

Street Art: Perpetual Alteration

An essay exploring the current standing of Street art and Graffiti, how they are affected by contextual and social issues and how society and artists react to its ever-changing condition

Stephanie Bognar

3557049

Prof. Patrick van Rossem

Second Reader Prof. Hestia Bavelaar

MA (research) Art History of the Low Countries in its European Context

2012

Utrecht University

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the following individuals whom have given me invaluable information regarding the Street art and Graffiti field, and whom have dedicated part of their time and effort into answering my research questions and guiding me through my work.

The pioneering stencil artist, Hugo Kaagman – for allowing me to take up his time for an interview held at his studio at the Amsterdam RAI station. The owner of the artKitchen Gallery in Amsterdam, Janette Dekeukeleire – the supervisor of my nine month internship which has given me beneficial experience not only in the various roles and responsibilities a gallery must undertake but has also put me in touch with many well-known Street artists and given me an insight into the Dutch Street art scene. The owner of the Andenken Gallery in Amsterdam, Hyland Mathers, who discussed the issues of Graffiti with me. The UK Street artist, Phlegm – who obligingly answered several online interview questions, set by myself. The Sheffield-based Graffiti writers, Fista, Such-Des, and Mist One – whom sacrificed part of their free time to talk to me about their legal and illegal work. The New York Graffiti writer, Quik, who demonstrated to me the commercialist, ‘money-making’ aspect of his work. The prominent Dutch Street artist, IAMDOOM – who graciously spent his free time showing me the Graffiti and Street art locations in Eindhoven, such as the Graffiti ‘Hall of Fame’, and drawing my attention to the ‘*Step in the Arena*’ event. The author and Punk specialist, Leonor Jonker – who facilitated my research by talking to me about the topics covered in her book ‘*No Future Nu*’. And lastly to my friends and colleagues who have helped me immensely by sharing their opinions and taking the time to answer my questions. Their patience is greatly appreciated.

Contents

Part 1: Introduction	p. 4
1.1 Looking at ‘Art’.....	p. 4
1.2 Identifying Street Art.....	p. 9
Part 2: The Language of the Street	p. 16
2.1 Defining and Refining.....	p. 16
2.2 Comparison and Competition between Writers and Artists.....	p. 27
2.3 Categorisation and Confinement: The Difficulties Encountered by Galleries when Exhibiting Street Art.....	p. 37
2.4 Civic Attitude and Typification.....	p. 42
2.5 Attitudes and Advancements in the Present.....	p. 45
Part 3: Conceptual Theorems	p. 50
3.1 Street Art Theory and the Situationists.....	p. 50
3.2 Strategists vs. Tacticians.....	p. 59
Part 4: The Other Side of the Wall	p. 64
4.1 The Splasher Group.....	p. 64
4.2 Visual Resistance: Working <i>with</i> Capitalism <i>against</i> Capitalism.....	p. 70
4.3 Psychogeography.....	p. 72
4.4 Street Art Snackbar.....	p. 77
Part 5: Conclusion	p. 79
Bibliography	p. 85

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Looking at 'Art'

What is art; why should we value it; and what allows us to say that one work is better than another? Traditional answers have emphasized aesthetic form; but this has been challenged by Institutional definitions of art and postmodern critique.¹

The question of 'What is art?' is one of too broad a scope to be answered definitively and one which can over-reach across time as medium and methods change. The genre of Street art often pertains its definitive factors based on past historical movements which have not only shaped our idea of what art is but have also wrought the basis of the freedom of artistic expression for which Street art represents.

Today, the definition of art, in western society, can be arguably dated back in history to its first radical change of style and interpretation during the time of the early Modernists, who broke away from the academic and classical standards of image-making and began focusing their talents on depicting the modern world by means of realism and expression. Art became much more thought provoking and encompassed emotion and passion within the brush strokes and its content. A far cry from the fine-line and flawless style of painting practiced by the masters in the academy.

Art began to change. Now pieces that displayed style and content which opposed the delicate aesthetics and pain-staking skill of the academia were causing controversy and creating an emotive response within the viewer as they could now relate to the piece on their own terms, in reference to their own modern society and emotional state. Instead of having idyllic images of Venus and seraphs domineering upon them like the gods and warriors they often depicted, enforcing classical narratives of ancient Greece or Rome and displaying unblemished, youth and beauty.

This step away from classical imagery and seamless painting technique was the first in the chronology of modern art. Art was no longer only a display of artistic ability in creating unattainable aesthetic beauty, or a presentation of proficiency in re-creating the visual scene of genre or mythology, but now also openly reflected the artist's expression regarding societal issues. This caused a reaction within the viewer who, once they had gotten over the controversy of the radical change of style and antagonistic content began to accept it as 'art' because it stirred a feeling within them, whether it was a feeling of rage or relief.

¹ Crowther *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt*, 2007 (p.3)

Art also no longer depicted the artist's internally idealised representation of power and divine beauty, but was now taking an external perspective at the reality of the world and the often bitter impression it left on the artist, whose emotions and passions then would spill out onto the canvas both in abstract, emotive form, and by containing scenes of 'real life' from the artists depiction and perspective, therefore stimulating the internal sensations and feelings of the viewer.

Art was becoming a public commodity and was being used in a different way. It was no longer drawing attention to legendary heroism and divinity as an example of how people should live their lives and to what they should aspire. It focused on the events and people of modernity and how many *were* living their lives.

The particular modern genre of Street art often carries on this means of visual representation of the issues and the world around it, usually through a method of *dérive* as established by the Situationists and Dadaism. It's liberal nature and immediate execution enables its speedy progression in form and content, and given the indefinite period of its existence many of its images are hard-hitting and thought provoking and react with its immediate surroundings, and instantly creates a visual impact (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Banksy, 'Kissing Policemen', Brighton, UK.²

² Google Images

Banksy's *'Kissing Policemen'* was a controversial image addressing the issue of homosexuality within the police force which was a taboo subject upon its creation and an essentially embarrassing and outrageous image. Now, however, it has become a celebrated and iconic illustration of modernity and a famed, sought-after piece with many prints being sold and recreations inspired by the image, such as the Russian *'Kissing Policemen'* (fig. 2) which, like its predecessor, caused controversy and scandal amongst the Russian police force, resulting in the image being banned from entering a Parisian art fair.



Fig. 2 Blue Noses controversial depiction of *Kissing Policemen*, Moscow, 2007³

But what of the original piece by Banksy? It is no longer a litigious image. It has become an icon of the modern art age. The prints and canvas pieces being produced are turning this temporal piece into a permanent commodity. – A representation of itself. Does this mean that its original meaning has been diluted with each copy, to the point of being lost completely? This is possibly the case. But it is worth bearing in mind that it is also the issue which has lost its baring. The *'Kissing Policemen'* image was once a taboo subject with its contemporary audience. Just as modernism was once an unconventional art movement.

Since public opinions about Street art are formed at just a passing glance, its subject matter tends to be offensive, socially garish, and yet ultimately, eye-catching. These characteristics are what set it apart from static conventional art work. Street artists are required to produce visually complex works that will intrigue the average passer-by, as they can count only on that moment's peripheral glance to get attention, and, hopefully, to get someone to think about the

³ Harding *'No Paris trip for Russia's kissing policemen'* *The Guardian*, Oct. 2007

work. The art they create has to be culturally relevant – it is not intended for a specific audience but rather it is on display for anyone who sees it. Banksy's work is particularly satirical, using a tongue-in-cheek, visual humour which instantly engages the public's reaction. However, once the shock of the image has waned it becomes something of a commodity. It represents an image of contemporary issues and therefore an important historical piece and also one of monetary value. Also, the indefinite life-span for each piece before it becomes subject to Graffiti writers, clean-up projects, other artists and the weather, ensures that the pieces are relevant to the present – addressing *today's* issues and reacting to *today's* visual stimulus. If the piece lasts longer than the content's relevance to modernity, its preservation marks it as an important cultural and historical icon whose popularity will no doubt lead to commoditisation.

Through a variety of styles throughout history art has constantly been evoking the viewer's emotions on various levels, whether by creating a conceptual piece which causes the viewer to interact with the art on a contemplative level, or by blatant, yet thought-provoking, visual imagery creating a clear perspective on the subject, thus bringing the topic into question.

Since the doorway of human capacity for thought of self and society has been widened, the art world has exploded and the floodgates of imagination and originality have burst open. Now there were no holds barred on creativity. Everything had the excuse of calling itself 'Art'. Different movements have stemmed from this influx of opportunity such as Cubism, Surrealism, Dadaism, the Situationists, Pop art, etc. All of which have found new and often controversial ways of reflecting, mocking and questioning art, the individual and society in general.

If this style is original (in comparative historical terms) it can manifest that special kind of aesthetic unity which we call art. Appreciation of this involves a heightened interaction of capacities, such as imagination and understanding, which are basic to knowledge and personal identity. By negotiating these factors, it is possible to define art and its canonic dimensions objectively.⁴

The conceptual link between art's aesthetic value and epistemological and historical relations converge on an expanded notion of the artistic image – a notion which can even encompass music, abstract art, and some conceptual idioms. The image's style serves to interpret its subject-matter.

The surge of imaginative creativity from the early Modernists onwards, designed to encourage emotive and contemplative feeling about the world in one way or another, does not, however, answer the question of what art is. If it were visual stimulation alone which caused an emotive reaction in the viewer, then almost anything could be called art.

It is argued that the aesthetic is an integral part of the making and perception of representational artefacts. It is predominantly western culture which has developed this as a

⁴ Crowther *Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt*, 2007 (p.3)

specialist practice, so it is then argued further that such a pursuit has significantly developed the logical scope of art media.

If this development [of art media] is related to a comparative horizon of diachronic history, it is possible to establish the idea of a canon and to justify aesthetic judgements on an objective, Universalist basis.⁵

As we understand that a once radical change in medium, content and style, as most movements in art have often began, has canonised a turning-point in the chronology of how we understand or consider 'art', we must also understand that 'acceptance' and artistic categorisation is not an instantaneous occurrence but under-goes an arduous and lengthy process of change, adaptation and criticism until it becomes a commodity and possibly loses its relevance to the period which it was originally addressing.

Street art is one controversial art-form which has undergone an enormous number of criticisms, changes and representations – in style, content, context and categorisation – and which has endured both praise and censure by adapting itself to various situations via its stealthily skilful execution and its liberal nature.

What this research will focus on is the evolution of Street art as it continually expands and gains popularity within institutionalised and public realms, often dominating its Graffiti predecessor. – What new methods have been adapted? And how are they continually being manipulated in order to keep from stagnating and therefore maintain interest, popularity and relevance? And what are the authorities' reactions and attempts to control or possibly even quash this liberal movement?

An artistic movement... [Which] has now leapfrogged over the critical machinery of the art establishment to become one of the most popular manifestations of contemporary art... Will this popular success dilute its edge? Or create a high profile platform to advocate personal freedom, social change and an expansion of consciousness?⁶

This research will look at the factors which define Street art as separate from Graffiti, a modern concept which is often misunderstood but is greatly important for understanding the concept of Street art which is often vastly different from Graffiti. Unlike Graffiti, which has maintained a constant amongst public regard, Street art's development and increasing popularity have strengthened its societal status and gained notoriety amongst various institutions.

⁵ Crowther *'Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt'*, 2007 (p.34)

⁶ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *'Art in the Streets'* 2011, (p.15)

Using a variety of both first-hand and second-hand resources on the genre, in the form of texts and journals, video documentation, articles, visitations and investigations of current Street art and Graffiti events, and conducting interviews with authors of the field, gallery owners and practicing Street artists and Graffiti writers, as well as engaging public opinion from my peers, this research will try to approach the issue of commodification of Street art through looking at its history and its practices whilst addressing the attitudes imposed on urban art based on conventions and governmental recuperation, which attempts to capitalise on the Street art market. – What have been the governmental attempts at nullifying the impact on Street art and exploit these pieces? Are they an effort at preservation? Should a transitory art-work be preserved or left to face its own transient fate? How has this rush of interest in Street art affected Graffiti? And what is the Graffiti culture’s reaction to the growing populace?

Understanding the temporal nature of urban art I will look at how artists have addressed contemporary issues and how the images, no longer relevant to the present, have become preserved as important art relics of the past. Do governmental attempts at preservation affect its moral value? What have been the reactions of radical groups as a response to the commodification of Street art and the growing fame of artists? Does selectively exhibiting a traditionally unconventional art form like Street art within a gallery - conforming to gallery policies and limitations – diminish the effect of the work and cause the artist to lose face? Or does it mark a celebratory peak of the genre?

1.2 Identifying Street Art

Arguably the most influential movement since Pop Art...The convergence of Street Art and Graffiti Styles...has become a global phenomenon. It continues to thrive and evolve forty years after it began.⁷

The first thing to clarify would be the difference between street art and Street art. The first being generic art on the street such as portraitists street performers and pavement painters. These are usually artists who punt their art for money and attempt at ‘busking’ their wares, and the second meaning the ‘Street’ genre - encompassing the lifestyle in which the art has formed a vast part along with music, literature, and fashion. But the founding stimulus of this genre was a reaction to society, much like a lot of modern art. This reaction (from a visual and artistic standpoint) was, originally, modern Graffiti.

Graffiti, debatably, has often been viewed as a reaction to contemporary social issues regarding political and territorial attitudes. It has been used, not only, as a medium of communication and expression of societal points of view, and as a marker for status and recognition, but also as a means of artistic outlet.

⁷ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *‘Art in the Streets’* 2011, (p.10)

Many artistic innovations occur during periods of...economic expansion, the emergence of graffiti as an art form in the 70's occurred in a time of economic and political changes.⁸

Politicians and governmental bodies have tried to nullify the effects by commoditising Graffiti with urban-style fashion and 'street' products, such as skateboards, and deter the growth of graffiti in the past via 'clean-up' projects and increased security in urban areas. However, this has caused various problems as authorities have not been able to control its spread. This is mostly due to the fact that they cannot access the Graffiti world both in a literal sense and a metaphorical one. Graffiti moves around in an 'other' language. Codes and initiations enable writers to participate in secret. But these codes and visual signals go un-recognised and un-registered by those outside the circle. Not only does this make it difficult for 'clean-up' projects to maintain certain areas but it is also generally tricky to target particular writers. – They are excluded both from the location and the knowledge.

Due to its very nature, Graffiti is primarily an anonymous act and those who participate are operating in a strange situation both demanding to be noticed and also hiding behind an alias.

