how this connects with the worlds of contemporary art and the several contexts of production of street art; the contexts in which street art is currently created in Lisbon, from individual initiatives to the actions of associations or collectives, and the municipality; and the way in which the city, through its institutional powers, can instrumentalize street art as a way of creating 'images of the city', and how this can be explored in terms of tourism and the marketing of cities, and the conflict or opportunities that these processes reveal for the actors involved.*

**Keywords:** Urban Sociology, Street Art, Routes, Multidisciplinarity, Field Work.

### 1. Introduction

This article intends to clarify both the construction of the object of analysis and the methodological options within a sociological PhD research project about the production of street art in Lisbon. In this research, street art was approached as a form of construction of public space in Lisbon's metropolitan context. Specifically, the objective of the research is to understand how a public space can be constructed through the ways in which it relates to the city and the art it features publicly – particularly, street art as an artistic and expressive manifestation of an ephemeral nature.

At the present moment, street art is the object of several dis-

tinct interventions in Lisbon, through not only the individual initiative of artists, but also through the programming efforts of associations, projects and the municipality. The assumption underlying this research is that the analysis of the contexts of production of street art in this metropolitan ambit allows us to reveal not only different forms of conceiving and constructing public urban space, but also tensions and conflicts about it.

This article aims to focus on the methodological aspects of this research, based on a programme of field work that, besides the extensive collection of images and other documentation, also includes a set of interviews not only with street artists, but also with other actors connected to the

programming of street art initiatives.

These methodological options, explored in depth in this article, made it possible to elaborate a reflection, not only about what street art reveals about the construction of public space, but also about the mechanisms through which this specific ambit of creativity, through its new contexts of production, connects with the construction of an artistic career, and with the world of contemporary art and its markets.

## **2. The production of street art in Lisbon: route towards an object of analysis**

This researcher's first contact with street art took place, simply, with the daily experiencing of Lisbon, through walking in the streets of the city and through the experience of its several public spaces. Posters, stickers, cutouts, stencils, colorful murals showcasing diverse styles, despite appearing to have a certain affinity with the graffiti the city's walls had long known, seemed to consist of something entirely different.

This material universe suggested a different intention, not so much related to the "spreading of the name", but to communicate a message to an audience much broader than the insiders in the graffiti world, with techniques and forms of expression much more diverse than the intricate elaboration of letterings.

Meanwhile, the observation of the mdf panels that had been placed near the Bairro Alto area by a recently created organization within the municipal authority, each one presenting aerosol paintings, colorful and with various themes, allowed for further questioning. Namely, what this initiative could reveal about relationships of power in public space, and how it could itself signify an attempt of the municipal institution to control the unpredictable and spontaneous, and also what potential did it see for the production of street art murals – a practice with increasing visibility in Lisbon – for the construction of a carefully curated image of the city. Along with this initiative came several others, in the form of associations, projects or workshops, to promote street art events and interventions throughout the city.

Some authors include street art in a set of practices that reveal "artistic marginal urban otherness" (Andrade, 2010), of ephemeral and autonomous nature, distinct from "legitimate" public art and with support from local or central administration, or private entities. On the other hand, observing

the diversity of contexts in which street art is made - from individual and spontaneous initiatives, to projects within institutional, collective or associative initiatives - also implies diversity in what concerns the actors, strategies and forms of cooperation within its production.

As for the street artists, I wondered about the ways they would manage the different and apparently vast forms of expression at their disposal, concerning the diversity of contexts for these practices, legal or illegal. The consequences of their options and the way in which they build a personal artistic path – when that intention exists – was another interrogation that this initial observation revealed. The increasing number of street art initiatives in Lisbon, in legal contexts, and with an increasing scale, as well as the opening of an active street art commercial gallery, broadens the outline of this question. Namely, what relationship could exist between street art and the world of contemporary art, with its mechanisms of artistic recognition, markets and exhibition contexts? Two different moments helped to build these questions: the exhibition of OSGEMEOS at CCB and the Vhils retrospective, a remarkable moment for the visibility and recognition of a Portuguese street artist.<sup>2</sup> Both illustrate the increasing presence of street artists in museums, and their insertion in the world of contemporary art.

Acknowledging this diversity of the object led to research on these perspectives to understand the purposes that these different actors - artists and producers - manifest towards a practice whose meaning largely overflows that of the artistic expression.

All this indicates that here lays, undoubtedly, a particularly rich object of sociological investigation, as it reveals urban dynamics in the practices, the identities and the meanings, the art worlds, and the construction of public space in the context of Lisbon.

## **3. Towards a sociological perspective on street art**

Reflecting upon the bibliographical references on the problematic of art in the public space, researchers Antoni Remesar and Pedro Brandão (2010) distinguish two types of approach: those that center on the art world and those that emphasize the public rather than the art. This ideal-type distinction makes possible to pinpoint some mistakes that a work on street art could incur. The first would result from



assuming that street art is a mere extension of graffiti, transplanting the literature and perspectives about graffiti to these practices, and therefore losing the significance of a whole set of unique aspects that define street art.

The second would result from the assumption that these street expressions all have a uniformly subversive intention to them, if not in their content, at least in the simple act of intervening in a public wall. This is not at all what is observable, as there is considerable amount of negotiation and strategy in the practice of street art in legal contexts, though it might be true for the illegal and spontaneous interventions. Street art is therefore a visual vehicle to reveal social dynamics between the several actors involved in its production, and between them and the city. The way each street artist builds themselves as such, elaborating a career path, can be analyzed according to a perspective that refers to Symbolic Interactionism: that is, emphasizing the way each street artist constructs and gives meaning to the act of artistically intervening in the streets of the city, and how that process is interconnected with a broader system of signification – namely the art world and the legal contexts of production of street art.

The dramaturgical perspective that underlies works under this perspective – such as Goffman (1993; 1999; 2011), and Ulf Hannerz (1980) – in which the city becomes a stage, is adequate for the analysis of the dynamics between the different actors in the context of the production of street art – as a scenographical elaboration of the city, on one hand, and as identity construction, on the other. The context of the street art practices was a necessary starting point.

Notions such as “urban tribes” or “youth cultures” are of little interest for this research, for the simple reason that the street art world presents such a diversity and complexity of practitioners and contexts of production that these theoretical approaches would be inadequate. The approach to the “practices”, however, is of interest for this research. Lígia Ferro (2011) conceives the practices of graffiti and parkour in a setting of cultural practices that express an “interpenetration of cultural spheres, that mirror the communicative condition of contemporary culture, in which diverse contextual identities are constructed.”” The notion of mediation practices she proposes (Ferro, 2011) is also useful for the conceptualization of the ways that street art is produced, namely in the role

of the agents that promote it and establish bridges between different worlds: between street art and the art market, the institutions, or the local communities, for example.

An additional research track was inspired by the work of José Guilherme Cantor Magnani (1994), about the esoteric practices in the Brazilian urban context. The way this anthropologist chose to approach these practices, consisting of dislocating the perspective from within the practices themselves, to the relationships these establish with the city, guided this research on street art. In that sense, Magnani (1994) opted to list the different contexts for these esoteric practices according to their characteristics, which also makes full sense in a research project on street art, in which the diversity of its contexts is also precisely one of the central aspects of this research.