.... your presence on their Presence... hanging your alias on their scene.⁹

Most Graffiti writing is generally unreadable, and therefore it's oxymoronic nature acts as a marker and statement of existence but is only understood by other writers and fans of the sub-culture. Outsiders are excluded from the scene and can merely look inwards. *Wild Style* Graffiti from New York – born out of the Hip Hop culture and usually defined by its large, bold lettering styles - demonstrates the diversity of skill amongst artists, and the strong visual impact – making the statement; 'I am here' – for which most Graffiti writers strive. *'Graffiti: is recognized as a visual expression of rap music ranging from simple signatures to elaborate wall art. In America around the late 1960's it was commonly used to express social and political messages. Graffiti is also well identified with the term tagging, forms of imaging or lettering to identify the artist. Street gangs are also known for tagging to mark their territory.'*¹⁰ (fig. 3). It is very much involved with itself in this sense, as a mark of recognition and territory, whereas Punk Graffiti (fig. 4), predominantly from Europe, was about the message to society. Compared to *Wild Style*, Punk Graffiti is more concerned with writing the message rather than the style of the image. The individual Graffiti writer is of no concern, but the product of the writing is the main element. The two opposing styles have different aims.

⁸ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *'Art in the Streets'* 2011, (p.11)

⁹ Mailer *'The Faith of Graffiti'*, 1974 (p.122)

¹⁰ www.lindafashionspot.blogspot.com/2011_03_01_archive.html accessed in January 2012

...punk relied heavily on the cut-up, desolate apocalyptic image of the individual in society; writing focuses our attention on the product of the individual.¹¹

During an interview with the author Leonor Jonker she describes the origins of Graffiti as being set in the Punk era - a period of discontentedness and disruption, which encouraged youths to manipulate Graffiti to express their restlessness and dissatisfaction of their pre-apocalyptic world.

In your book 'No Future Nu' (2012) you talk about Punk being the thing that started Graffiti (in Europe), I was wondering if you would mind explaining this for me?

"Graffiti of course already existed before the punk years. The Graffiti boom in New York started in the early seventies and was an expression of very young teenagers from a poor background, as you can see and read in 'Watching My Name Go By/ The Faith Of Graffiti' (1979). However, before the Punk years, The Netherlands was relatively 'clean'. You had the odd scribble of the feminist/ lesbian community ('liever lesbians'), some political remarks and football slogans, and Provo first started writing and drawing in public space on a bigger scale: Robert Jasper Grootveld drew the symbol of Magical Centre Amsterdam everywhere (he even engraved it in the Paleis op de Dam) and wrote the K of 'cancer' on advertisements for cigarettes. A similar Graffiti movement as in New York didn't exist in The Netherlands. Of course, here you didn't have ghettos like in New York.

The Punks first started writing Graffiti in a similar way to the New York ghetto youth. It started as a way of promoting the bands and fanzines of the Punks and Dutch Punks imitated this from the London and New York Punk scenes. It was a simple and effective way to get your point across - it was cheap, and anti-authoritarian. Soon, Punks and Punk-inspired youths started writing their name, or tag, all over town [such as the Punk activist Dr. Rat] and Graffiti evolved into a practice, which was not strictly linked to Punk anymore. A second generation of Graffiti writers grew up in an environment where all alternative, open-minded youths made Graffiti. Niels 'Shoe' Meulman for example has never identified with Punk, but started writing Graffiti when he was about 12, in the Punk years. This new generation of Graffiti writers turned Amsterdam in the Graffiti capital of Europe, as is very well narrated in the documentary 'Kroonjuwelen'. So the Punk years were the pioneer years of Graffiti in The Netherlands, it was then that some basic techniques and 'rules' were worked out and the first time the urban environment was overtaken by young people. Also the book 'Watching My Name Go By' influenced both Punks and pioneers of the second/ post-Punk generation of Graffiti writers."

As you know the Hip Hop, Wild Style also began in New York about that time, and I'm not sure they had the same Punk influences as we did.....

¹¹ Rose & Strike 'Beautiful Losers', 2004 (p.233)

“The graffiti style in the Punk years was quite similar to the early New York style tags - Very basic, stark letters and figures.

The 'Hip Hop' style wasn't immediately picked up here (in Europe). It was only in about 1983, when second generation pioneers like Shoe first came across the 'pieces', the enormous Graffiti works, as seen on subway trains in New York. Until that time, they had mostly worked with Edding markers, and had not really explored the possibilities of spray can-art yet. The link with Hip Hop music, break-dancing etc. only came later as well. You had a sort of in between period between Punk and Hip Hop.

Of course, unlike in New York, stencilling was also very much part of Punk Graffiti (not only with artists like Hugo Kaagman, also bands like Rondos from Rotterdam used stencils to promote their band and fanzine).”¹²

As *Wild Style* and Punk met it seemed that there was a sort of merger. Similarly to the work of Banksy, which is often politically influenced, yet his style is also recognised. Banksy is just one recent example of ‘style’ and ‘meaning’ coming together in this artistic gesture. With artists such as Banksy and Shepard Fairey - who also use guerrilla tactics around various cities to display the ‘*Obey the Giant*’ image as a recognisable ‘logo’ and also as a message about society - came the birth of Street art as their work brought a new and innovative artistic quality to what is essentially vandalism.

The growth of recognition of Banksy’s work has since gained him fame and has set a new limit of tolerance by the public, who are angered when a Banksy is removed by the street-cleaning authorities. But with this recent growth of interest in Street art also come an interest and stimulus for Graffiti as the two are generally understood as different branches of the same tree. With Street art reaching a peak in fame and commercial popularity, Graffiti is also experiencing another surge of support from writers and its fans.

The knowledge that Graffiti is a subculture, and with reference to the idea that a subculture is a representation of a moment in history, it could be argued that Graffiti in all senses was born out of a need for change and the expression of something being ‘wrong’ with society. With this in mind, it would be difficult to imagine the end of a subculture such as Graffiti as there will always be a new group that does not agree with authority and who want to make their mark visible to society as a statement of ownership and territory. History has often shown the repeating interest and rebirth of Graffiti in different forms, as it also expands and enhances the growth of Street art today.

What seems to have passed the anti-graffiti campaigners by is the fact that graffiti is not, as they have often dubbed it, a disease. It is not a flaw, a leaky pipe that can be fixed. Graffiti is not curable; it is forever and it has been since forever.... Patrols, special paints, harsh sentences – these cannot ‘cure’ graffiti, as it is born out of a human need to create and express, and not only this. If this were the only reason for kids writing on the walls, then a simple redirection to

¹² Fragment from an interview with Leonor Jonker regarding her book *No Future Nu* (2012), conducted by myself in February 2012

art classes would suffice. The fact is, these are young people who feel ignored, fenced in, and they react.¹³



Fig. 3 A heavily 'bombed' warehouse in New York.



Fig. 4 Punk-style Graffiti in London.¹⁴

¹³ Rose & Strike *'Beautiful Losers'*, 2004 (p.243)

¹⁴ www.graffiti-letters-styles.blogspot.com/2010/05/punk-graffiti-pictures.html accessed in January 2012

Although this history suggests that there will always be a steady stream of teenagers who feel compelled to immaturely vandalise public property by marking their tag across any available surface, it does not explain why Street art on the other hand has now reached such heights of popularity and is now generating so much interest within artists, students, and even advertising companies who wish to target a certain audience.

Arguably it is because the emerging generation of artists is less concerned with painting illicit and illegible pieces for the benefit of their exclusive community, like their Graffiti writing predecessors, than with attaining wider fame and bigger audiences. Perhaps it is because they are no longer constrained by the medium of spray paint on walls and are now incorporating all kinds of street furniture and different medium, from signs to statuary to ad hoc installations, impulsive public interventions and increasing political statements. Whatever the reasoning the term Graffiti no longer takes the limelight on the urban scene but must now take a step back for its younger cousin, Street art. Both are classed under the collective 'Urban' art umbrella and there is now an avid market for these previously unobtainable works. As Contemporary art at the moment suffers a stagnation of originality, Street art is on the rise and is gaining value, especially among a generation of people who have grown up within its culture, viewing it as a developing form of art rather than vandalism.

However, we must not only look at the social aspects of what defines Street art but the conceptual aspects as well. Recent art movements, for example, Pop art and Taboo art - art which focuses on material and subjects which cause a drastic emotional or physical response, challenging and pushing the limits of the idea of art and possibilities - have been particular with focusing on statements about commercialist production or the individual in society, much to the point that the public are now used to associating 'statements' with art. This is similar to the anarchistic ideas of the Dadaists whose use of highly avant-garde art was to subvert and undermine the value system of the ruling establishment, and then the Situationists who wished that art not be made as segregate from society and who felt that the world had been separated into 'spectacle' and 'spectators'. Their aim was to re-connect society with itself and art and they often made statements about societal issues through the use of manipulated media, this method was called 'détournement'.

Taking on board the method of graffiti and the ideas of the Situationists, - with the possibility of the work being situated in an accessible public domain - artists brought a new element to this urbanised art. Combining political statements with artistic expression and innovation, the public now recognised it as 'art'. Artists like Banksy and Shepard Fairey are creating Street Art - defined as such with capital letters, because they act upon the public concept and understanding, whether appreciated or not, of 'Art'.

Where past Graffiti writers were only driven by one motive or another, such as the, arguably, NON-Situationist approach of the territorially personal yet artistically qualitative skill of the *Wild Style* Graffiti writers, or the, possibly, PRO-Situationist motive of expressing political statements of the Punk era, artists today are able to combine the two into something the young generation recognise and appreciate. The contemporary issues and styles concerning Street Art are also definitive towards its understanding. It is the 'Art of Today'. As the viewer, the public also appreciates innovation alongside artistic skill, which encompasses, not only, a lot of the

radical stunts that Banksy performs, but also the artistry of other artists such as Invader's mosaics.

The down-side is that like most new art movements, the novelty soon wears off and the public become 'used to it'. It loses the excitement and, being a liberal art-form, becomes in danger of being copied and reproduced. Two current Street artists, namely Fake and Mr Brainwash, are currently becoming known for their ability to copy other Street artists' work. Their styles and images are so similar to that of Shepard Fairey and Banksy that it can only be defined by the signature, which unlike many previous artists, they provide.

*"They do it to become famous."*¹⁵

Seeing the growth of fame of many Street artists has attracted many would-be creators to the scene with anterior motives and attitudes that drive them. Now, there is a Street culture. Fashion, attitude, music and advertising, as well as art, are acting upon this new generation of culture and Street art has become the by-product of this modern societal conduct and is also a subculture within itself.

Thus, many Street artists are creating commissioned pieces and hosting their own exhibitions and selling products with their design. They have become a high demand amongst the public and are gradually becoming more and more famous amongst galleries, art institutions, students and artists. Although not completely considered a 'high' art, it is still a significant development within the genre, and can even be an influence on 'high' art pieces and fine artists if we look at Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose career began as a Graffiti-style artist in New York, and Keith Haring whom also created Graffiti and whose work was a response to the New York Street culture. Both artists are renowned with modern art institutions.

Although, like Graffiti, much of it is still practised as an illegal activity, the genre of Street art has branched away from its relationship with Graffiti and it is being recognised as a stand-alone subculture with its own development, cult following, target-audience and now even its own copy-cat artists who wish to cash-in on its status, whereas Graffiti still existed maintaining the same concept and content, and with the same public disdain and admiration as it has held for decades. It is only recently that Graffiti has also seen another wave of popularity with the up-surge of Graffiti events and writing competitions¹⁶ as a reaction to the growing interest of Street art.

Considering its vast growth in recognition in recent years, it may be fair to say that Street art has evolved from its relatively underground association with Graffiti into its own cult standing – with its own artists (both students of art and former Graffiti writers), its own fans, and its own commercial following. More and more museums and galleries, as well as advertisers, world-wide are realising Street art's popularity with the masses and are looking to join the populace.

¹⁵ Fragment from a discussion with Jeanette Dekeukeleire of artKitchen Gallery, conducted by myself in April 2011

¹⁶ www.wallstreetmeeting.de/ accessed in May 2012

Today, Street Art is something that you will not only find in the streets but on the movie screen, in mass media and at auction.¹⁷

This amplification to Street art's fame, debatably, has two sides to its consequence: It could either heighten the capacity of Street art's already huge cult status, as it brings it within the classes of the 'traditional' definition of art, or it can undermine the status altogether by this very same categorisation. – Street art becoming a commodity.

Street art is gaining popularity and is becoming a stand-alone focus for many students, artists and galleries, as well as advertisers and youth-based marketing. Although there is no study dedicated to this genre, it may be a matter of time before critics and scholars begin looking at the potential of this rapidly growing phenomenon.

I believe there is a difference between the motivations of Graffiti writers (who have maintained the plateau of the 'Graffiti' status) and Street artists. Their mediums may be similar, but their means are different. Although both are formed through a want of freedom of expression, what they wish to express is usually at almost extreme ends of the spectrum. One is created as a visual means of communicating with its peers, with rules and initiations which one has to follow, the other aims its message at a much more broad scope of the general public and is much more liberal and open to whosoever wishes to participate.

Both are products of societal discontentedness and follow an entire chronology of societal and radical movements which help to shape our understanding and appreciation of the Street art phenomena, and may also play a part in categorising it within the art genre.

While Graffiti's status remains aloof and its means unchanged, falling in and out of the public eye, Street art has developed into one of the most potent art forms of the modern age. However, its potency may also spell its demise as new radical movements and commoditisation of the genre indicates its peak of popularity and possibly the end of its impact on society.

Part 2: The Language of the Street

2.1 Defining and Refining

Street art is all art on the street that's not graffiti.¹⁸

Since there has been an influx of Street artists and particularly now that the interest in Street art is becoming more apparent amongst students and institutions, it is important to identify that it

¹⁷ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *'Art in the Streets'* 2011, (p.14)

¹⁸ Lewison *'Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution'* 2008 (p.43)

is being viewed and treated as a subculture within itself, separate from Graffiti and associated Graffiti prejudices from the public. Although much of it is still being practiced illegally with the defacing of public property, there is the superficial matter of artist and style which has defined it from Graffiti. Artists such as Shepard Fairey, Invader, Banksy and Laser 3.14, all of whom began their career classed as Graffiti vandals, are now recognised by art institutions as Street artists and are also participating in gallery exhibitions. Their work is now defined as art despite that much of it is still being illegal. They are recognised as such by institutions and the vast majority of the public, whereas Graffiti writers, even though many are recognised amongst smaller communities by their tag, have not gained that same recognition by established institutions and are still being disregarded as art by general society, in spite of much of it displaying a vast amount of artistic skill and imagination, and extensive knowledge of the medium. Therefore it is important to look at the differences that have occurred between Graffiti and Street art that have made one continually abhorred within society - aside from its loyal followers and Graffiti enthusiasts - and the other more and more revered.

Graffiti, in its various forms, has often been a symbol of status amongst urban gangs and individuals. Traditionally, Graffiti can be viewed as a form of communication, whether it is a tag, signifying the existence to other writers and taggers, creating an unknown world exclusive only to those who are partial to it and not to the knowledge nor often the appreciation of the general public, or whether it is a message directly to the public concerning the anarchical structure of society or voicing the opinions of the youth of the time.

*"I think the basic tag ... it's communication in its simplest form.... Communication to other kids. At a glance you can look at something for half a second and you know the style, the risk they took.... It's all condensed into one three and a half second movement.... It doesn't have any of the grey strappings of the art world.... A kid's tag is a kid's tag, that's it."*¹⁹

Propelled by new media forms, Graffiti features in art galleries as archaic examples of urban culture and in commercial settings, captivating a new generation of adolescents from all races and social classes. But while Graffiti's public visibility has waxed and waned over the last few decades, its attraction to urban youth has remained relatively consistent. The general public still perceives 'writers' and 'taggers' as vandals that want to deface public property, and many certainly use the method of graffiti as a way to rebel, *"to lash out, and to destroy."*²⁰ But Graffiti writing satisfies a complex set of needs, functioning for most participants as a furious but relatively benign antidote to adolescent isolation, boredom, powerlessness, and anonymity. These could be the same experiences that draw many urban youths to gangs, and other youth groups that share the same attitudes and ideas of society. Quite often, these gangs have a hierarchical structure and young artists develop their skills within, learning from the elder and more established writers.

¹⁹ Interview with Barry McGee AKA. *Twist*, taken from Rose's *Beautiful Losers* 2008 (p.134)

²⁰ Interview with Jese, taken from *Claustrophobia Magazine*, Winter Edition 1999

Those who write graffiti for more than a few months typically go through a series of structured stages similar to those of more recognized careers. ...the writer begins with tagging, a solo activity that satisfies a range of individualistic needs. After a few months, most taggers abandon the marker and spray can for non-graffiti pastimes, but those who continue on to the next career stages-the painting of "throw-ups" and larger, more complex "pieces"-begin to collaborate and in the process forge close personal and professional relationships. The new emphasis on style prompts them to cluster in groups, constructing "a total art world" for discussing new designs, devising aesthetic standards, and judging innovations.²¹

Although, developing a Graffiti style can take time and requires learned skills and awareness, young writers that are attached to a crew of Graffiti artists often learn the technicalities and stamina for creating work through an unofficial 'mentoring' scheme. Groups of writers would work together being taught by a lead artist. And as well as keeping watch for police, they learn the components of creating a good piece fast.

When engaged in these activities, whether legal or illegal, young crew members also absorb many important values and habits of mind. Writers plan and execute complex, original projects, collaborate with others, manage time, and practice to improve, and in the process, build self confidence, resiliency, and other useful academic and job skills.... Graffiti crews encourage writers to value both self and community, effectively softening the sharp individualistic edges that they honed as taggers.²²

As well as the ability to team-build, Graffiti also requires a certain level of skill and imagination in order to create a piece that is original, recognisable and easy to reproduce in almost any setting. In a world steeped in advertising, youths see a chance to advertise themselves, and in so doing they can;

....represent the symbolic re-occupation of an estranged environment.²³

Hip Hop Graffiti, which originated in New York, is predominantly concerned with communicating the tagger's existence to other writers through an intricate style that is original and can be recognised instantly. Its reproduction featuring over a wide area indicates a level of territory and often ownership. It almost acts as a secret code between Graffiti writers as most of the public are aware of it but cannot understand or appreciate the significance.

Anarchical or Punk Graffiti, which began in Europe, was concerned with sending a message to the public, demonstrating the concerns for the hierarchical society and expressing the attitudes about an apocalyptic future and the corrupt government. Both can be considered as artistic

²¹ Christen 'Hip Hop Learning' Educational Foundations, Feb 2003

²² Christen 'Hip Hop Learning' Educational Foundations, Feb 2003

²³ Mailer, 'The Faith of Graffiti', 1974 (p.76)

forms of expression regarding the situation of the time by the contemporary youth who felt powerless in the world in which they lived. One being that of the urban slums and dangerous criminally-active area, the other being that of an anarchical and pre-apocalyptic period during the Cold War, when the youth thought that there was no future.

It can be argued that both aesthetic and expressive branches of Graffiti were created as a form of communication either to other writers or to society, otherwise, why choose a public area as the canvas on which to display the work? Whether the viewers liked it or not, it was seen.

Graffiti, as an aspect of culture, can be used as an unobtrusive measure to reveal patterns of customs and attitudes of a society.²⁴

Graffiti was a means of being heard and noticed in a world where the youth felt ignored and it provided an outlet for these frustrations, and a lot of these factors are still reasons for Graffiti writing today.

“...Graffiti is [a] major source of influence for Street art. The most common type of graffiti is called “tagging”. Tagging is characterized by artists writing out their names in a very stylized manner: large brightly colored bubble letters placed on a public walls, trucks, or subway trains. While working under the constant pressure that they might get caught at any moment, street artists assert their reputation in a particular urban area through tagging. As graffiti artist competed to outdo each other, they have invented the concept of “bombing.” Artist would work to “bomb” the hardest to reach or most publicly accessible area with the most glorified version of their tag. This is where a thin line must be drawn between graffiti and street art. Whereas graffiti artist use their tags to claim an area, street artists work to breathe a new life into that area with political or social commentary that is left for the audience to contemplate.”²⁵

Street art was also influenced by this freedom of expression, and artists not only wished to communicate with each other and their admirers but also have their artwork interact with its environment and communicate with the public - as Blek Le Rat asserts: *“My stencils are a present, introducing people to the world of art, loaded with a political message. This movement is the democratisation of art: if the people cannot come to the gallery, we bring the gallery to the people!”*²⁶

Street art generally falls within a different *visual* factor to that of Graffiti and in this sense it runs parallels with the layman’s definition of fine art and graphic design. The image is not solely to

²⁴ Stocker, Dutcher, Hargrove, Cooke ‘Social Analysis of Graffiti’ *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 85, Issue No. 338, Oct. - Dec. 1972

²⁵ Moore ‘Street Art: Experiment in Dialogue’ Stetson, 2012

²⁶ Webb, ‘Blek Le Rat: This Is Not a Banksy’ *The Independent*, Sep 2011

promote the writer's name and territory, but it is also a creative collection of stimulating imagery and skilled artistry in painting, stencil, sculpture, photography and various other media. Nevertheless, there are still factors which determine that it is Street art and not Fine art in the traditionally understood sense.

Street art generally appears in public spaces chiefly along-side Graffiti, its predecessor. And, much like Graffiti, its setting enables its means. From the "streets" it can be viewed by the public and therefore can carry across its message or encourage recognition in style and method to a larger number of viewers than those found within the confines of a gallery.

Although much of it is now commissioned by the government as part of a regeneration scheme, many of the artists whose work is commissioned also started their work by illegally painting and defacing public property. Its origins, therefore, stem from a similar source as that of Graffiti. Much of Street art is still being produced and displayed illegally in public spaces and urban environments along-side Graffiti and both share a number of similarities in terms of implementation but there are many visual differences in content and general target audience.

An interview with the Sheffield Street artist, Phlegm, describes his basic origins and inspirations;-

Where did you school/study art?

"I did a sculpture degree at Leeds (UK)."

Who was/is your inspiration?

"I started out mainly interested in underground cartoonists and self publishers. I liked Robert Crumb and the whole idea of taking work into your own hands as an artist. I really got sucked into the whole D.I.Y. culture. Eventually it led to Street art. It seemed a good way to work hard every day and not really answer to anyone."

Any favourite artists?

"I look up to a lot of Street artists these days like, Sam 3, Escif, Blu, Aryz, ROA loads. Other artists I admire are outsider artists like Henry Darger, Adolf Wolfi, Charles Dellschau... loads! Artists unaware of much outside what they work on I guess."

Was there a lot of Graffiti/Street art where you grew up/studied?

"No, none. I grew up in the country and studied outside Leeds on a sculpture park. Street art was something I found after years of self publishing my comics...as soon as I found Street art it just seemed like an extension of what I did already."

Why work on the street? With architecture? Outdoors?

"To be free, mainly. I don't want a life full of meetings and exhibitions, I just want to get up every day and go painting. I don't really believe in value either, so painting in the street or in derelict sites is a way of working away from that system. Also working outside with architecture opens you up to a lot of site specific work, challenges, different conditions....all things that make you work differently every time. It also changes things for the viewer. You can work in places that are very atmospheric, or places that catch the viewer off guard. There are millions of reasons I choose to paint outdoors....I'd have to write a thesis myself to get to the bottom of it."

Has demand for your work increased or decreased in recent years/months? (Given the financial crisis, or not).

"I've not noticed the financial crisis...other than the fact I have a lot more abandoned buildings to choose from! I don't really make much money at the best of times to be honest. I don't really produce a lot of things to sell or feel very comfortable selling artwork. I scrape by, financial crisis or not."²⁷

Phlegm mentions that he wants to work away from the value system and that working in the streets allows him to do that. Working in various conditions and settings creates new challenges for him and his work reacts in different ways with its environment (fig. 5). Despite his works being very popular in the UK, Phlegm does not create canvas pieces and very rarely participates in gallery exhibitions, unless there is an opportunity work with outdoor structures. As a result he does not make a lot of money selling his work but his fan-base is significantly large as he works purely for the enjoyment of this liberating medium.

As mentioned earlier, the *visual* factor of Street art often parallels with that of fine art and graphic design. Many Street artists are art students or have been and usually have a technical knowledge of creative materials instilled upon them by the academia. This is not to say that all Street artists are educated in the fine arts, but that many Graffiti writers have developed their own style through their own circles and groups, and by their own trial and error outside of the institution. Therefore, much of Street art tends to display more knowledgeable artistic qualities and a more varied use of medium, such as stencil, mosaic, sculpture and painting, to that of general marker-pen and spray-paint Graffiti. This varied use of media and artistic skill is incorporated into a stimulating design of images, most of which are predominantly concerned with the aesthetics and also often hold a message or narrative, but can also be a purely visual stimulant.

²⁷ Fragment from an interview with Street artist, Phlegm, from Sheffield, UK, conducted by myself in January 2012



Fig. 5 Phlegm, upon the ruins of the old steel foundries in Sheffield, 2010²⁸

Although its singular visual quality may differ from Graffiti, Street art by a particular artist may also form part of a series of images, defining the artist's style and technique and encouraging recognition by the public. This is reflective of a Graffiti writer's tag which is marked in various places within an area, thus causing style and name recognition. Of course, regardless of medium, there are badly applied and unskilled Street art pieces just as many tags are lacking artistic skill. 'Tagging' is a particular type of Graffiti which is done neither for critical acclaim nor personal gain. It establishes a fleeting moment of contact between the writer/artist and the spectator. The people who produce these images work anonymously, with no intentions for monetary or reputational gain, just out of desire to leave something for another person to see and respond to. Some Street art pieces may even resemble Graffiti in medium and style, but it is often the concept for which it is created which defines it either Graffiti or Street art.

Thus we have determined that much of the contextual factors which define Street art are akin to those of Graffiti in public defacement, recognition of style, and burghal context. However, despite these analogous points, there are aspects to Street art which differentiate its standing from Graffiti in the modern sense.

²⁸ Google Images

In recent decades, the Street art subculture has evolved into its own stand-alone form of urban art along-side, and quite often now in competition with, its forerunner, Graffiti. Commonly misconstrued as the same thing, Street art and Graffiti are now almost completely separate forms of metropolitan art, and the fact that the general public, following and trusting in the institutional definition which has identified and classified the two genres, treat them as differing art fields characterises this segregation of the two.

Despite both following the same pattern of production – a series of stealthily applied images promoting the artist’s or writer’s style and name, illegally defacing public property, and producing work within the public’s access and view – there are metaphysical differences between the two genres, which, arguably, can define the art from mere defacement.

The main aim of Graffiti is generally the labelling of territory and the spread of a name. The dominant Graffiti style in question, as mentioned earlier, is the New York *Wild Style* - large font text and tags which often appear as ‘throw-ups’ on the side of train carriages and along train tracks and the public domain. This is the style much of the general public would identify if asked to define Graffiti. And, despite different forms of vandalism, and styles and intentions of Graffiti also being very much in existence, the *Wild Style* type has proven more staying-power in method and meaning. It is thus snubbed by the general public as it represents the visual characteristic of vandalism of public property – such as on derelict buildings and train carriages. Self-taught as most Graffiti writers are, and arguably also displaying a certain aesthetic skill, and knowledge of the mediums they use like their Street art counterparts, the *Wild Style* fashion is concerned with conveying an image and is predisposed with indicating a writer’s presence and ultimately marking their territory.

Ownership of a neighbourhood or space - as defined in New York gang war-fare - has been a long-standing issue since the 1960’s and Graffiti provided a means of labelling the conquests and parameters of a gang’s terrain. It can also be the symbol of an individual. Their alias was often their code of reference, indicating from which area they came. One such early writer from the 1970’s was Taki 183. Taki 183 was the alias of a Graffiti writer from Washington Heights. Taki was his nick-name and 183 was the number of the street where he lived.²⁹ Soon, many other writers were labelling the streets with their individual alias or gang name.

The appearance of this unusual name and number sparked public curiosity, prompting the Times article to report on this new Graffiti phenomenon. Taki was by no means the first writer; however he was the first to be recognised outside this newly formed subculture.

²⁹ Eric ‘History of Graffiti’, *Davey D’s Hip Hop Corner*, June 1998

There is a point and purpose behind what graffiti writers do....it still needs to be explained to people.³⁰

From this point onwards Graffiti has eluded the public understanding and been at the forefront of public frustration. The tags and labels seem to only be understood by groups who move within those circles. A message of superiority and ownership between gangs and individual tags which make the statement; 'Here I am.'

[Writers] communicated with one another through tags, drawings and concrete poetry. It unified the city, creating a common outlaw culture.³¹

The style of most Graffiti writing is also no accident in creating a clandestine image. Much of the large texts and fonts are difficult to read for the general public, but the learned Graffiti writer will recognise the lettering style and technique, and therefore will be able to read and recognise the tag of their own or a rival writer.

Walls become a forum for active conversation.³²

Discursive interactions between artists can be cryptic, employing specific symbols and words to affirm or denigrate another artist's work. For example, the word 'toy' written across a piece is a graffitist's insult; buffing carefully around a piece to retain it indicates admiration. Painting over is referred to as 'crossing out' or 'slashing' and is a non-verbal conversation about skill, proficiency or aesthetic judgements.

Smaller tags may be the work of a novice or 'toy', and the larger pieces performed by the more established writers. The hierarchy within the group of writers is indicative of the skill in which they perform their work. A fellow writer will not only recognise the characteristics and therefore the tag but will also appreciate and understand the risks, dangers, difficulties and speed in which they executed their work. A tag, however large, is designed to be distributed at speed, ease and in multiples, and yet display the particular and recognisably original style and aesthetic skill of the writer.