The work of Sharon Zukin (1993) facilitates an understanding of the relation between street art and the institutions and entities that allow and promote these new contexts for its production, particularly Zukin’s concept of landscapes of power, that attempts to illustrate the way in which the authorities that manage public space – and also the private entities that, through capital, have the power to do so – mark it with images of said power, and of which public art, in a broader sense, is a classic example, as is some street art produced in institutional contexts.

As counterpoint to this conception of the city, Alain Bourdin (2005) adds that the city is also a vast system of opportunities, in what concerns professional activities, jobs, services and products, relationships, meanings, possible behaviors, events and mobility structures. Hence the city, in the set of street art production contexts it presents, also represents a group of opportunities for the artists, who, according to their personal aims, and with variable success or difficulty, can build from their activities on street art a surplus value for the construction of a career.

In order to theoretically frame the aspect of the construction of an artistic career, some reference to Howard Becker (2010) is relevant. Firstly, in his concept of “art world”, which perceives artistic activity as collective, with several actors and respective roles. It is argued in this research that street art constitutes a particular art world. Secondly, Becker also associates career with a commitment to practices (1953), as does Richard Lachmann (1988) in the context of graffiti. Becker connects the notion of career with a learning process

of meanings and techniques. This idea of progression appears in the speeches of the interviewed street artists, relating to the contexts in which they develop their practice and also on a technical level. On the other hand, street artists give meaning to the different moments of their formation and learning. Therefore, it was possible to trace elements of a personal narrative of an artistic path in their discourses.

As for the artistic work, the work of Nathalie Heinich (1996; 2005) is important to consider when investigating the passage of the street artist to the contemporary art world and its market, particularly the concept of artistic singularity and the processes of recognition and celebration of artistic careers and the “rules of the game.”

Raymonde Moulin (1997) is also a valuable reference, specifically the way she conceives the roles of the several different actors in the art world that contribute to its transformation: state, market, museums, galleries – and also, evidently, the artists and the artistic movements. Moulin traces social profiles and exposes the mechanisms through which artistic careers are built.

Therefore, the study of the forms and contexts of production of street art allows the formulation of another set of themes. These include: from the perspective of the institutions, the control of public space and the promotion of a certain image of the city - the urban marketing of cities in a context of touristic competitiveness; from the perspective of the artists, the contextualization of a set of practices and the representations and expectations that connect with it, how an artistic career is built, what strategy there is in the choices artists make when collaborating with public institutions, and how this reflects the insertion of street art in the contemporary art world and its markets.

#### **4. Methodological approach of a street art research project**

It is important to clarify the methodological approach that underlies this research, which is inherently sociological approach, as the influence of the ethnographic perspective was crucial.

If the anthropological knowledge structures itself around the micro scale of daily life and the personal contact between the observer and the observed (Agier, in Cordeiro, 2003:15), for a sociological research project a certain connection to the macro level of reality is also unavoidable. While trans-

versal to daily life and human interaction, both levels of analysis are important to contextualize approaches to urban research. Therefore, the first level of approach for this research is the representations of the street artists and their creative expressions in the walls of the city; the second is an intermediate level, that of the producers of street art and the agents that mediate their practices; the third level is that of the organization of urban space by its institutions, the images of city that underlie their approach towards street art, and also the contemporary art world and the relation street artists have with it.

The general approach for this research relates to what Pierre Bourdieu (2001) called participant objectivation, which differs from the participant observation, that assumes the researcher can simulate a momentary affiliation with the group that is the object of research, to better understand it. On the other hand, participant observation considers the rupture with the subjective aspects of the proximity with the object. The challenge this perspective presented was of constant rupture with the eventual impulse of the researcher to arbitrarily judge and attribute value, objectifying instead her role within the research.

Concerning the techniques that were used for this research, these were necessarily flexible, as, during the course of field work, some adaptation and experimentation is paramount. However, engaging in the collection of a set of interviews was soon determined to be a fundamental aspect for a qualitative research approach.

Due to the specificity of the context of research, and the multiplicity of actors involved, the collection of personal testimonies was considered adequate. Because it is also in the form of that speech and the singular manner in which each individual articulates it, that a researcher can understand which aspects the interviewee attributes more or less importance to, in a process of “sociological intelligibility centered on the subject” (Conde, 1993: 207). Therefore long interviews with each of the subjects were privileged, resulting in detailed information.

The collection of testimonies of the several actors involved in the production of street art in Lisbon, in the form of semi-directive interviews, was a valuable moment in the field work. The amount of information obtained through these extensive interviews was considerable, allowing the researcher to clear their research doubts and to dissipate assumptions held prior to the field work, as well as to determine the future directions for the research.

Therefore, interviews were conducted with two sets of actors: on the one hand, who creates street art, that is, the artists in their diverse profiles; on the other hand, who produces it, that is, actors connected with associations and collectives that promote street art in legal contexts, as well as the municipal institution through Galeria de Arte Urbana.

Testimonies were, therefore, collected from a significant group of street artists, which allowed the researcher to trace their individual – and diverse – paths in the construction of an artistic career, to understand their perceptions of street art, and how its growing visibility is interpreted and sometimes taken as strategic by artists in the building of their career. On the other hand, the interviews with the actors involved in the production of street art, namely members of associations, organizers of events and institutional representatives, allowed an understanding of how these mediating agents position themselves in the field of street art, and how they represent the role street art might have in the construction of public space in a contemporary and global urban context. Another aspect of the methodological approach for this research is the one that concerns the collection of media data. The researcher's attention to the several entities and artists making or promoting street art in Lisbon allowed her to be aware of the events, initiatives, inaugurations, exhibitions and interventions throughout the city.

Therefore this was an invaluable way of finding moments for the observation of these initiatives, which also demonstrated the intense activity around street art-related activities – concerning the period between 2010 and 2014.

In a first moment of familiarization with the subject, it was particularly relevant to explore websites that could show what was being currently done in terms of street art, and also who was doing it. Reference to magazines about street art was also important, such as the collection of online articles, in this early familiarization. Some of these articles soon revealed a media trend about street art, namely the “rankings” of the “best cities to watch street art.” This stimulated a reflection on how street art could be accredited with a role in media constructions for the marketing of cities. Another aspect to emphasize derives from the preponderance of articles about Banksy that were noticed, which contributed to a reflection about the role of media ability for some street artists, and how the choice for anonymity, or the use of a personal name or a street name, is a very eloquent aspect of how the artist conceives his or her construction of an artistic career.

The Portuguese press was also an important resource, both online and in print form. This was not only a complementary way of taking notice of the several initiatives, but also a way of being aware of the impact that street art has on the media.