Skilled Graffiti tagging is, therefore, no mean feat, and many of the original writers from the 1970's, whose work still exists today and has survived the removal schemes which destroyed the mark of others in their generation, are esteemed by young writers who do not write over these historical pieces as a sign of respect. Their tag has succeeded in that which it set out; - to state ownership, existence and resistance.

As romanticised as this brief analysis of Graffiti writing may seem, its elusive content, exclusive context and covert operations have alienated the general public - outside its group of

³⁰ MacDonald *'The Graffiti Subculture; Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York'* 2001, (p.3)

³¹ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *'Art in the Streets'* 2011, (p.11)

³² McGaw *'Complex Relationships between Détournement and Récupération in Melbourne's Street (Graffiti and Stencil) Art Scene'* 2008, (p.230)

aficionados - who have viewed Graffiti as mere vandalism and pointless and disrespectful public defacement.

[Graffiti] consistently had a problem with the art market; Iconoclastic – it is often hard....to read, and strewn from the countercultural or underground tendencies of youth – regarded as urban noise along with other unorthodox trends.³³

Street art, on the other hand, can arguably be classified as ‘art for the public’, or at least as much for the public as contemporary art found in a gallery. It may be displayed illegally like Graffiti, and much of the time may even follow the same level of stealth in order to produce, but it is not usually linked to a gang or territorial group. Quite often it is the work of an individual or a collaboration of individual artists whom utilise the urban environment to his or her own means and recreates the surroundings into an aesthetic vantage point.

Similar to a Graffiti writer, the artist displays knowledge of the area and of the medium he uses, but unlike a Graffiti writer it is not by means of territory or ownership that they create their work, but for the simple excitement of creation without limitation. The ‘world’ is their canvas. The only limitation to the extent of each piece, regardless of authority, is the limit applied by themselves. By disregarding convention and compliance the artist is able to produce whatever they wish without adhering to codes and rules.

The Street artist’s work is not only a means of communication strictly understood by other artists, unlike Graffiti. It is a means of artistic expression generally in the context of an outdoor urban environment. The general public *recognises* it as art because it does not require an understanding of the complexity of its execution, but only an admiration of aesthetic skill. It is inclusive, where Graffiti is often exclusive. However, this is only a generalisation based on contemporary opinion of my peers and there are, of course, exceptions to the rule.

Also the superficial factors can define the art from the ‘vandalism’. A vast majority of Graffiti is done by spray-paint or marker pen. Two mediums whose creative limitations are apparent in the work they produce despite them being expertly applied. It is not strictly to say Graffiti is restricted to using these medium, but that they are the most used in Graffiti of all available medium, whereas Street artists have been known to apply different media to various locations, therefore displaying a variation of creativity. Graffiti tags and pieces tend to follow a similar aesthetical format to each other whereas there seems to be an element of *diverse* artistic talent and creative imagery found in most Street art – which generally appeals to the majority.

An example of Street art breaking away from the ‘wall-art’ stereotype is found in Isaac Cordal’s work *Cement Eclipses* (fig(s). 6 & 7). Arguably, Cordal’s work can be situated in any location, but the context of his work purposefully utilises the urban environment by using and manipulating clay figurines and adapting them to ordinarily inaccessible and unlikely locations and settings.

³³ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *Art in the Streets* 2011, (p.20)

The use of scale is a key feature in his work as his miniature figures replicate the 'every day' working man in his various positions in life – going to work, sitting, eating, sat at a computer. But these figures are depicted as minute and fragile. Becoming 'swamped' by a minor puddle or over-shadowed by an enormous structure - portraying the fragility and minuteness of human kind and our menial, consumerist lives. Although, the figurines also represent a delicacy and beauty of life and are photographed in very poignant and picturesque settings which not only challenges the viewer to determine the art – whether it is the figurine, the use of the location, or the photograph of the situation – but also expands on the medium of Street art.

Cordal's '*Cement Eclipses*' signify the two sides of contemporary human existence. Alone in these domineering surroundings the figures seem frail, isolated, and tenuous as they go about their routine and repetitive lives. Whereas, once a carefully angled and controlled snap-shot of their 'lives' is taken we, as the viewer, see the beauty of the world from their angle and the bigger picture around them. The viewer is invited to play God as we observe their giant world, thus causing the viewer to look inwardly at our own lives and the world of which we are a small part.



Fig. 6 & 7 '*Cement Eclipses*', Isaac Cordal.³⁴

The Graffiti world is inaccessible in that only fellow writer's and it's dedicated fan-base are usually able to follow its progress, incomprehensible in style and reasoning, and limited by location as it tends to remain within the parameters of a certain territory - it's most effective setting being outdoors where it can be seen by rival groups and writers – and tradition of style and medium as a form of respect and loyalty for the culture. Street art, on the other hand, is accessible to the general public in that it displays elements considered more 'traditional' of artistic quality, it often generates a level of understanding and ultimately appreciation by the public at least on the same level as they would appreciate and accept art found in a gallery whether they like it or not, and does not limit itself to a traditional medium or area and can also be 'domesticated' and displayed indoor as well as out.

³⁴ www.iconology/archive/cement-eclipses-isaac-cordal/1907 accessed in January 2012

One stylistically comparative example of a genre representing similar consumerist issues of its time and is now a canonical movement displayed in a gallery is Pop art. There are many qualities that tie Street art and Pop art together, for example the use of artistic technique of repetition. Andy Warhol, one of the most influential American Pop artists, was very fond of the idea of repetition in his works. The mass-production of celebrity images made a social statement on how Hollywood churns out celebrities so they can be consumed by the public on a mass scale. However, in doing so, the artist would inevitably break down their image and almost make it lose its purpose, as a word that is said repetitively can lose meaning

The production of work to the point of ad nauseum can simultaneously change and enhance the original purpose or idea, and this is something Street artist Shepard Fairey has also experimented with. Ubiquitous for his widely circulated picture of Andre the Giant captioned with the word 'OBEY', Shepard Fairey has become a prominent figure in the Street art world ever since. Much as Warhol used repetition to bring up controversial questions on the validity of originality in art, Fairey's repetitive images, which negated the very possibility of producing fixed meanings, also challenged the public.

The use of repetition made Shepard Fairey's artwork a perfect vehicle for discussion because it promoted a conversation about art among common people, rather than cultural elite. The general public was prodded to question this dark looming image and the reasons for its circulation in public spaces.

Graffiti and Street art may co-exist and may follow a similar format of production, as dictated by its environment, but their metaphysical intentions tend to differ almost completely. Of course, there are exceptions to these rules on both sides, in terms of content, and this is a generalisation of the two, but the majority of Graffiti and Street art follow this basis and therefore it seems appropriate to apply to most examples.

This is not to say that one is better than the other, as both displays a level of creative visual talent that is suited to their medium, and both have striven to get thus far. It is only to say that they are different, and both were born out of a different need for creative means, whether it was to label and mark its terrain, or to convey a visual message to the public, or utilise a public space as a visual outlet.

2.2 Comparison and Competition between Writers and Artists

Art as it occurs on the streets is an 'other' history. Inherently anti-institutional, it has never fit well within the academy or the museum.³⁵

³⁵ Deitch, Gastman & Rose *'Art in the Streets'* 2011, (p.19)

We have established the basic differences and similarities between Graffiti and Street art, understanding that there are, of course, many exceptions to the rule - it is this basis which has and is governing much of today's understanding of Street art.

Its familiarity in medium, aesthetics, context, and subject matter, makes Street art visually accessible, even if the complex issues and conceptual layers are not completely observed or understood, and therefore popular with the public. It attempts to shake off the hierarchical aspect of 'high' and fine art which is usually found in a gallery which not all public will venture to see. However, as commodity and issues regarding fame and monetary value accompanies an acclaimed and influential art piece, it is often defined, unwillingly or not, as 'high' or fine art and preserved as such, ultimately altering its existential facet.

There is also the excitement of 'finding' and recognising a particular piece of Street art as it is not restricted to a specific area, and can be discovered at any time and any place. Urban art has the capacity of adapting to any location, using any medium available, enabling it to 'appear' in some of the most unlikely places. This attitude of the visual medium may seem intrusive to many who are not used to the Street art phenomenon or those of a different generation, who may not agree to the application of its content, but for much of the youth and various public groups within the field, it has become a common expressive outlet and a cherished piece of culture and history. Many galleries and advertisers have also celebrated and taken advantage of the impact of both Graffiti and Street art, with influential artists and infamous writers alike.

*"In the early days...it is about getting a buzz out of fighting the system... 'cause they said it's illegal...but as you progress and become more creative, you spend more time thinking about your work than your opposers."*³⁶

Some Graffiti writers have even attempted adapting their work into a Street art context and are selling their previously illegal style in the form of canvas and photography work. Such as a transition from illegal Graffiti work in the form of a 'throw-up' on the side of a train carriage into Street art photography (the writer and photographer are the same person), and work on canvas done by a former Graffiti writer whom previously had served five years imprisonment during the 90's for excessive tagging (fig(s). 8 & 9). These are examples of the varied levels of conversion that some Graffiti writers undertake when adapting their work into a Street art context – initially sticking to the methods and styles with which they are familiar. However, legalising their work does not always sit well for most Graffiti writers, and a transition is often rare.

*"...In the late nineties I tried to paint walls out on the street that were legal, but, for me, there was no feeling left. It was gone. I missed the thrill of getting over..."*³⁷

³⁶ Interview with Eazel taken from 'Short Stories; Graffiti Wars', (documentary), 1999

³⁷ Interview with Seen, taken from 'Riding Zone' (documentary), 2008



Fig(s). 8 & 9 Mist One and Fista at Dulo, Sheffield (2007)³⁸.

Artists that do make the transition from Graffiti writer to Street artist, and those whom did not practice 'Graffiti', are often very conscious of defining the differences between Graffiti and Street art, despite both of them following a similar method of production and illegality. When asked to discuss their past and how they came into being they would treat Graffiti as a side-line or 'period' separate from their current Street art production as UK Street artist, Phlegm, describes;

- Did you always create commissioned pieces? Was there ever an 'illegal' Graffiti period?

*"I've always drawn pictures. I never had a 'Graffiti' past. I'd say over half of my work is still illegal...just in places that people don't really care about. I like derelict sites, ruins, and places that get ignored. Run down and boarded up buildings."*³⁹

Phlegm describes a 'Graffiti past' as separate from his work as a Street artist, but still mentions his work as being illegal.

Another artist whose Street art work is coming into high demand from galleries around the world is the UK-based artist, Florence Blanchard, who began as a Graffiti writer with the tag name Ema (fig(s). 10, 11, 12 & 13). Ema's Graffiti work displays the typical style of Graffiti writers which has remained constant from its birth in the late 70's in New York. The 90's was, arguably, the last significant decade for Graffiti before the naissance of Street Art in the early 00's.

Although both Street art and Graffiti are illegal and both encourage recognition, the illegible graffiti taggers are much less revered than the Street art image which displays a certain

³⁸ Photographs in Dulo, Sheffield, taken by myself in May 2007

³⁹ Fragment from an interview with Street artist, Phlegm, from Sheffield, UK, conducted by myself in January 2012

distinguished artistic quality and proves to be instantly recognisable. - Demonstrating the metaphorical accessibility of the image rather than the tag, and ultimately the Street Art rather than the Graffiti.

Commissioned pieces follow a succession of most establish Street artists. Although the artist must of course establish themselves within the 'art world', either by producing craft-zines, prints or canvas work, in order to be accepted as an accomplished artist in the traditional sense rather than vandal, their commissioned pieces, along with their illegal work, serve as devices for recognition. Again, the image proves to be the foremost means of achieving this rather than text. This may also prove to show the perpetual rise and fall of interest in Graffiti and its fluctuation and moribund of meaning and style over various periods of time, as it remains aloof, and the recent growth of interest and practice of Street Art as it gives testimony to its celebrity success. Another stage of succession and ultimately 'conformity' is the celebration of the artists work within a gallery. An example of how recognition of style, provided by producing illegal work in the public-eye, can lead to a celebrated exhibition for the artist who must then, however, conform to the limitations of a gallery. However, for an artist such as Ema, whose work does not seem out of place in either the street or within a gallery, as the content of much of her work is purely aesthetical and easily adaptable to any location, conformity is not an issue which bares much substance.

This transition from 'tagger' to 'artist' provides a classic example of the transitory status of the art and the artist, as Street art is a contemporary and therefore temporary art form whose immediacy and transient existence characterises it's status and strengthens its impact. But it is also this ephemeral execution of images which defines it from 'traditional' art, whose permanence tends to lead to a stagnation of reference and meaning. When we look at a classical masterpiece we cannot relate to it in the same way as the contemporary viewer did as its context may be so far removed from our own situation that we may only appreciate its historic value and its accomplishment of skill. Its meaning becomes antediluvian and obsolete. Whereas Street art's very provisional nature purports to encompass modernity in attitudes and styles. Street art is ever-changing its image.



Fig. 10 Ema's Graffiti 'throw-up', 1998.⁴⁰ - Taken from Ema's blog under the heading 'Graffiti Work'. It is important in this case to mention that this category is separate from another entitled 'Street Work'.



Fig. 11 Ema's current Street Art style and recognisable image, 2010.⁴¹ This image is an example of the juxtapositioning of Street Art and Graffiti existing along-side each other.

⁴⁰ www.florenceblanchard.com/graffiti-06-98/ accessed in March 2012

⁴¹ www.florenceblanchard.com/street-work/ accessed in March 2012



Fig. 12 A collaboration with Street Artist Kid Acne, 2011.⁴² This commissioned piece displays the popularity of Street Artists who are asked to cover a wall or public space.



Fig. 13 Ema's 'Breuckelen' installation at Recoat Gallery, Glasgow, 2011.⁴³

The divide between Graffiti and Street art is very much apparent not only *within* the product, but also concerning attitudes *without*, according to institutionalised methods. Although a gallery may celebrate and exhibit pieces by famed Graffiti writers as many had done in the '90s as part

⁴² www.florenceblanchard.com/street-work/ accessed in March 2012

⁴³ www.florenceblanchard.com/exhibitions/ accessed in March 2012

of a city's cultural heritage, and as a celebration of the popularity of this genre, it now often acquires the guise of 'Street Art' in order for it to be accepted. In a recent exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles a historical and cultural display of Graffiti and un-commissioned Street art was fêted (fig. 14), asserting the ever-growing popularity of the genre:

When Museum of Contemporary Art director and curator Jeffrey Deitch whitewashed a mural by Italian artist Blu in December, the episode perfectly illustrated how graffiti's unruly, in-your-face attitude, even when sanitized under the banner of "street art," might not be a good fit for a museum retrospective. The very idea of the exhibition "Art in the Streets" at the Geffen Contemporary asks whether this erstwhile outlaw culture can or should be folded into the grand narrative of art history. Despite its first, faltering steps, the exhibition answers this question with a resounding "Yes." Viewers will encounter a bombastic, near-overwhelming cavalcade of eye candy: colorful swirling murals, immersive installations, walls papered with candid and provocative photos, and a custom-designed skate ramp. Immodestly anticipating the response, there's even a big "WOW" painted on the inside of the building's roll down doors. But the exhibition's strong suit is not its impressive array of large-scale work but rather its art historical treatment of an outsider form, complete with a timeline, "period" rooms, and plenty of video and photographic documentation.⁴⁴



Fig. 14 Banksy displayed at the 'Art in the Streets' exhibition held at the MOCA, Los Angeles, (2011).

⁴⁴ Mizota 'Art review: 'Art in the Streets' at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA' Los Angeles Times, April 2011

The interest in showcasing Street art has grown over the years, whereas an interest in exhibiting Graffiti in an institutional context seems to have waned as less and less galleries choose to class their urban exhibitions as 'Graffiti' but as 'Street Art' in-keeping with the growing popularity of the *profitable* genus. Graffiti has, as a culture, a method, and a medium, more or less lost most of its impact upon the general public and has been forgotten or ignored as it moves back into the underground hosting its own events and shows away from the conventionality of gallery participation and more respective of its cultural background, whereas Street art has developed a stand-alone status within the public-eye and is therefore moving closer to being regarded as an art movement and donning the label of orthodox art.

As the MOCA Gallery exhibits its selection of what it believes to be representative of Street art, one wonders how it came to the conclusion that what it is displaying is an honest representation of *'Art in the Streets'*. The 'anti-graffiti' policy which maintains the buildings upkeep and clean image would imply a certain amount of hostility towards the field when not complying with gallery regulations. An air of condescension exudes from the collection of Banksy, Shepard Fairies, and other such famous works who, undoubtedly hold 'celebrity-status' within the genre.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Los Angeles is celebrating graffiti, but not on its own property. MOCA's pyramid-topped headquarters on Grand Avenue is conspicuously tag-free. In Little Tokyo, the museum has always painted over the graffiti that appears occasionally on the outside walls of the Geffen Contemporary, its satellite warehouse exhibition space. And now that its latest show — proudly billed as the first major American museum survey of street art — has triggered a predictable upsurge of vandalism in the area, MOCA is even cleaning up graffiti on neighboring businesses.

Why is that? "Art in the Streets" suggests no answer. The exhibition honors such alleged high points in graffiti history as the first cholo tag on the Arroyo Seco parkway and the defacement of L.A.'s freeway signs, without the slightest hint that graffiti is a crime, that it appropriates and damages property without permission and that it destroys urban vitality.⁴⁵

The apparent hypocrisy of the MOCA adds to enforce the point of growing segregation between Graffiti and Street art. Its selection of 'big-name' artists whom the world knows to be displayed in its idea of *"Art in the Streets"*, not only expels lesser-known artists, but also 'shoo's away' would-be writers and taggers, and those by which the 'streets' are most predominated. The gallery and the participating artists, therefore, empower the artists' status and push it into the direction of 'fine art'.⁴⁶

The artist is often blamed for 'selling-out' to a gallery. However, it is often the gallery which makes the final selection. This exclusive process defines the limitations of a gallery, not only in

⁴⁵ Mac Donald *'Tagging MOCA'* Los Angeles Times, May 2011

⁴⁶ Lampert *'The Problem with Taking "Art in the Streets"'* Blouin Artinfo, Jan 2011

complying with its own policies, to which an artist who practices on the street chooses not to conform, but also in terms of the use of space and publicity. A gallery cannot host as many art pieces that it may wish to, and it must also appeal to its patronage. For an extensive genre such as Street art, which arguably includes the most artistic contributors across the globe, a gallery must be selective in choosing only the most accomplished.

However, it is important to note that fame does not define the art. There are many well-known Graffiti writers but their status does not mean that their work is now classed as Street art, but a glorification of an urbanised art form which has established itself within its own field. Writers like Phase 2, whose reign lasted through most of the late 70s in New York and whom participated in one of the first Graffiti exhibitions at the Razor Gallery also in this period, are respected by both current writers and public followers.

Other writers, such as the afore mentioned Mist One and Fista from Sheffield who are both notorious for the amount of Graffiti vandalism caused during the 90s have both tried to adapt their styles onto a canvas one by painting directly onto canvas, the other by photographing his Graffiti work on the side of trains – Mist One is perhaps the most controversial of the two for adapting his work into this context as his work is still illegal but is blanketed by being photographed.

All three writers are highly skilled and famed for their tagging and artistic ability, and all three have adapted their work into the contained context of a gallery canvas at some point. The medium and context may have changed but the style and initial interpretation of the image have not. However, the context of the pieces can re-define the under-lying status and impact of the image. The canvas piece represents a representation of itself. No longer is the transient nature of the piece a defining factor of its implementation. There was no danger of being caught 'vandalising' and tagging the canvas. No immediacy of its execution. The artists were able to take their time and perfect their work – an opportunity not duly granted when out on the streets creating stealth pieces undercover of night. These are still self-promoting tags which although not laying claim to territory, are still laying claim to dominance and ownership of the status which they have achieved.

Banksy, being a former writer himself, understands the etiquette and codes of Graffiti. In 2010 he demonstrated as much by acting upon a code of Graffiti using his Street art. An attack on a former rival of his - long since retired from the scene – instigated the 'battle' code of Graffiti 'war'. A piece in London by Graffiti writer, King Robbo, which had been in place since 1985 (fig. 15), was painted over by Banksy as a mark of 'disrespect' to his rival but as an ode to Graffiti conduct (fig. 16). King Robbo reacted to this in the traditional Graffiti method of re-tagging his name onto Banksy's piece (fig. 17)⁴⁷.

This demonstrates that not only is there competition and rivalry between writers, but also between artists and writers. The segregation of the two cultures is not only apparent amongst

⁴⁷ 'Graffiti Wars' (documentary) Channel 4, 2011

its fans, but also within the scene. Although Banksy is now a Street artist, he communicates with his old rival Graffiti artists upon their terms in the traditional Graffiti ethos, whereas through the same image he communicates with the public – challenging authoritative clean-up projects and ‘control’ over the sub-culture. Without knowing what or who Banksy was attacking via Graffiti lore we would not know that this is also a message of ‘territory’ and superiority over his rival (possibly indicative of his fame) harking back to Graffiti practice, as well as an oxymoronic image which visually stimulates appeal for the general public. Through this Banksy is able to communicate to audiences of both urban cultures.



Fig. 15 King Robbo, London, 1985⁴⁸



Fig. 16 Banksy, London, 2010⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Alter 'Banksy's Graffiti Wars on the Canal' *The Times*, Jan 2010



Fig. 17 King Robbo's come-back, London, 2010⁵⁰

Just as there is good and bad Graffiti – skilfully or unskilfully implemented, there is also good and bad Street art. Both may use similar tactics of execution, and even similar media, but their intentions tend to differ in that one is open to public interpretation like most art, and the other is not but has one main purpose. Street art works by interacting openly with its environment, whereas Graffiti reacts with its audience on a closed scale. Recognition, fame and skill grow for both of these streams of urban art but its audience and intentions often do not merge. One is still classed as Street art, the other as Graffiti.

2.3 Categorisation and Confinement: The Difficulties Encountered by Galleries when Exhibiting Street Art

Now that both streams are classed as different genres of urban visual culture, differentiating between the two may also cause various problems for galleries who wish to exhibit either field. In the past during the beginning of Street art in the early 00s they were often exhibited together as one classification. However, a selection process is now necessary to differentiate the two as Street art's popularity increases.

There is an evident difficulty that galleries have to face when exhibiting Street art. Not only must they select the artists with the most 'selling-power' – given the vastness of the genre, with artists creating various different pieces in distinct styles and tackling different subjects, as well as

⁴⁹ Alter 'Banksy's Graffiti Wars on the Canal' *The Times*, Jan 2010

⁵⁰ Alter 'Banksy's Graffiti Wars on the Canal' *The Times*, Jan 2010

having to filter out the lesser-known artists and those whose work is not of the same quality. In the street it is an open canvas to anyone who dares to create, but in the gallery the rules change. Conformity to policy and regulation is a key aspect and it is up to the gallery's discretion as to how liberal they are to the artist.

When Graffiti first entered the gallery arena in the 80s and 90s, before Street art came into consciousness, it was a risky attempt at bringing Graffiti into the institution and therefore celebrating it within an environment in which people were familiar with and which persuaded them that what they were viewing was a form of art. However, taking Graffiti out of its habitat caused disastrous effects. Without understanding its importance within the street the tags and labels which were displayed in the gallery were rendered meaningless.⁵¹ Although the image remains the same as seen on the street, as mentioned earlier, the transiency of the Graffiti piece is no longer applicable to the canvas as it becomes a representation of itself and its actual meaning and impact is significantly reduced. Taken out of the environment in which they were most effective they became colourful shells of an idea. They no longer carried the same resonance within them. The hierarchy of the Graffiti code had been removed as rival writer was displayed along-side rival writer, and toy with master. They became a representation of themselves. The most they could present was the artistic quality they displayed. It did nothing to aid the public's understanding as to *why*, but merely as to *how*. There was no competition between writers to 'bomb' or 'tag' – they all received an equal amount of publicity and the danger of removal was non-existent. In this sense a gallery exhibition can drastically and quickly diminish the impact and alter the meaning of Graffiti.

Although, this may have been a detrimental move for Graffiti to make for itself, but it motivated the public to view Graffiti in a different light. It sparked an interest within the viewers who were now able to identify 'throw-up' or tag in the urban scene. It provided a window into a whole other culture which was only just being understood and which demonstrated artistic potential – and, ultimately, marketing potential. They recognised its popularity but did not fully understand its significance. Some writers succumbed to the comforts and profiteering of the institution and advertisers and were hence known among their brethren as 'sell-outs'.

As Graffiti disappeared out of conventional exhibition with the bitter taste of vengeance upon their lips, vowing never to conform again, Street art, seeing the potential for freedom of creativity within the open environment began to take effect. When the first Street art exhibitions were held many writers opposed the idea and the segregation began.⁵²

As well as the use of different materials Street art's goal was to reach the public - unlike Graffiti which was designed to reach a fellow writer. This makes Street art much more suited to a gallery exhibition as its image is generally adaptable to suit almost any medium whether that is outside or upon a canvas. As long as the image is seen it can still provoke a reaction and if it is

51 Snyder, *'Graffiti media and the perpetuation of an illegal subculture'*, 2007 (p. 100)

52 Eric *'History of Graffiti'*, *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner*, June 1998

indeed a Street artist's aim for the public to see their work – hence their choice of using the open environment – then it should work just as well in a gallery where people come especially to see the work. On the other hand containing some Street art images within a gallery also inhibits the effectiveness of the piece. The artist's choice in where they display the image within urban surroundings should cause the viewer to question their environment. Seeing an image unexpectedly often catches the attention of the spectator and can even provoke the thoughts of the onlooker, although this is not always guaranteed.

Despite being aesthetically easier to exhibit, Street art received no less opposition to exhibition than Graffiti with regards to cause and motive. It still effectively nullified its impact and, under the old Graffiti idea of a liberal urban visual method conforming to a gallery, became seen as a 'sell-out' by fellow writers and avid Graffiti followers.

Nowadays Street art has reached a peak in its existence. Artists of various different mediums, motives, and backgrounds are being observed throughout the world and many are successfully addressing world issues and actually making differences with their Street art. One such artist is JR, a French street artist, who uses his camera to capture faces and expressions of real people who live in dangerous areas of conflict and poverty, and then pastes these images across massive canvases within the area in which they were taken, creating a sort of opposition to the idea of the people that live in these areas that the propaganda media presents. One such project was *'Women are Heroes'* which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (fig. 18), and which aimed to represent and celebrate all the women that had lost children and husbands to the gangs and police that corruptedly monitored the province. Altering the aesthetics of the Brazilian ghetto, renowned for its gun crime and corrupt police force, JR not only captures the viewers attention with this stunning vantage-point but also provokes thoughts and emotions within the viewer as they look into the eyes of those whom have suffered under the corruption and danger that their lives lead every day.⁵³ This is an effective example of how Street art can not only make the public aware of a situation but it can also effectively alter the environment for the better away from the restrictions and confines of a gallery or local authority.

These photographic portraits were not monitored by the authorities, nor were they restricted to a gallery space, but were created and displayed in the open for the public. It was art-for-art's sake and for the people both inside the ghetto and those outside. Due to the dangers of the province the media were restricted from entering, so the project was able to continue without conditional limitations. This vantage-point created a sort of visual bridge between the province where no-one dared venture and the outside world. It altered the aesthetics and made an area which represented poverty and hostility into an area of visual beauty – provoking the thoughts and capturing the attention of the outside viewer

⁵³ JR *TED Talks: 'Use art to turn the world inside out'*, March 2011

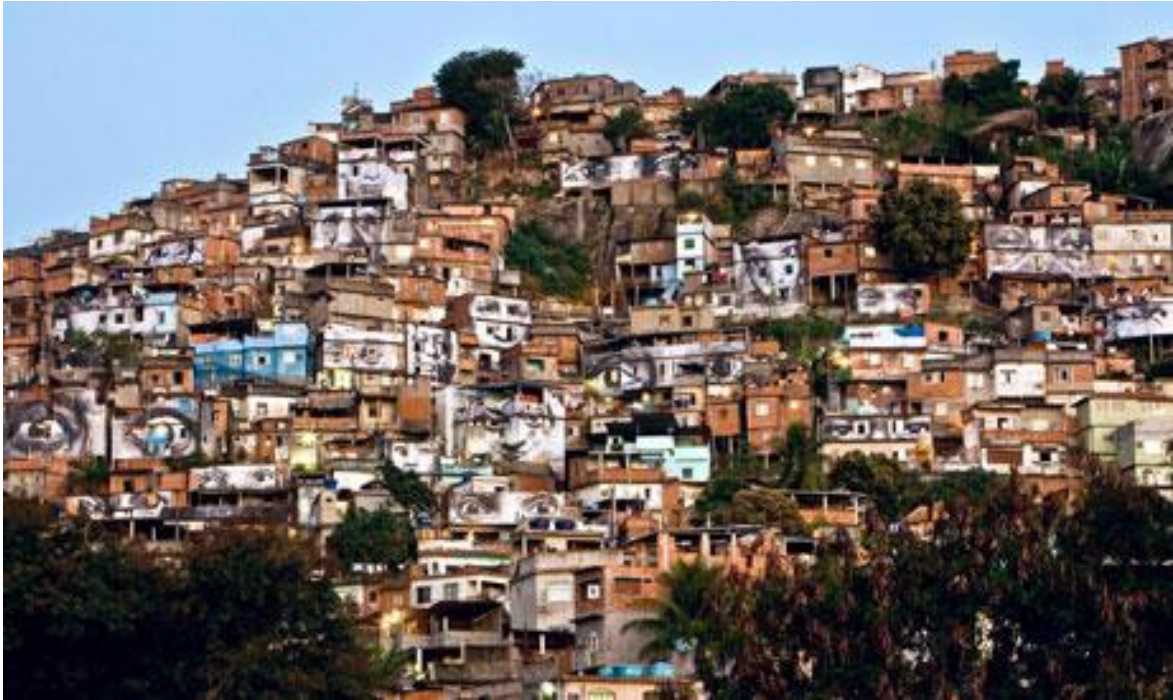


Fig. 18 'Women are Heros'⁵⁴, Rio de Janeiro, 2008.