### **5. Creating routes through Lisbon's street art: a methodological approach**

Aside from the media resources collected and the group of interviews conducted, there were other processes of data collection for this research project: The collection of visual data and the keeping of a field diary were also important aspects of the field work.<sup>3</sup>

Recording annotations, questionings and interrogations that the observation suggested to the researcher, the field diary proved to be a valuable resource, particularly in the moments of indecision between several possible directions for the research route. These notes also included the first impressions and spontaneous thoughts that the moments of observation of moments of street art pieces – completed or in the process of making - suggested to the researcher, concerning the pieces, the artists or the reactions of the passers-by, for instances.

Throughout the initial stages of the field work, the option to make routes through the streets of the city with the purpose of observing became obvious, assuming the public space as a central element to this research.

The act of walking through the city, as a methodological approach, was pointed out by João Teixeira Lopes (2008; 2013) as it allowing allows one to trace a proximity portrait of the city, and as it permits the researcher to observe it from within, through her senses. This is the core of the methodology of the walker, (Lopes, 2008 e 2013), in which the act of walking through the streets of the city summons the reflexive thought, creating “«practical poetics of the space»” and corresponding to an intensive learning process in what concerns the interaction in urban public space – simultaneously, that which observes and integrates ephemeral communities, in his/her encounters with others (Teixeira Lopes, 2008).<sup>1</sup> op.cit.). Hence, it is important to highlight the considerable amount of learning potential through the observation that is stimulated by the incursions of the researcher within urban space, as it allows him/her to unravel an analytical process

of the elaboration of relations between the several aspects of the research object.

This methodology of the walker became an essential methodological approach for this research. In order to comprehend the visual specificity of this research context, the street art of Lisbon, several incursions through the streets of the city were necessary.

Walking through these streets, in order allowed the researcher to observe street art pieces of which that the researcher she either already knew about – from word-to-mouth, or having seen images in the internet, magazines or newspapers – or didn't had been previously unaware of, in which case she intended to find out. .

There was not the intention of following a random order in these routes, but of trying, non-exhaustively, to cover several areas of the city of Lisbon. From these routes resulted hundreds of photographs that constitute an invaluable part of the visual data collected, as they document the observed production of street art in this city, in its expressive diversity and contexts of production.

It is also important to emphasize the several moments in which the researcher could observe the elaboration of street art interventions, namely in programmed contexts.

These moments of observation happened either by mere chance, or because the researcher had been informed, through social media or through the very artists involved.

These were naturally very rich in terms of the information that they provided for the research, in what concerns the different techniques of making street art, their specific use, the craft of creating an artistic intervention, and also, interestingly, the interactions and the momentary sociabilities that take place within the moment of the intervention, between the street artists, the passers-by and the observers.

Another observation concerns how the space surrounding the street art intervention can be momentarily transformed, namely through the placing of objects or grids, and how this creates situations that somehow resemble a stage, delimiting the space of the artist and the public that observes what is, in fact, a strongly performative situation. Equally interesting was to note that some of these intervention moments might attract media attention, with photographers and interviews for magazines or online publications, for example. This suggests a reflection about the multidimensionality of an ob-

ject that assumes forms of expressive and artistic intervention in the public space that can be illegal and spontaneous, but can also be performative, fully exposed to the look gaze of the passers-by.

## 6. Conclusion

Street art involves a diversity of circuits with a diversity of protagonists that constitute key -elements into the production and practices of street art in Lisbon. Therefore, the researcher opted to trace a topography, not only of that included, but was not limited to, the perceptions and representations of each of the different actors involved – the street artists, the producers, and/or the institutions and entities involved. The mapping of these inter-relations became the starting point for to understanding the process of social construction of public space (Low, 2014) through street art in the urban context of Lisbon.

As a final thought, it can be said that theThe role of the researcher while discovering this particular art world (Becker, 2010) was one of observing the circumstances, people, places, and meanings that contextualized and interacted with the object (Costa, 2001), in order to unveil the complexity of the processes that underlie the production of street art in Lisbon, as well as its actors.

A multi-methodological approach, including interviews and a vast set of visual and bibliographic resources, was a complement to the development of an intensive period of field work, in which several moments of observations, the creation of a field log, and the creation development of walking routes were crucial aspects to the understanding and conceptualizing this object – . pParticularly, how street art, as an artistic expression in the public space of the city, can be expressive of appropriations, uses of space, processes of transgression and legitimation, and also dynamics of identity and memory.

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## Notes

1 - This article results from a research funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, with reference FCT SFRH/BD/82506/2011

2 - OSGEMEOS: Pra Quem Mora Lá, O Céu é Lá, Centro Cultural de Belém, from 17/05 to 19/09/2010; Alexandre Farto aka Vhils: Dissection, Museu da Electricidade, from 05/07 to 05/10/2014.

3 - For the visual diary, a competent photo camera – although technically unambitious - was an indispensable item for the researcher. The field diary took the format of a notebook, another presence in the “field work kit.”

4 - Loosely translated from the portuguese «metodologia do andante».

This article had changes made in the copy editing process.



## Modes of Spatial Exploration in Berlin: Collaborating with Knut Eckstein on Subverting the City<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article primarily investigates the city of Berlin on two levels: as a totalizing vision in which a specific perspective of urban space is imagined and built into the city and as a layered and disparate space in which urban objects are catalysts for associative narratives for rethinking the urban environment. It concentrates on two primary areas of Berlin: the Kulturforum and Bebelplatz. Looking to a creative experience of the city, the author collaborates with the artist Knut Eckstein to explore the idea of subversive space based on a performative transgression of barriers in architecture.*

**Keywords:** Berlin; Subversive space; Dérive; Spatialization; Art and architecture; Postwar modernism

Linking the city to the concept never makes them identical, but it plays on their progressive symbiosis: to plan a city is both to think the very plurality of the real and to make that way of thinking the plural effective; it is to know how to articulate it and be able to do it (Michel de Certeau, 1984: 56).

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way around the city, as one loses one's way in a forest requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks (Walter Benjamin, 2006: 54).

### Potential Labyrinths

Walter Benjamin wrote of a getting lost in the city – in Berlin at the start of the twentieth century – as an art in which one must be schooled. This essay turns to Berlin today in an attempt to get lost in familiar places. These are sites that have been planned as cultural centers in Berlin at different points in the city's history, but which have lost their focus through

Berlin's spatial-temporal fragmentation. In one location, the area around the Kulturforum, the space is transitional in nature, it is comprised by the Berlin Philharmonic, various museums and cultural institutions and the State Library, but doesn't appear as a destination, place of respite or interest. Rather, it is an open urban landscape seen on the way to somewhere else. Still, in its initial conception, it was meant to be a cultural anchor of West Berlin. Drawing on plans by Hans Scharoun from 1946-57, it was to counter the regularity and denseness of the nineteenth century city with an irregular urban landscape (Enke et al., 1999). Since Reunification, the project has forfeited its place of status and no longer fits into an articulated urban ensemble. The other site, however, should stage a spatial-visual experience of Berlin, as will be later articulated. Bebelplatz runs along Unter den Linden, arguably Berlin's most famous street and the one that led to the Stadtschloß (Berlin City Palace), now under reconstruction. It is framed by the Staatsoper (State Opera) and was the site of the 1933 book burning and currently remains constricted by long-running renovations on the opera house.