JR leaves the art at the mercy of the people involved rather than the authorities, which has often resulted in his projects being defaced or moved. However, he states that the art belongs to them.

"What was interesting was that the media couldn't get in.... They would have to film us [pasting the photos] from a really long distance.... We just did a project and then left, so the media wouldn't know.... They would have go and find the women and it created a bridge."⁵⁵

By taking his Street art to areas where galleries and museums are non-existent, his art gains new meaning, not only due to the concept of the project but also for the people concerned who are perhaps not used to experiencing an art culture.

JR acts upon the very nature of Street art. Its accessibility and unlimited creativity is what defines its character. Aside from it being an artistically-based concept, the point of its being unobstructed by an authority harks to the rebellious characteristics of Graffiti. However, unlike Graffiti, the medium of the project which *involves* the public, rather than remains at a metaphorical distance from them in the form of an artistic understanding or an anonymous gang signature, marks another step within the evolution of Street art and signifies the importance of the culture – influencing its popularity amongst the public.

⁵⁴ Google Images

⁵⁵ JR *TED Talks: 'Use art to turn the world inside out'*, March 2011

This could, therefore, be viewed as a development of Street art by being an artistic and potentially beneficial, productive endeavour, while still maintaining its expressionistic and 'free/rebellious' ideals stemming from Graffiti, which, despite opposition and ever-fluctuating interest, is maintaining its underground status and ever distancing itself from Street art. By combining these two almost opposite ideas with the concept of involving the public, rather than sustaining a level of distance from them, attempts to create a connection of interaction between society and Street art, although it is given that appreciation and understanding is not always achieved. However, it is this immediate execution and address of contemporary issues which attempts to initiate the viewers reaction, whether they understand or appreciate it or not.

In spite of its liberal nature the Gallery still proves to be one of the principle methods of gaining institutionalised recognition, which may be why many lesser-known Street artists are still being penalised for their work. A gallery wishes to be a part of the movement and it has often played a key hand in the publicity and propaganda of the art. However, its only means of indefinite survival is to make money, which it can only achieve if they can attract the public to view and buy the art pieces. The public demands for famous artists, and famous pieces and those which cannot be seen in or around their home town. The gallery must select pieces which will interest the public and in particular the public who are willing to spend vast amounts of money for an original Banksy. Street art, being the open and liberal genre that it is, attracts many young fanatics, not only within the culture but also without. Its cult-status, found on the street and signifying the age-old Punk and Graff ideals of 'sticking it to the man', appeals to many youths whom feel oppressed by authority. *"But the gallery needs collectors, not fans."*⁵⁶ As Street art continues to progress many more galleries choose the exhibit and celebrate its growth.

This raises the question of the impact the institution has on an essentially 'outdoor' and spontaneous form of art. Many have argued that this renders the point of Street art meaningless, and that artists that conform to a gallery are 'selling-out'. But this attitude is an old one which was formulated during the reign of Graffiti and before Street art was a stand-alone concept. Conversely, if indeed the term Street art now implies not only the context of the art but also the style of the art itself then it would not be incongruous to display the 'domestic' work of a Street artist.

The Gallery offers a level ground between artists and viewers. It is not only a collection of various favoured artists, but also provides a platform on which the artists have agreed to expose themselves and their work to the matter of conformity and public opinion. The viewer is able to scrutinise their work on comparative terms with other artists and styles, and at their own convenience.

They can also purchase particular pieces which benefits both the artist and the gallery.- However, this may also be an incentive of the individual who wishes only to gain fame and recognition, and thereby feature in a gallery in order to sell their work.

⁵⁶ Extract from a discussion with Jeanette Dekeukeleire, conducted by myself in May 2012

Although, despite the benefit of gallery publicity Street art still proves to be a difficult subject to exhibit - due to its very nature many would-be artists are able to create similar images in the street and call it 'art'. Therefore the gallery must be selective with whom it chooses to display. As the gallery relies upon interaction with the public in order to profit and maintain its capital, it must react to an institutionalised definition and understanding of 'art'.

What the public state as 'art' is generally based on the traditional, westernised idea of the visual image. If an artist can demonstrate a skilful and an original execution and knowledge of their medium, it can cause an emotive response from the viewer, who appreciates novelty and imagination.

Street art is not only problematic in its selection by galleries who must accept as well as reject various artists and their work to comply with gallery policy, profiteering potential and simply because of a lack of space, but it is also becoming more and more difficult as the liberal nature of Street art is undertaking an even more freeing medium with technology and the internet. Artists are able to work from home and sell their pieces online via websites and applications. This technological breakthrough for the art industry could almost render the gallery an obsolete form of money-making and could perhaps become an archival exhibition space - no longer celebrating the new movements but housing past ones, taking on a similar policy to that of a museum. Conversely it is important to mention that galleries today also have access to online publicity and shops, and that their newsletters often publicise to thousands of subscribers. So the gallery is by no means limited when it comes to advertising and publicity, but that the artist, if well established, often does not necessarily 'need' the gallery to exhibit their work.

Another advantage to exhibiting in a gallery is that it is a symbol of quality. As it only chooses who and what to exhibit it represents a level of significance which the artist has reached with their work and style.

Nonetheless this selection of work could also indicate a level of superiority and the elite which often prove problematic when aimed towards the impact of many categorical urban art pieces.

However, this is only with regards to the Street art phenomenon, which is a difficult movement to contain and categorise unless met upon the artist's own terms.

2.4 Civic Attitude and Typification

The visual image is the key factor for defining most art movements. It is the visual which catches the public-eye and which instigates recognition of style or personal reference. And in most cases it is the visual icon, rather than text, which is instantly recognisable. This is arguably why most writers, particularly of the 'Wild' Graffiti style, have painstakingly developed and perfected their tag as more of a symbolic visual reference rather than plain text. The tags and throw-ups are logos which, as texts, are barely legible but as images can be easily spotted by fellow taggers and also recognised by passers-by. The underground world of Graffiti has developed this indecipherable technique as a means of communicating with other taggers, as only they can decode the enigmatic image of the tag. But it has also developed as a means of remaining remote from the general public who are unable to interpret the cryptic symbols, thence maintaining their anonymity.

Street Art also plays on the format of recognition in style and technique but does so not as an agent of territorial ownership, but simply as a public expression of art.

Most people when asked to compare the difference between both Street art and Graffiti will state the tangible differences. Both may use guerrilla tactics in method but Street art affirms a point of *art-for-art's sake* in that it usually does not form any other purpose than that of an elaborate 'decoration' – with or without meaning. Much like any art, its key factor of significance is the visual image.

When asked to define Street art in their own words, and based on their own idea of what Street art is, several people gave varied answers. However, they each hinted at similar factors and followed a very analogous pattern;

Statement #1

"It has to be in a public space, accessible day and night to everyone.

It has to at least have pretence to be 'artistic', to be more than a graffiti tag or vandalism or doodling, by being surprising in some way, by actually addressing or interacting with by-passers, or by having a message (nonsensical or otherwise)

It has to have some element of illegality, not necessarily by being illegal but at least by not being signed with a 'real' name, something half-mysterious or clandestine

It has to be hard or impossible to sell (or to take out of its context without ruining it)

It does not have a very permanent character or 'noble' materials

It is 'fixed' physically to the public space, by being attached around or sprayed on something, or by being too big to carry."

Statement #2

"The Street art I'm interested in is the stuff that they do on the pavement. It looks like it's in 3D. Shows great imagination! Does it serve a purpose? No. Insofar as no art serves a purpose or it serves lots of purposes. But if it stops us and makes us think/admire, then it makes us question and talk about it then it enhances our lives. Gives a different dimension to our lives. Street art would make us smile as we're doing our boring shopping. Gives us something to talk about. I love it! Don't know about Graffiti. Is that Street art? Why does that not have same feelings? It never evokes that feeling of admiration for me. [Despite] Graffiti [having] been around for many years."

Statement #3

"[I agree with subject #1]. The only point I am not sure about is the illegality, because I don't think it is a necessity. It just happens to be connected to Street art, because of its roots in Graffiti etc, but if an artwork were to tick all the boxes that [subject #1] has listed, except for illegality, it would still be Street art I think. But maybe you could argue the same for all of the points mentioned."

Statement #4

"I think for art to be Street art it needs to actually be done by an artist and be commissioned by somebody like a council or art charity. By definition, I suppose for it to be "Street art" it needs to be

in the street as opposed to in a gallery.

Personally I really like Street art as I find that it is a great way of making shop fronts a lot more interesting, and it can be used to almost disguise run down areas by giving them a facelift for free and covering up the grot. I like the cartoonish style that is often used, and it's a fantastic way of showcasing artists' talents on a massive scale.

Alternatively, I can appreciate why people might not like street art as that might be everyone's taste - it's not exactly classical art. However, I think it's much more attractive than Graffiti. Graffiti is damaging and is done WITHOUT reason... Street art improves the area and is done WITH a reason."

Statement #5

"My first thought to what makes something "Street art" was that it must appear in a street/outside public owned space. But then I thought that "Street art" is more of a genre so could therefore be exhibited in a gallery...or would that make it "Street art style"? I suppose what I am struggling with is if you took a Banksy off the street and put it in a museum would it cease to be Street art? I'm not so sure. Maybe the piece or the artist just needs to have its routes in the urban environment either using reclaimed materials as a canvass (like a wall) or for the piece itself. By this token, that would mean that you couldn't take a Rembrandt and stick it on the street and call it Street art as it has no route in the street."

Statement #6

"I definitely think Art, Culture, News, Society and Politics have a profound effect on what Street artists capture and I think overtime street art has become a well respected art form and not the scribbles of mindless youths. I think street artists often use their art to target the public and try to make them aware of social and political issues. What I find fascinating about street art is the fact that it has now become very "cool" and has a cult status. During my time at university I noticed a mirage of people trying to emulate Street artists such as Banksy. The Street artists themselves also tend to have a hero worshipping status as they have an anti establishment tag and many of my friends definitely respected what they were trying to encapsulate in their images. Take Kid Acne who is a local graffiti artist in Sheffield much of his Street art became synonymous with Sheffield and when I think of Sheffield now I can say I associate his art with that place. That's what I enjoy about the Street art that I have seen over the years, I often associate the images with that place. The images street artists draw/stencil create certain emotions whether that is anger, comedy, love or fear I think that's very rare with any other types of art. Street art can often engage wider audiences because they are shown in public domains, so Street artists are extremely clever in the sense that they can create an emotion in someone and make them think about particular issues that they wouldn't necessarily think about if they had not seen their street art."⁵⁷

It is important to mention that these candidates have absolutely no background in any form of urban art, and that the only influences on their answers were their own knowledge of the genre.

⁵⁷ Statements 1 – 6 made by fellow peers of different disciplines and backgrounds, March 2012

The question they were asked contained no favouritism between either Graffiti or Street art, but the answers show a strong message of segregation and preference between the two.

Each statement mentions a particular element which defines Street art in its contemporary context. There is a distinct acknowledgement of the difference and separation of Street art from Graffiti, and the former even runs parallels with fine art in terms of quality, originality, and a common understanding of the term 'art'.

It is also apparent that the reasoning and significance of Graffiti eludes the general public. This lack of understanding causes frustration, hostility, and intolerance towards Graffiti writers. – A relationship between public and writer which has not drastically altered since modern Graffiti began in the 70's. This also demonstrates a level of hierarchy as Street art is much more revered than Graffiti.

2.5 Attitudes and Advancements in the Present

Street art is defined as an expressive medium which may or may not have a purpose, but which adds another dimension to our understanding of 'art'. - It has seceded from its relationship with Graffiti and is now not only regarded as an art movement, but maintains its 'other' factor by becoming an *extension* of what we already understand to be 'art'.

The symbolic barrier of its 'alternative' subculture status is swiftly being demolished as public, institutions and artists alike are realising the various potentials of Street art, whether as a form of decoration, expression, or social and political statement. Its various forms and materials are not only expertly used, and tactfully executed with guerrilla-like strategy, but is also demonstrative of the artistic skill and imagination of the artists, and often leads them to constructing commissioned pieces and/or gallery work in the more traditional sense.

It has extended the idea of 'art' by acting upon the age-old concept of '*art-for-arts sake*' and indeed upon creating art '*for the public*'. It also especially brings to light the significance of the Gallery and the art institution.

But the institution is not the prime objective of Street art's goals. The gallery merely acts as another medium and other level of display.⁵⁸ For many artists the hierarchy of a gallery does not lessen their Street art credibility but advocates it. It is no-longer frowned upon for a Street artist to wish to exhibit in a gallery. The terms 'sell-out' and 'conformist' are words of a by-gone era echoing past Graffiti and Punk style writers, whose ethics were completely different to that of modern-day Street artists. Street art is a different level of urban art to that of Graffiti, which allows its display in a gallery. The anti-institutional attitude was most prominent both ten years ago, when Street art was new and still closely associated with Graffiti, and during the 80's when Graffiti writers tried to adapt their style onto canvas. This caused dire effects for the writers who had indeed 'sold-out' according to Graffiti lore and principals.

⁵⁸ Fragment from an interview with Hugo Kaagman, conducted by myself in March, 2011

The chronology which has defined Street art over the years has seen a shift in the emphasis in the meaning. Street art once meant *art in the Streets* – usually illegal and sharing many parallels with Graffiti from where it derived. Over the years Street art has become a genre of art and has become linked to a popular lifestyle and ‘street’ culture. There has been a shift from the emphasis of ‘street’ to ‘art’.

The darkened, ghetto and post-apocalyptic days of Hip Hop and Punk Graffiti were replaced by urban regeneration which has brought people back onto the streets. The Cafe Culture has re-populated the run-down urban areas and those still led the ghetto lifestyle had inadvertently become fashion blue-prints for a new popular culture.

The evolution of Street art has developed from this Street culture and has now become a popularised branch of urban lifestyle. Its popularisation has been recognised by institutions and therefore, the natural progress of art has often led to its inevitable, but not final, destination of a gallery.

Now, although Graffiti is much less adaptable to gallery display than Street art – given its underground language and usually un-relatable or incomprehensible *Wild Style* lettering – it is still celebrated amongst its own fans and writers through its own events and happenings, unrelated to a gallery or profiteering but merely for the sake of self-promotion and dedication to the culture. A Facebook page⁵⁹ dedicated to Graffiti and Street art is open to all members consisting of fans, new artists and writers who are able to participate in writing competitions and post images of their work on the streets. Using a free social network like Facebook not only widens the audience which stretches across the globe but also utilises its liberal nature to promote this new open approach to Graffiti and Street art – stressing the noninterventionist nature of which they are based upon.

There are also Graffiti events open to all writers and free to the public. One such annual event is ‘*Step in the Arena*’ in Eindhoven.⁶⁰ This event is a recent collaboration between artists and writers as a response to the growing popularity of urban art but with a focus on Graffiti. Beginning in 2010, it invites all writers to join in a piece-battle in which they make their mark or piece within a designated area of Eindhoven. This area, the Berenkuil – officially Insulindeplein, is appropriately nick-named the ‘Hall of Fame’ (fig(s). 19 & 20) by fans and writers and is a large series of under-passes forming a circular, arena-like, open space. This space has been a popular hit-spot for writers and taggers over many decades and was designated an official spot where Graffiti could be created over ten years ago. ‘*Step in the Arena*’ is an opportunity for writers to ‘battle’ and demonstrate their skills and communicate their dominance and status within the Graffiti scene - a commemoration of the Graffiti sub-culture. Anyone, from toy to master, writer and artist are allowed to join making these events paradoxically more accessible and ‘free’ than popular Street art, whose similarities to institutionalised methods of promotion are becoming more and more common-place with current exhibitions. The Graffiti scene is once again opening up to its audience without striving for fame or conventionality, but by embracing its own dynamics.

⁵⁹ www.facebook.com/pages/Graffiti-Street-Art/179456680970 accessed in May 2012

⁶⁰ www.stepinthearena.nl accessed in May 2012



Fig(s) 19 & 20 The Berenkuil Graffiti 'Hall of Fame' in Eindhoven.⁶¹

Graffiti's recent re-growth in popularity is a reaction to the segregation of the Street art and Graffiti genre. As writers have realised that to also conform to a gallery is detrimental to the Graffiti ethos, they choose, therefore, to venerate and also honour the genre in their own less conventional method which is still reminiscent and respectful of the culture. While Street art follows the customary art path of fame and commercialism - many well-known pieces losing their original, contemporary meaning through commodity - Graffiti is embracing its metaphysical and also its qualitative differences from Street art.

In the past graffiti was condemned as an outright act of vandalism but now most of the community see the potential for graffiti to be an art form.⁶²

The Gallery does indeed enable, publicity, preservation, public access and awareness, and also provides an opportunity to earn money, but it does not hinder or stop the artist from producing more illegal work on the streets. In one way it *promotes* their work.

The institution is merely a symptom of the evolution of Street art and indeed many other visual arts. However, in an age where technological advancements have enabled artists to advertise themselves and their work, and even sell their work 'from home', via websites and applications has made it even more difficult for galleries to find artists willing to consign their art for a halved percentage of the selling price. Street artists had always had the advantage of liberty over confinement - therefore opting for a gallery display was only used as a means of publicity as well as celebration. Now they find even more liberation with technological advertising on which they may often dictate their own terms. - A sign of its popularity and an indication of its current progression. Its recognition is ever increasing amongst artists, institutions and students, which may or may not have a detrimental effect on its impact.

⁶¹ Google Images

⁶² Sayer 'Sub-culture as Big Business' *World Wide Bulletin*, May 2005

As is a natural process for any art form, changing attitudes in society determine that changing attitudes towards an established art movement. That which was once 'radical' and associated with its closest relative, Graffiti, from which it stemmed but, through a theoretical process based on Situationist ideas and various styles of Graffiti, has now developed its own standing and is its own movement with its own following.

This generalised idea of Street art as it stands today, with a few exceptions to the rule, leads to wonder how it had become so widely accepted as an art form, or even as part of a lifestyle, although much of it is still carried out illegally and has a tendency to deface and possibly even damage public property. Its style and motive may vary from Graffiti, and the lifestyle which it is associated which differs from that of Graffiti, as well as its ethics and ideas – but it is still essentially vandalism to a point of un-authorized defacement of public property without permission. Many of the tactics to carry out Street art are guerrilla-like in terms of stealth and secrecy. Only a small percentage of it is commissioned or 'famous' enough to be wanted by a gallery.

There is a fine line between the definition of Graffiti and Street art and there are many exceptions to the rule. What I give here is a generalisation of what my research has lead me to believe is a significant difference to classifying the two as separate from each other – based on first-hand accounts from writers and artists alike, as well as institutional interpretation, public ideas and my own personal experience.

However, the factors which determine the two as different are ever-increasing, as they become ever-more dissimilar.

I mentioned earlier the idea of metaphorical public accessibility to Street art and Graffiti. Graffiti writers have their own society and system. A writer can recognise a fellow writer's style and skill of execution, taking into consideration the external factors of their environment.

The Graffiti 'world' stems from the old idea of territory, ownership, and the youthful need to express and vent their frustrations through an alias or recognisable style, which is generally unintelligible to the general public but which can be understood by other members of this exclusive society.

The initiations into a group or gang of New York *Wild Style* writers follow very strict rules and a novice, or 'toy', must prove their loyalty and skill of execution.

These ideas may seem dated now but they still form the basis of Graffiti writing today. Many youths will go out in groups and take turns to keep watch while 'tagging' their terrain. Tags are sprayed over tags as each group enforce their status and ownership, leaving a 'message' for other gangs who might invade their patch.

Punk Graffiti acted as a pre-cursor to Street art today.⁶³ In the sense that it not only marks territory similar to New York Graffiti, but it also conveyed a message of 'Anarchy' to the public – based on governmental policies of the time.

⁶³ Fragment from an interview with Leonor Jonker, conducted by myself in February, 2012

Although the political issues have changed since then, the idea of this urbanised visual medium expressing political concerns has been maintained by the earlier works and political stunts of Banksy and the repeating 'Obey' image of Shepard Fairey.

The evolution of Street art and the changing attitudes towards the urban environment has led to the amiable attitude people now have towards this artistic medium. Regeneration and urbanisation of once run-down towns and cities across Europe the US and in particular the UK has also seen a development in the social acceptance of the art which dominates this urban landscape.

Whereas Graffiti was the visual mark of the oppressed, Street art has developed, along with its surroundings, into an expression of freedom. Free art understood and appreciated by all who wish to know it. On the other hand, it is not only regeneration in the urban environment which affects the art but also the use of art in regeneration in the form of commissioned murals, aesthetically changing the facade of a run-down building or area.

....art both influences and is influenced by social changes.it initiates social changes while itself changing with them.⁶⁴

The ever-changing societal factors have influenced the status, and helped to categorise Street art, as well as ensured its evolution as a more common socially acceptable movement than that of Graffiti before-hand.

The influence that starts in society and is directed toward art determines the nature of the relationship more than the reverse.⁶⁵

To study the growing acceptance of Street art over Graffiti into institutionalised conventionalities and commoditisation we must take a chronological look at its influences prior to Graffiti, which was touched on by Punk Graffiti writers and subsequently maintained in some form by Street artists and which helped to shape its association as an art movement.

⁶⁴ Hauser *The Sociology of Art*, 1982 (p.89)

⁶⁵ Hauser *The Sociology of Art*, 1982 (p.89)

Part 3: Conceptual Theorems

3.1 Street Art Theory and the Situationists

Given the character of Street art, and its adaptability to suit almost any location, its ideals and nature are similar to those of the Situationist movement.

Started in continental Europe in the 1950s, the Situationist International (SI) was an avant-garde political movement that sought to recapture the ideals of surrealist art and use them to construct new and radical social situations.⁶⁶

The Situationist movement originated from a small band of avant-garde artists and intellectuals influenced by Dadaism, Surrealism and Lettrism. The post-war Lettrist International, which sought to fuse poetry and music and transform the urban landscape, was a direct forerunner of the group who then founded the magazine, *Situationiste Internationale*, in 1957.

At first, they were principally concerned with the “suppression of art” and they wished, like the Dadaists and the Surrealists before them, to supersede the categorisation of art and culture as separate activities and to transform them into part of everyday life. Like the Lettrists, they were against work and for complete *divertissement*.

Under a capitalist rule, the creativity of most people had become diverted and stifled, and society had been divided into actors and spectators, producers and consumers. The Situationists therefore wanted a different kind of revolution: they wanted the imagination, not a group of men, to seize power - and poetry and art to be made by all.

These ideals of the Situationists correspond with the nature of Street art. Its submergence of art with the ‘everyday’ street and public setting enables its message to be viewed by a wider audience and is a key element to its very disposition and therefore the Situationist idea that art and culture is for everyone and should not be viewed as a separate.

Banksy’s work is such that his manipulative use of media enables it to adapt to most settings in the public realm, and its content is often provoking and controversial.

In the course of art history, there have been many artists who have created art with socio-political undertones, whether they are realistic, expressionist, and symbolic or issues of propaganda. Such is true with many other forms of media such as music and film. The emergence of Graffiti in the 70’s unknowingly encompassed the ideas of the Situationists by producing art in a public setting with a message or a symbol, dependant on whether it was Graffiti of the Punk movement or Hip Hop Graffiti. Its artistic aesthetic or message was merged

⁶⁶ www.libcom.org/thought/ideas/situationists accessed in May 2012

with the 'everyday' and it challenged the categorisations and segregation of traditional and conformist 'art'.

Banksy's avant-garde artwork combines these interests into his work.

Thanks to the Situationist art and philosophy movement before him, Banksy is able to make meaningful art which provokes the common man into thinking more about current issues and hopefully to make some positive change in doing so.⁶⁷

His stencilled messages are to provoke rather than decorate, and despite his acts of vandalism, he is revered for doing so and widely notorious. Banksy most effective tactic is perhaps his anonymity as he is able to obtain the notoriety and recognition that most artists desire, but does so with complete ambiguity and, in doing so, lets his artwork speak for itself using the message as the medium. This subversive tactic of spreading ones art is almost the key to the Situationist idea.

Idealistic beliefs such as this have long existed before the height of the Graffiti scene. The Situationist movement during the late 50's and onto the 60's believed in Marxist and Post-Modern thought, as well as incorporating those ideals with art and film.

Founded by the French artist and philosopher Guy Debord, the Situationists believed in;

....superseding art, abolishing the notion of art as a separate, specialized activity and transforming it so it became part of the fabric of everyday life. From the Situationist's viewpoint, art is revolutionary or it is nothing.⁶⁸

As part of the Situationist ideal, they practiced what they called 'détournement', the act of taking an existing form of media and creating a new piece of art with a totally different message behind it. It can be also described as the 'turning around' of images or ideas from the dominant culture through appropriation and superimposition of revolutionary ideas or slogans.

In this they would take comic strips and place quotes from their own work to show the contrast between the Bourgeois consumer cultures with anti-Capitalist dialogue (fig (s). 21 & 22).

⁶⁷ Malazarte *'The Mystery of Banksy and the Situationist Movement'* Art Institute of Tampa, Feb 2006

⁶⁸ Malazarte *'The Mystery of Banksy and the Situationist Movement'* Art Institute of Tampa, Feb 2006

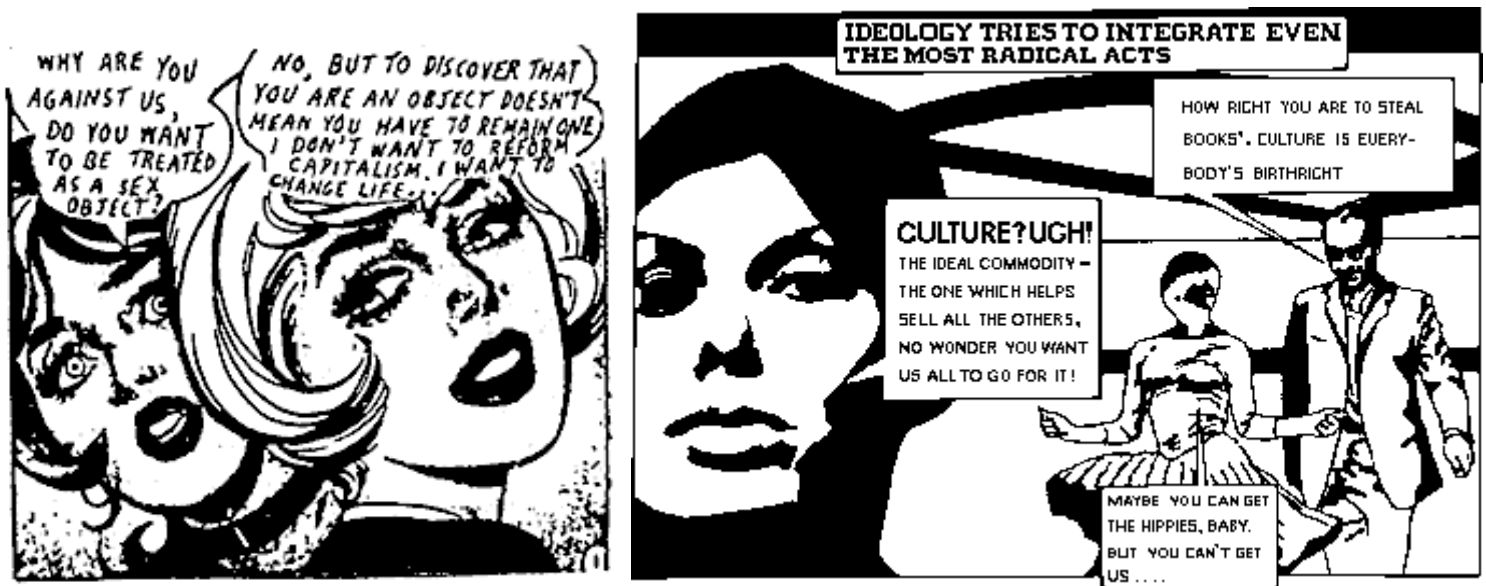


Fig. 21⁶⁹ & 22⁷⁰ (1973) Situationist art.

Détournement spread to film with the feature; *'Can Dialectics Break Bricks?'*, a black-and-white kung-fu movie dubbed over with Marxist dialogue, and a film version of Debord's book, *'The Society of the Spectacle'*, using images of sex and the consumerist society against itself. Also to emphasise the Situationist message, Debord bound his books in sandpaper in order to deface the literature along-side the text when being taken from a book shelf.