As both spaces are highly visible, there is a strong tendency to contain them within conventions of seeing and to project

intended urban meanings onto them. While it would not be possible to physically get lost in either the Kulturforum area or Bebelplatz, I asked the artist Knut Eckstein to engage with me in a labyrinth of associations in exploring them in August 2014. Berlin does exist as a plurality of ideas on the planning level. It has been and is still constantly being thought and re-thought and its urban fabric can reveal the condensation of representations. In the 1990s, for example, the question as to the representation of the new Potsdamer Platz was posed and presented the challenge of inserting a new square into an historical and historically charged space (Ladd, 1997). Much of the attraction of the original Potsdamer Platz was due the “unplanned liveliness” of the ensemble, which was then extinguished through the developments of National Socialism, the effects of World War II and the Cold War (Ladd, 1997: 121).

Brian Ladd (1997: 1) describes Berlin as a haunted city in which memories “often cleave to the physical settings of events” and the buildings and places have many stories to tell. New projects, therefore, are condensations between old and new and point simultaneously to the past and the future. The pasts to draw from, however, are diverse and the plurality of the metropolis is often faced with the simplification of complex trajectories into a seemingly coherent urban image. In this paper the city is opened up as a train of associations in which the experience of the city may be situated between outer conditions and a playful engagement with them, allowing for unseen but present meanings to be brought into focus. This line of thought is informed by object relations theory and the ideas of Donald Winnicott (2005) of experience as a creative act in which the object of experience may be both materially present and created by the subject. Experience lies in a gulf between subject and object in a potential space in which the line between self and other is blurred. Understanding this transitional aspect of space allows for potential meanings to be brought into focus.

Urban experience may be situated in a potential space in which the city is an imagined site for the projection of new architectures and urban ensembles, as alternative models contrasting or negating the present forms of the city. The potential city is also a collection of objects internalized and entering into new constellations. Christopher Bollas (1992) speaks of a dream-like relationship with objects where an in-

termediate space is entered into and in which the subject is inhabited by inner constellations of psychic realities, so that while objects are fantastically charged, the experience of the subject is simultaneously fueled by outer reality. Thinking of the city in terms of a potential or intermediate space allows for it to be opened up to otherwise invisible trajectories so that the real in its totality is negated by what could be, what was, and what is present, but unarticulated.

In *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, Jane Rendell (2006) investigates the intermedial and engages with it as a methodology of spatial practice in which critical relationships of time, space and the social are emphasized. Approaching art and architecture through critical spatial practice, new interdisciplinary points of contact are established. In discussing walking as spatial practice, Rendell (2006: 188) suggests that, “The spatial story acts as a theoretical device that allows us to understand the urban fabric in terms of narrative relationships between spaces, times and subjects.” Walking can thus be understood as a thought process in which relationships between objects both present, covered over, and absent are continually being activated and re-thought by the subject. While such narratives may be idiosyncratic in nature, Bollas refers to spatialization as “the unconscious development of space according to the evolution of any city” and defines “interspatial relations” as the “psychology of spaces as they relate to one another” (Bollas, 2009: 205-227; 216-217). Sites evoke dreamlike convergences of motifs that are juxtaposed with one other in the subject’s movement through space. Free from normal sense-making constraints, unexpected arrangements may be created. Urban sites may prompt a reflection to another time, or to figures germane to them. In this sense, dreamlike engagement with the public sphere could call into focus issues of social relevance.

Referencing Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre and the phenomenon of the nineteenth century flâneur, Sophie Wolfrum (2008) underlines the performative and productive aspects of such spatializing arrangements. Space is the productive medium of lived social dynamics, and therefore contingent upon an interactive subject. That is, sites are not only idiosyncratically charged, but are situated in a social chain of associations. The Situationist International practiced engagement with the social psychological nature of space

as an investigative method (Wolfrum, 2008). In reflectively walking through the city, a critical art practice advanced by the Situationists, objects of the city may be rearranged to think their various configurations in terms of what normally remains invisible. As Wolfrum notes, the Situationist investigations of urban space did not – for the most part – result in artistic urban interventions. She, however, calls for an active engagement in the city through artistic-performative means to return space to the cultural memory of an urban society. In the following, Berlin will be considered in terms of its interspatiality, as sites as potential spaces activated in drifting through them. Berlin will not only be re-imagined in terms of a critical and subversive thinking of the city, but the labyrinth of the potential city will be considered. Further, in collaboratively thinking about the city with Knut Eckstein, artistic practice will be presented as a means of urban investigation on a speculative level.

### The Space of Kulturforum

Walking through the city of Berlin along Potsdamer Street onto the Kulturforum one encounters a bleak space, currently (August 2014) signed as space with the graffiti “Raum” – space – sprayed on a rusted steel plate on the concrete bank of the forum square. The open area stretching from Hans Scharoun’s Berlin Philharmonie (1963) to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s New National Gallery has been conceived of in many different ways.

This ensemble of cultural institutions was intended to counter the Berlin Museum Island containing the Old National Gallery, which was included in the Soviet sector of the city. Potsdamer Platz, once one of the busiest commercial centers in Europe, lies just north of the Kulturforum and became one of the most prominent symbols of the city’s division, as it remained a vacant, desolate territory. The once vibrant center was divided by the Berlin Wall and was a “no-man’s land” until the opening up of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German Reunification in 1990. It then remained a contested site for some time afterwards due to a shift towards the previous center – literally called Mitte, or the center – and a desire to rebuild Potsdamer Platz into an active urban nucleus, also encompassing a shift away from the Kulturforum.

Potsdamer Platz is today a business and entertainment district, often identified with Berlin’s annual film festival, the Ber-

linale and the Sony Center (Helmut Jahn, 1998-2000), one of the key festival cinemas and an evocative visitor destination. The area has become a collection of high-rises conveying different urban concepts. The high-tech glass aesthetic of Sony Center, for instance, is strongly contrasted by the historicizing eclecticism of the brick-clad Kollhoff Tower (Hans Kollhoff, 1994-1999) diagonally across from Sony Center. And while Hans Scharoun’s (1967-68) Staatsbibliothek (State Library) once looked out over the void surrounding the Berlin wall, it now abuts the back of Renzo Piano’s Theater am Potsdamer Platz (finished 1998). The Staatsbibliothek once stood as a border of the Kulturforum, separating it off from the emptiness of the bombed-out Potsdamer Platz. Now the Staatsbibliothek and Theater am Potsdamer Platz appear to turn their backs on each other. As Potsdamer Platz has been re-designed and transformed into a tourist destination, the Kulturforum appears neglected. Furthermore, as an emphasis has been placed on the restoration and re-conceptualization of the museums of the Museumsinsel in Mitte, in the former Soviet sector, the purpose of the Kulturforum has been called into question.

The forum was planned by Scharoun in the 1960s as a type of Stadtkrone (City Crown) in which a utopian concentration of art and culture should evolve (Bernau, 2014). It was designed according to the ideal of an open and automobile-orientated urban space. Today the elements of the Kulturforum stand in isolation to each other, and as an automobile-orientated space, it may not seem a place, as Nikolaus Bernauer (2014) notes, congenial to the flâneur. Concepts of what the Kulturforum should be continue to be formulated and debated, so that the utopian ideals of the Kulturforum sharply diverge from what the forum currently is and has been. And a type of potentiality transpires from this discrepancy between the lived and the envisioned space, which is characteristic of the city of Berlin and which speaks to the nature of space, as a movement between the phenomenal situation and a field of ideas and images.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984: 92) writes, “The desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it.” The perspectival image of the city allowed for a vision of it that at the time of its inception remained a fiction. De Certeau understands the drive to see the city as image – scopic drive as totalizing. Urban complexity is simplified, but “Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness

that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible" (de Certeau, 1984: 93). The space of the Kulturforum does as yet escape any totalizing vision as its evocative, but disparate elements (Neue Nationagalerie, Philharmonie, Gemäldegalerie, etc.) do not correlate into a unified vision. "Raum" graffitied onto a rusty steel girder separating the Matthäi-Kirchplatz – a park-like setting of the forum – from the sidewalk further emphasizes its disparate character. Stone and metal sculptures are scattered around the sparse and seldom-visited park area. But "Raum", meaning space, invites the recipient to see and experience the open and non-spectacular space of the setting. Once reflected upon, the site becomes a series of discoveries, which the visitor is allowed to investigate on his/her own. The unassuming Gemäldegalerie, for example, houses one of Europe's premier but infrequently visited painting collections. Sloping upwards from Matthäi-Kirchplatz, the extensive terrace leading into the museum complex (designed by Hilmer & Sattler und Albrecht, 1998) obscures the interior volume. While the terrace incline may seem inhospitable to the museum guest, it was once frequented by skateboarders who appreciated the multiple levels and open space, but are now kept out through newly installed barriers, prohibiting this impermissible activity.

### **The Tension of Creative Space**

Spray painting and skateboarding utilize the forum in a non-intended and non-sanctioned manner. Discussing risk, public space and skateboarding, Iain Borden (2008: 154-158) sees skateboarding as a means of creating tension in public space:

For example, skateboarding implies that architecture can be micro-spaces and not just grand monuments, that we can produce not only things and objects but also desires and energies, that public space is for use rather than exchange, that one should use the public realm regardless of who one is or what one owns, and that the way we use public space is an essential factor of who we are.

Non-intentional use of space creates a tension, as well as a sense of playfulness and discovery. In discussing image and movement in cinema, Gilles Deleuze (2008: 163) speaks of the "power of the false" as thinking that which is not thought, or seeing that which is not seen through disturbance. Irri-

tation as a juxtaposition of heightened artificialities may perform an inducement to thinking. In the urban environment, the dissonance of spatial trajectories often contains a potentiality for experiencing beyond an exchange-value based vision. Art production as creative activity can involve a practice of space in such a potential sense. Potential space, understood in reference to Donald Winnicott (2005) lies between illusion and reality, between subjectivity and objectivity. It is a type of playing in that the creative dimension of forming the object world is accentuated and the subject is the creator of the objects, just as much as the objects exist in and of themselves.

### **Installation as détournement**

Following in this direction, I would like to turn from urban space to art production based on a constructive understanding of ephemeral and base materials in the art of Knut Eckstein and then return with him in looking at the city as a potential and creative space. Bringing out the potentiality of space in his work, the Berlin-based artist Knut Eckstein disturbs the totalizing formulation of spatial-visual orders, especially in terms of how the public realm is conceived. In 2009, I collaborated with the artist in working on an exhibition thematizing public space in Giessen, Germany.<sup>2</sup> We asked him to contribute a work that would facilitate open debate and reflection upon public space in the exhibition zwölfteinhalb (twelve and one half). Knut Eckstein produced spatial elements out of wood-supported cardboard boxes, covered over with car-paint. The main structure was a raft-like platform that visitors could sit on during talks, or which podium discussions could be held on. While functioning as a meeting place, the object is also a representation of urban collectivity. It recalls the improvised kinds of meeting places found in the city where found objects can be occupied and transformed into makeshift gathering spots.

Cardboard boxes are a constant throughout Knut Eckstein's work. Cardboard is a material synonymous with market culture and the transport of goods. The modular disposable cube forms embody a type of transience representational of contemporary living. Signs and images are also interspersed in these constructions. The artist titled the Giessen project *détournement* in reference to the Situationist technique of

taking elements from commercial culture, subverting and simultaneously engaging with them in another context (Sadler, 1988). Elements of the entertainment industry appear in détournement, for example as advertisements and film announcements attached to cardboard steel. Kino (Cinema) written in cable-light was hung from the ceiling at the entrance of the exhibition, suggesting that the ensemble could function as a theater, a place of spectacle, which it did on one occasion. But whereas commercial signs entice us to consume based on monetary exchange value, détournement invited the visitor to communicate in a social setting and to playfully engage with each other in using the space. In researching for the exhibition, the artist spoke with the university students regarding the history of the 1968 protests in Gießen, a city known for a certain leftist tendency. The theme of protest and finding a collective space had become very topical with the threat of tuition fees and cuts to the university's budget, bringing students to protest in the Hessian state capital Wiesbaden.

Communicating in a non-profitable sense and proposing the idea of a collective space could be regarded as further qualities of the subversive and I think this is an aspect brought out in Knut Eckstein's constructions: imaginative interspatial communication. But I have asked him to insert his own thoughts here on the notion of disobedience, urban space and his work. We will take this collaboration as a point of departure for further exploring and reflecting upon public space in Berlin.

Knut Eckstein Speaking on the Strategy of the Provisional<sup>3</sup>  
I started thinking about the installation for Giessen from the perspective of the importance of the 68' student protests that occurred in this small university city that lacks any other comparable big event to commemorate. The first footage images I found on the web displayed an organization of meetings in public space that can be formulated as a (re) action of civil disobedience. The demonstrators were even using signs and signals that are forbidden in public (e.g. the Swastika) to protest against the so-called leading class opinion and power. This led to the contribution of an installation piece that fits the needs of meeting and discussing in public at an exhibition hall. Insisting on the importance of entering the artwork, sitting on it, thus recalls "sit-ins" from the 60s to make it work as a critical platform for thought and meaning. Making the surface like liquid and moldy, like scratched and

tagged through the use of high-gloss car paint and other materials, I tried to get the user intrigued and disgusted at the same moment and to make him/her become aware that a user of the space has to possibly overcome his/her own borders to make a conscious decision of thinking differently. Also to be inside or invited to a communicative open space, to commemorate the city itself in the installation, I also used the cable-light sign at the entrance of the exhibition reading "Kino" from its backside.

To me it's important to transform a given formation of ground/ space or meaning in a way to work out new content beyond its legalized understanding.

Ephemeral materials, velocity and rawness get almost no common allowance in public, but point out the moment of transgression and transition into new orders, rules or alignment. Searching for borders to destabilize, views to shift, rules to scrutinize or to question, in 2002 I set up a temporary large scale rope-light sign and deliberately vague cardboard box installation on a scaffolding beam marking the entrance to a big construction site for a future fun park called spacepark. The signified corporate identity confused the viewer in its layout and presentation and led to questioning the whole site.

The fun park actually closed down again after only 3 months of operating.

2010: After being invited to the show 'open light in private space', I decided to alter a space implicitly private (a small garden house) into a refreshment stand. Its deliberately provisional sign of one of the best internationally known beverages brand hung free floating over the rooftop of the hut inviting the viewer to enter and use an oversized commercial vending machine inside the small hut to get a self-labeled beverage from the above mentioned brand subverting its image and philosophy.

2012, Budapest: I set up a high bamboo scaffolding hung on the façade of a contemporary 5-story building displaying the multilayered logo of one of the biggest oil companies in the world and an accompanying double yellowish red star that is illegal in Hungary at the moment if it is displayed in red. This conveys a reading of corporate identities in ambiguous ways when connected to historical facts of both German and Hungarian history.



In the same way, a comparably small work brandsatz (brand or fire and sentence) from 2012, material: cable-light, bamboo, wire, 8 x 3 x 2 m, consults the role of signifier and signified in its title and visualization.

### **Collaborative Drifting at Bebelplatz**

Knut Eckstein's installations are curiously juxtaposed into given situations. They draw from their environments, re-arranging textual, visual and structural materials to stimulate alternative, but site-inherent modes of communication. In considering how a critically artistic approach to space could broaden conventional modi of perception, we questioned the role that signs play in charging spaces with content. We propose that a subversively playful approach to the built environment can detour meaning systems and open it up to thinking in terms of the provisional in which potential associations are brought into focus. Employing the method of the *dérive*, or the drift, the Situationists wandered about the city letting themselves be led by ambiances, discovering socio-psychological relations, often the result of unintended arrangements (Sadler, 1998). Exploring Berlin, we were drawn to a counterpole to Potsdamer Platz: Bebelplatz on Unter den Linden. Like Potsdamer Platz, it is intended to be a representational area, which is currently in a state of transition. Also known as the Forum Fredericianum, it evolved as a realization of King Frederick II's (Frederick the Great's) plans for a cultural center and consisted of the Royal Opera House (today the State Opera House), St. Hedwig's Cathedral, the Royal Library (today a part of the Humboldt University) and the Prince Heinrich Palais (today the main building of Humboldt University) (Böhne and Schmidt, 2000). It represented Prussian Berlin as a cultural center and as a place of tolerance (the Catholic cathedral in the Protestant kingdom) and was later transformed into a site of intolerance when National Socialist students burnt the books of hundreds of writers, publicists, philosophers and scientists on May 10, 1933 (Roth and Frajman, 1999). The event is now remembered through the memorial Bibliothek (Library, 1995) by the Israeli artist Micha Ullman and a plaque with a quote by the German-Jewish writer Heinrich Heine (1820), "That was only a prelude, there where they burn books, in the end they burn people." Bibliothek is easily overlooked as it consists of an underground and empty library – empty white bookshelves

– that can only be viewed through a glass plate, which often more reflects back those looking into it. Following World War II, the ensemble became part of the Soviet Sector and was renamed Bebelplatz in 1947 after August Bebel, a co-founder of the Social Democratic Party and publicist (Böhne and Schmidt, 2000).

Bebelplatz is thus another site of layered and conflicted histories, and is momentarily dominated by large construction containers used for the extensive and long renovations of the State Opera House. A main signifier of the area's history, a statue of Frederick the Great, is now covered with scaffolding, transforming it into a type of playground object. What interested us in the area was not in fact its representational character, but a new level of meaning which it momentarily calls up through the containers and graffiti on the large clock in the square reading "refugees welcome" and "§ 23 Bleiberecht." Paragraph 23 refers to the "right of residency" for those seeking asylum for humanitarian reasons, which has been a very current theme throughout Europe with debates taking place on the rights of asylum seekers and also on the problem of appropriate housing for the refugees.

Since ideal views of Bebelplatz are now obscured by the building containers and scaffolding, images of opera performances are being displayed around the construction area and remind the visitor that this is in fact the site of the famous opera house. This is a cogent contrast, as the construction objects also recall elements of makeshift dwellings, again calling into consciousness a current need for socially functioning spaces and not just representational ones. Groups of tourists are guided through the square and told how to comprehend it, as its importance is not so readily apparent. There is a tension between how the area should be, how it now is, and how it could be. The subversiveness is a potentiality inherent in the urban ensemble - as its objects now (provisionally) relate to each other - that hijacks the vision of the space through an insertion of an opposed and imagined spatial experience. The current transitory character points both to an ideal future vision of the square, while also allowing for critical reflection on the use and purpose of public spaces. Questions arise as to whom they are designed for, how such spaces can truly express a sense of inclusion, and how they can facilitate meaningful discourses. Inserted into historically and culturally charged sites, the phrases "refu-

gees welcome,” “§ 23 Bleiberecht” and “Raum” slip through the cracks of staged spatial images, recalling the uniqueness of the present spatial conditions. Subversive signs and acts, coupled together with the contingent provisional states they are now in, transform many of Berlin’s public areas into potential spaces for thinking of the city differently.

## Conclusion

With the opening up of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and with German Reunification in 1990, Berlin began a process of transformation in which past and forgotten associations resurfaced and new ones were posited. Not only did repressed and neglected memories reemerge, but other histories were abased, such as with the destruction of the Palace of the Republic to be replaced by an attenuated modern reconstruction of the City Palace of Berlin (Berliner Stadtschloss). Potsdamer Platz recalls urban leitmotifs, such as early twentieth century Chicago, rather than just the prewar ensemble. The city remains a kaleidoscope of contrasting spatial-temporal arrangements. Into what coherent form the city shall develop remains in question. Its still present transitional character is in fact the source of its evocative draw. Out of this complexity emerges an increasing drive to unify Berlin’s urban visions, yet the city still offers the possibility for creative engagement. Such a rethinking has been proposed here in terms of a suggestive expansion of sites which the recipient is called to self-consciously engage with and create. Artistic production has been understood as the playful production of space in which normative spatial arrangements are corrupted to give voice to a type of social dreaming. Public sites thus can be potentially produced in the activity of interspatial thinking.

## Notes

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2 This was part of a series of exhibitions titled Kunstgeschichte und zeitgenössische Kunst – Art History and Contemporary Art – organized by Prof. Marcel Baumgartner and the Institute of Art History at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen together with the Neuer Kunstverein Gießen under the directorship of Markus Lepper. Available at: <http://www.giessen-tourismus.de/de/termine-tickets/ausstellungen/269/>

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3 The following section encompasses remarks by Knut Eckstein from September 2014 regarding his work as a subversion of normative spatial experiences.

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Figure 1: Kulturforum with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie



Figure 2: View of Potsdamer Platz from Kulturforum with Sony Center and the Kollhoff Tower





Figure 3: Knut Eckstein, spacepark, logosign and box accumulation, 2002



Figure 4: Knut Eckstein, 'unsicheres terrain (on a shaky ground), Budapest, 2012



Figure 5: Bebelplatz with construction containers



Figure 6: Clock with refugees welcome graffiti at Bebelplatz



## The dialectics of graffiti studies a personal record of documenting and publishing on graffiti since 1988

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### Abstract

*There is an abundance of books, magazines, films and internet-forums dedicated to graffiti. How this documentation has influenced and been a part of the graffiti subculture has not been studied much. Drawing on personal experiences, as a documentarian and publisher of graffiti media over 27 years, Malcolm Jacobson recollects how the positions of participant and observer incessantly have twisted around each other. This has been mediated through development in media technology as well as by the coming of age of graffiti and its practitioners.*

**Keywords:** Graffiti, publishing, professionalization, subculture, participant observer, insider/outsider

As a photographer and publicist, I have seen how the documentation of graffiti has shaped graffiti practices in a dialectical process. Since 1988, I have been a part of this, and I will here reflect on how these dialectics have changed over time. Since my space is limited, I will build my case on personal, first hand, experience. I suggest that this can be developed in future analysis of empirical data.

My earliest recollection of graffiti is when I as a child visited a pizzeria with my babysitter. On the television mounted on the pizzeria wall, a story was aired about youths painting the subway trains of New York. The creativity and energy that the graffiti writers brought about was paired with an intrinsic mix of individuality and community. This inspired me. I was eleven years old and started sketching graffiti letters and even wrote some signatures in the subway. However, my interest faded because I didn't find any graffiti community or graffiti writings in my neighborhood at this time. Years later, I found out it was the documentary *Style Wars* (Chalfant and Silver, 1983) that had been aired on one on Sweden's then two national television channels that Friday evening in September 1984, thus making a nation wide impact.

In 1987, I became fully aware of the significance of *Style Wars*, in addition to a few other depictions of graffiti from

New York. By then this had made a huge imprint on teenagers from distant parts of Stockholm who had built an informal network using the city's subway and commuter system. Even if there was a significant amount of graffiti in Stockholm by 1987, the amount of publications on both foreign and local graffiti was sparse. The increased amount of graffiti in Sweden was reflected in a mass media coverage characterized by moral panic (Hannerz and Kimvall, 2015). My friend Tobias Barenthin Lindblad and I were rookies, or (according to the graffiti vernacular that we studied in the few American books available) we were toys. Since we hadn't established respected positions within graffiti culture, we were also, to a large extent, cut out of the informal information flow.

Despite our inexperience, we had an SLR camera each, which benefited us greatly as we started producing our own information on contemporary graffiti. The photo quality produced with our cameras also caught the interest of well-established writers. Like many other kids we would watch out the windows of subway and commuter trains and where we saw a lot of graffiti, we would walk back along the tracks to study and document it. Our travels took us to parts of Stockholm and other cities across Europe we had never visited before (and probably never would have if it wasn't for graffiti). Initially these photos were used for personal inspira-

tion, but eventually our self-imposed vocation would lead us to professional careers in photography and publishing. We found that graffiti culture is very welcoming as long as you are willing to prove your sincere commitment through hard work, usually through intensive bombing or a mastery of style painting (e.g. Barenthin Lindblad and Jacobson, 2011). Nonetheless, our commitment principally materialized itself in printed matter as opposed to paintings on walls.

There have been considerable changes in the available type and amount of published information since I began documenting graffiti in 1988. I suggest a conceptualization of the dialectic relation between graffiti and publishing in four stages. These are theoretical ideal type constructions that will overlap in real life. Each new stage does not supersede the previous stages, rather it adds to them.<sup>1</sup>

1. Outside observers – approx. from 1968
2. Self-publishing – approx. from 1990
3. Subcultural professionalization – approx. from 2000
4. Social media – approx. from 2005

I will concentrate on the first three stages since these are the ones I have had most experience of. I will then conclude with some brief reflections on the current fourth stage. I will discuss the stages in the perspectives of technique, participant and observer positions, as well as information flow and control. This can further be related to perceived and constructed audience and social borders, age, power, economics, informal learning processes, and several other aspects that I will only be able to foreshadow.

### **1. Outside observers and local graffiti writers**

Like most youths outside of New York who were interested in graffiti in the 80's, I devoured everything I could find out about it. That consisted of about five books, a few record covers, a few movies, out of which a couple circulated on poor VHS copies, and occasional music videos one might happen to see blaring on a TV at some random fast food restaurant. The limited number of publications made my friends and I quite indifferent of genre boundaries. We didn't make much distinction between a video on MTV or a book by a social anthropologist.

Typically at this stage in the dialectics between graffiti and publishing, there would be a big distance between the graffiti

writers and their observers. This was reflected in age, geography, time, and perspective of graffiti. But since the amount of information was limited these distances were bridged over by our strong demand for information. This is why we, as fifteen-year-old kids from Sweden and elsewhere, read *Getting Up* by Craig Castleman (1982), an American social science dissertation. What we didn't master in language, we learnt on the way. Us teens treated the available publications on graffiti like canonical documents. But due to distance, in all the aspects mentioned above, the information available did not quite correspond to our time and place. During the second half of the 1980's there was plenty of graffiti in Europe and elsewhere. By then youths were inspired by what they saw around them, rather than by documentations from New York (although these continued to play a significant role).

The limited and slow information cultivated local graffiti styles. It was possible for a trained graffiti connoisseur to recognize a particular style and tell which city (or part of a city) it originated from. Stockholm in the 80's distributed information on recent graffiti in the same way that New York had done in the 70's. In order to stay current, you had to get on the train tracks to actually see what had been painted or make the effort to meet people who were doing it. Tobias and I hadn't mastered graffiti style yet, nor did we have our names up in the streets or on the trains. But we were lucky to run into a graffiti writer that would show us around, and teach us the unwritten rules and codes: Jacob Kimvall who was a year older than us. He would eventually team up with us in our informal learning process as graffiti publicists.

In this stage, direct encounters with the walls of the city filled a cardinal function, i.e. to see which writers had style and were "up". In other terms, who manifested their commitment to the graffiti community. Complementary to this, the oral and visual subcultural information flow had links between many countries. At this time, information was treated like industry secrets, those who had photos of new styles from other cities and countries often kept them to themselves. Control over information gave a certain amount of power within local graffiti scenes.<sup>2</sup> This power is still exercised, for instance, some writers choose not to put their pieces online and occasionally even ask others not to publish their work, or to remove it from the Internet (Hannerz, unpublished).

## 2. Self-publishing and international network

In March 1992, I participated in publishing the first issue of Underground Productions (UP) in a print run of 320 black and white offset printed copies, together with Tobias Barenthin Lindblad, Jacob Kimvall and the graffiti writers Bonus and News. UP had an ambition: to give a true and just depiction of graffiti. This would complement what we perceived as a biased depiction of graffiti in general mass media and a lack of information about contemporary graffiti. We soon discovered that neither the editorial staff nor the readers always agreed on what this meant. Nonetheless our efforts were appreciated. Within the same year, two more issues were released in 1000 and 1500 copies.

We were teenagers without much knowledge of the printing industry. But the developing technique of desktop publishing made magazine design accessible for larger groups and spurred a rapidly increased quality of magazine publications, as well as raising the skill level and confidence of us publishers. By the mid 1990's, the number of graffiti magazines in Europe and elsewhere had increased significantly, and by then it was standard to print these magazines in full color.

Previous to this magazine boom, a hand full of people in graffiti scenes around the globe had felt the same urge as we to produce photos of graffiti in a systematic way, by travelling the train lines of their cities. In his dissertation, Jacob Kimvall (2014: 39) suggests within-subculture-documentarians to be labeled chroniclers. We were not simply documenting an existing reality, but rather participating in constructing graffiti as a phenomenon. Kimvall also points out that the practice of chronicling within graffiti is under-theorized.

These images and this network served as a foundation for the magazines that desktop publishing had facilitated. Many of us chroniclers traded photos over national borders and continents. This was an informal reciprocal economy where an equal exchange of photos was expected. These photos were required to have the same quality (concerning both photographic technique and style of the graffiti depicted); otherwise the established trade link would fade. In addition to trading photos the editorial staff at UP (initially meeting in my mother's apartment) was now sending boxes of magazines for international trade. We applied the same rules here: one magazine of equal quality against another. Soon we

were supplying open minded magazine stores and hip-hop clothing shops with dozens of different graffiti magazines from around the world. During the second half of the 1990's, self-published graffiti films were added.

These magazines become somewhat like national institutions and hubs in an international network. They offered international fame to writers that had been local heroes and increased the speed and spread of information. This also came with a wave of criticism that accused the magazines of not reflecting the scene in a correct manner. The classical debate within graffiti concerning the primacy of quantity or quality (with respect to placement and risk) was vivid at UP's editorial meetings. UP wouldn't usually print a full page of images depicting the same tag, even if that writer totally dominated a city. Pieces that would be interesting to study in detail were preferred.

Some writers argued that graffiti should be experienced first hand, without mediation or someone editing and controlling information flow. This is a noteworthy perspective but does not acknowledge that fame within graffiti was built from long ago by telling stories, narrating myths, and creating legends, a practice in which people always had different skills and positions.

This stage in self-publishing of graffiti media, in many respects, stood in opposition to the stage characterized by outside observers.<sup>3</sup> Compared to a few years earlier, the amount of information was abundant, the distance in time was shorter, the producers of the magazines came from within the graffiti culture and were the same age as other graffiti writers. The network of graffiti publishers bridged over long distances (Macdonald, 2001). But since these distances in the dimensions mentioned above were shorter, the feeling of global community and closeness was enhanced. Not before long, the increasing flow of information mitigated the aesthetic differences between various countries.

## 3. Subcultural professionalization

Grffiti magazines were typically produced by amateurs and were non-profit venues. At UP, we invested revenues in raising the quality and print run of the magazine. By 1994, the print run was 4000 and by 1995, after three years in business, the print run was 6000 copies, a considerable number for an art magazine published in a small country like Sweden.

What had started out as a hobby now looked much more like a profession. Along the way, we also had to learn sales and economics, but we still worked with this in our spare time. I had initiated a career as a freelance photographer and journalist, along with the publishing of magazines. In this line of business, I had participated in publishing several books. By 1996, I decided to publish a book on Swedish graffiti based on several years of documentation. This resulted in the book *They Call Us Vandals* (Jacobson, 2000) and a publishing house I then founded, Dokument Press (at first called Dokument förlag).

The staff of UP took an active role in distributing the book. In 2003, Dokument Press published its second book, *Overground*, which was edited by members of the UP editorial team. The network that had evolved between graffiti magazines was decisive in the distribution of books in Dokument Press's initial years when books on graffiti composed the principal publishing program.

Our professionalization again widened the gap between the ones producing magazines and the graffiti scene. As the amount of work increased and more economic considerations were taken in publishing decisions, "traditional" graffiti books eventually consisted of a smaller part of the publishing program. Among the editorial staff at UP, there has been a movement from the perspective of insider to observer that has increased over the course of twenty years. The last issue of UP was published in June 2012, twenty years after the first issue. Dokument Press was unable to spare time to work on the magazine (which had been a pro bono part of the publishing program) due to the workload with other publications.

The staff at UP is not an exception, many of the people that produced magazines and videos eventually used their acquired skills and network professionally as journalists, photographers, publishers, researchers, spray paint manufacturers and store owners. This should be discussed in relation to an increased professionalization among graffiti artists (e.g. Snyder, 2009).

Dokument Press and our professional careers might be described as cuckoos raised in the subcultural nest, finally pushing the subculture out. But that is only a relevant description if you believe subcultures do possess some kind of static authenticity. Rather we, as subcultural publishers, embrace all the roles and stages we have experienced. We

have matured, and so has graffiti. When Dokument Press published a book that Tobias Barenthin Lindblad edited with Martha Cooper's (2008) photos of early New York tags it was like we entered a wormhole that brought us back to the roots from which we had seasoned – Cooper's photos had been amongst the most inspiring in the few American books that had reached Sweden when we were kids.

#### 4. Social media – back to self-publishing

The last stage I have identified is the present situation and I will not develop this here, other than a few brief reflections in relation to the earlier stages. The regular publishing of graffiti magazines no longer fills the same purpose since the media landscape has shifted dramatically through the Internet and social media. This was reflected in lower demand for UP abroad and for foreign magazines in Sweden.

The institutional role that magazines and niche publishing houses took forced editors like us to function as gatekeepers deciding what to publish. Social media like Fotolog, Instagram, and Facebook do not have gatekeepers in that sense. Thus, the distance between the roles of documenting and painting graffiti has diminished. Today, lots of photos from the 1980's and 1990's by chroniclers who didn't become publishers earlier surface on Internet, intermingled with a torrent of contemporary graffiti.

At the same time the distance, in space and time, to the actual walls with paintings, has, in a sense, never been bigger. The need to actually travel and put yourself in front of a painted wall when it is still present has declined in opposite proportion to the increased publishing of graffiti. Still the symbolic power of site-specific graffiti is apparent and often reflected in the photos. Graffiti is still as much about context as style, something that Peter Bengtsen (2014) has discussed concerning street art.

What is less apparent in the torrent of images on the Internet is that the contemplative narration of stories has been pushed into the background in favor of a visual fragmentary flow. Here, I believe that we who have distanced ourselves from the subculture – but still are close to it in terms of experience – have a lot to offer, especially in theoretical perspectives. One topic to be studied in detail would be the dialectics of graffiti and documentation that I have sketched

above. The way I have discussed distance and closeness as well as participant and observer positions throughout this essay can be related to Georg Simmel's (1971 [1908]: 143-145) social type, "the stranger", an objective observer with a complicated relation to the community: "the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near."

Malcolm Jacobson is co-founder of the Swedish graffiti magazine Underground Productions (UP) and founder of Dokument Press, a leading international publisher on urban culture. Jacobson is currently graduate student in Sociology at Stockholm University.

More information on Dokument Press at [www.dokument.org](http://www.dokument.org) and Underground Productions at [www.upmag.se](http://www.upmag.se).

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