It is this attitude and artistic ideal, which the Situationists embodied, that plays a key component in understanding the character of Street art and Street artists like Banksy.

The Situationist tactic of détournement is also a method adopted by Banksy, as he recreated existing pieces of artwork and changed the meaning and the view of these classic works. Such as Claude Monet's *'Bridge over a Pond of Water Lilies'* (fig. 23), onto which he painted shopping carts and a cone submerged in the water - transforming a classic piece of impressionist art which is easily recognised as Claude Monet's famous image but re-painted by Banksy to include an equally recognisable situation all too familiar with the modern-day audience, demonstrating the immediate contextual reference in the piece - The Art of Today - and recreating Andy Warhol's infamous *'Marilyn Monroe'* screen print, by using supermodel Kate Moss' face instead.

These modified oil paintings became so popular that they had their own exhibition entitled *'Crude Oils'* located in Westbourne Grove, London. But what has popularised Banksy most of all, besides these aforementioned pieces, are his public 'stunts'.

⁶⁹ Google Images

⁷⁰ www.libcom.org/thought/ideas/situationists (accessed in May 2012)



Fig 23. 'Show Me the Monet', Banksy, Westbourne Grove, London (2005)⁷¹

Banksy draws on Situationist philosophy...the use of the media as an extension of his art.⁷²

Banksy's ability to recreate different pieces and styles of artwork not only shows his innovation and imagination in being able to recapture the public's attention to these familiar pieces, but also demonstrates his skill as an artist who is able to make nigh exact replica of various classic art works.

As mentioned earlier, the Situationist movement was heavily influenced by the desire of the Dadaists and Surrealists to extend their artistic concerns into attacks on broader social and cultural issues, and saw itself as overtly and politically engaged in a struggle against a society that had become, an "*accumulation of spectacles*."⁷³ Drawing on Marxist theory, the Situationists reasoned that if modernity is a spectacle and its spectators are seduced by the glamorous mediation of their own lives through images, signs, and commodities, then modern individuals are fundamentally characterised by personal alienation, a feature fundamental to class reproduction and economic expansion instead of basing their sense of self on a direct understanding of space and society as they did in the past.⁷⁴

⁷¹ www.artofthestate.co.uk/bansky/bansky_crude_oils accessed in January 2012

⁷² Deitch, Gastman & Rose 'Art in the Streets' 2011, (p.18)

⁷³ Debord 'Theory of the Dérive' *Internationale Situationniste*, Issue No.2, 1958

⁷⁴ Debord 'Theory of the Dérive' *Internationale Situationniste*, Issue No.2, 1958

Based on the profound belief that human beings can overcome this state of passive consumption, the Situationists developed guerrilla tactics of engaging with, and subverting, previously one-directional forms of media and societal experience. Using these tactics, notably *dérive* and *détournement*, the city was to become an arena for creating situations that would break the constraints that prevent the development of meaningful ventures in life and culture. - *Dérive* can be described as an unplanned journey through an urban environment, on which the subtle aesthetic contours of the surrounding architecture and geography subconsciously direct the travellers, with the ultimate goal of encountering an entirely new and authentic experience.

The desired outcome of these urban re-evaluations was the elaboration of new urban psycho-geographical outlines with which to discredit authority, so as to discover what Debord described as a "*human journey through authentic life.*"⁷⁵

This movement arguably foreshadowed much of the theoretical claims behind today's Street art phenomenon. Chronology suggests that the Situationist International was allegedly an early influence on the Punk subculture in Europe.

Malcolm McLaren introduced Situationist ideas to Punk through his management of the band *The Sex Pistols*. Vivienne Westwood, McLaren's partner and the band's designer/stylist, expressed Situationist ideals through fashion that was intended to provoke a specific social response. Jamie Reid's distinctive album cover artwork was openly Situationist (fig. 24).

One major punk activist in Amsterdam during the 1970's is Hugo Kaagman (fig.25). Co-founder of the '*Koekrant*' Punk magazine and now internationally renowned stencil artist. The Punk movement was "*...looking for new philosophy, and trying to promote the [Punk] culture.*"⁷⁶ To do this Kaagman and his colleagues not only wrote the '*Koekrant*' and hosted exhibitions from their squatting house, but they also tagged and vandalised various areas of Amsterdam.

*"Hip Hop' graffiti was all over Europe, but Amsterdam was the first. It carried a message."*⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Debord '*Theory of the Dérive*' *Internationale Situationniste*, Issue No.2, 1958

⁷⁶ Fragment from an interview with Hugo Kaagman, conducted by myself in March 2011

⁷⁷ Fragment from an interview with Hugo Kaagman, conducted by myself in March 2011



Fig. 24 Jamie Reid's famous album cover design for the Sex Pistols (1977)⁷⁸



Fig. 25 Hugo Kaagman in his studio at Amsterdam RAI station, (March 2011)⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Google Images

⁷⁹ Photograph in Amsterdam RAI Station, Amsterdam, taken by myself in March 2011

Leonor Jonker describes the Situationist influence on Punk in her book, *'No Future NU'* (2012), and also talks about the use of détournement in another of the Sex Pistols single covers, designed by Jamie Reid;

Do you mention anything about the Situationist influence on Punk, in your book?

"I do. The Situationists of course were a massive influence on Punk. I discuss it in relation to Street art, because the détournement practice of the Situationists (using mass-media imagery in a new context) was used by Street art pioneers like Jenny Holzer, but also by the Punks - best example of course is the 'Holidays In The Sun' single cover of the Sex Pistols (fig. 26)". The album cover by Situationist inspired graphic designer Jamie Reid changed the texts of an existing holiday advertisement, altering the meaning of the pictures representing a classic practice of détournement.

"To me, détournement is at the core of both punk statement and street art practice, linking punk and street art tight together.

Also, of course, the Situationists wrote Provo like statements on the street like the famous 'Sous les pavés, la plage'."⁸⁰

Many of the provocative aspects that were instigated through Situationist art and then continued through the Punk era are still a major factor for a lot of Street art today. Much of it seeks to combine a recognisable image with an influential context, and displayed in a public area where it can be viewed by the masses.

One of Banksy's most recent contributions, similarly to his *'Crude oils'*, is the *'Cardinal Sin'* piece (fig. 27) at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. The piece, made in response to the child abuse scandals that the church seems to be known for these days, features a face taken off and replaced by blank bathroom tiles. Banksy noted in a statement; *"I'm never sure who deserves to be put on a pedestal or crushed under one."* The sculpture sits next to religious works dated from the 17th Century.⁸¹ In this piece of 'Art of Today' Banksy juxtaposes the anarchical, modern state of society with idealised forms of 'high' art. Much like the *'Crude Oils'* work, Banksy contrasts a classical piece with a modern visual medium. Everyone recognises the implications a face pixilation has, which demonstrates Banksy's response to the Catholic Church given their many accusations of child molesting that have been brought to light recently. These works are also often compared to the Situationist theory of détournement.

⁸⁰ Fragment from an interview with Leonor Jonker regarding her book *'No Future Nu'* (2012), conducted by myself in February 2012

⁸¹ www.ukstreetart.co.uk/2011/12/banksy-cardinal-sin-sculpture-walker-gallery-liverpool accessed in January 2012



Fig. 26 'Holidays in the Sun', Sex Pistols. Album cover designed by Jamie Reid.⁸²

Street art is not only confined to the streets but encompasses an entire genre of contemporary art, whose reasoning falls very similarly with original Situationist ideals and the Punk influence. Another example is Banksy's Guantanamo Bay detainee stunt at Disneyland in 2006, in which he placed a mannequin, dressed as a prisoner in the enclosure of one of the rides, caused much controversy as the subject was a major topic in the news at the time.

⁸² Google Images



Fig. 27 'Cardinal Sin', Banksy, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2011)⁸³

An Italian Street Artist, Blu, also paints controversial murals concerning political issues. His distinctive comic book style often delivers caustic messages against big corporations like the oil companies. One of his controversial street art creations is the *'Smoking Politicians'* mural in, which was intended as a protest against political inaction towards pollution in Southern Italy.

Much of Street art follows a similar pattern. A combination of guerrilla tactics and stealth as expertly displayed by both past Punk and current Hip Hop style Graffiti writers who cover the streets with their alias and image using the traditional spray paint medium to communicate their exclusive 'street' code to other writers, so too do Street artists use these same secretive guerrilla tactics in the production of their art but often in correspondence to a political issue and contemporary concerns. Like the Situationists and Punks before, Street art is a response *to* the masses and *for* the masses, which exists along-side Graffiti but whose impetus and *raison d'être* often differs.

Artists have challenged art by situating it in non-art contexts. 'Street' artists do not aspire to change the definition of an artwork, but rather to question the existing environment with its own language. They attempt to have their work communicate with everyday people about socially relevant themes in ways that are informed by aesthetic values without being imprisoned by them.

⁸³ www.ukstreetart.co.uk/2011/12/banksy-cardinal-sin-sculpture-walker-gallery-liverpool accessed in January 2012

Street art is very much a contemporary form of art and is not forced to last. Given the natural elements, public clean-up regimes, and defacement by other artists and Graffiti writers, Street art is a temporary concept. Its contemporary issues are all the more effectual due to the immediacy of its execution and its transitory characteristic.

3.2 Strategists vs. Tacticians

We have discussed the factors of the Situationist movement and détournement which are often continued within Street art and which differentiates it from most modern Graffiti from an internal perspective, but we must also look at it externally and observe what factors have 'pushing' it into acceptance as an independent art movement, and particularly since it's disassociation with Graffiti.

Along with the internal influences on Street art the leader of the Situationist movement, Guy Debord, also describes the influential link between art and society and what influences the latter has on the former.

In his book, *'The Society of the Spectacle'* (1967), Debord traces the development of a modern society in which authentic social life has been replaced with its representation:

All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.⁸⁴

Debord argues that the history of social life can be understood as; *'the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing.'*⁸⁵ This condition, according to Debord, is the historical moment at which the commodity completes its *'colonisation of social life.'*⁸⁶

With the term *spectacle*, Debord defines a system that is a confluence of advanced capitalism, the mass media, and the types of governments who favour those phenomena. Life had become superficial and an imitation of itself – A Spectacle with Spectators.

This brings to mind a verse from William Shakespeare's *'As You Like It'*;

'All the world's a stage,

*And all the men and women merely players.'*⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Debord, *'The Society of the Spectacle'* 1967 (p. 8)

⁸⁵ Debord, *'The Society of the Spectacle'* 1967 (p. 6)

⁸⁶ Debord, *'The Society of the Spectacle'* 1967 (p. 6)

Debord criticised the spectacular society of mass-production, mass-media, and consumerism as lacking in authenticity and impoverishing the quality of life - a degradation of knowledge and genuine experience.

The period of mass-consumerism in the '60s was also addressed by artistic movements such as Pop art and Andy Warhol's '*Campbell's Soup Cans*' (fig. 28) and other works using a variety of images from the world of commerce and mass media.

Perhaps this theory could not be further from the truth in our own consumerist and virtual, on-line society, with technological supplements and substitutes such as *Kindles* replacing books.

With the afore mentioned works of Banksy with his '*Crude Oils*' exhibition, the issue today is no longer addressed at the degradation of society *via* mass-production but the degradation of society during the *after-math* of mass production. It addresses the issues of modernity through the spectacular medium of classic art pieces.

In this we see Banksy turning the criticisms of Debord on their head. It is no longer a case of authority enforcing consumerism and the *spectacle*. They do not induce passivity, nor are they simple commodities. The power-plays and means of exchange between Street artists, authorities and commerce are now discursive.

Banksy uses the notion of 'spectacle' to address society of its 'spectacular' attitudes via the Situationist approach of *détournement*. Those admiring through the metaphorical window of idealised perspective at Monet's '*Water Lily Pond*' is given a blatant visual reminder of the modern society in which they live - similarly with '*Cardinal Sin*', in which the nigh-celestial is reprimanded for grave and mortal accusations.

Shepard Fairey addresses the more classic issue of consumerism and governmental control through his '*Obey*' series, which, similarly to Warhol's work, is a mass-produced image repeated over the urban environment, representing our spectacular society who blindly follows rules and regulations without question (fig. 29). Both repetitive images represent the consumerist and spectacular state of modern society as theorised by Debord.

The '*Society of the Spectacle*' is, in many ways, an extension of Marxist theory via Henri Lefèbvre, in which society is depicted as divided between the passive subject who consumes the spectacle and the ruling class that produces the spectacle.

Another French theorist is Michel de Certeau, who developed a more interactive picture of urban power relations which could also be used to describe the relationship between Street artists, commerce, and the authorities.

⁸⁷ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II Scene VII

De Certeau contended in *'The Practice of Everyday Life'* (1980) that daily acts of consumption by ordinary people are, in fact, acts of silent production. He defines power in two ways: 'strategies' and 'tactics.' 'Strategies' include all elements that can claim ownership over territory and from that position seek to control other elements that are apparently powerless. They include institutions, governments, authorities, landowners as well as the physical structures that define the built fabric of our urban environment: streets and footpaths that contain passages and buildings that have limited access.

'Tacticians,' on the other hand, are those who own nothing but are able to usurp places from the 'strategists' momentarily through movement and timing. De Certeau suggests that even the way one walks down a city street, choosing to meander slowly or hasten quickly, is an act of 'tactical' navigation that defies the attempts of the 'strategic' forces of the city to contain people.⁸⁸

The relationship between 'tactics' and 'strategies' is thus conceived as fluid, changeable and not at all linear or as 'black and white' as Debord's theory.

Street artists can therefore be labelled, for all intents and purposes, as master 'tacticians.' They inscribe the surfaces of the city with certain skill and stealth and their method illuminates the complex power relationships that exist between authority, commerce, landowners and the general public.



Fig(s) 28 & 29 'Campbell's Soup Cans' Andy Warhol, Museum of Modern Art (1962). 'Obey the Giant', Shepard Fairey⁸⁹ - first appeared in the '90s and is still continued in various forms today.

This guerrilla tactic is adapted by artists and writers alike by learning and familiarising themselves with the patterns of movement of the strategists. Consequently they use timing and stealth to full advantage. While in the early years many worked furtively at night, they now paint in broad daylight. If they want to work in a place that might attract attention they adopt the garb

⁸⁸ De Certeau, *'The Practice of Everyday Life'* 1984 (p. 92)

⁸⁹ Google Images

of a strategist, for example, overalls or hiring an expensive piece of equipment such as a scissor lift – all items which imitate authority.

Strategists are constantly trying to regain control over the tacticians by turning the tactical products into commodities and therefore consuming this 'free' art and regurgitating it into mass-media and consumerism.

These attempts to turn Street art or any tactical affiliation into a commodity for entertainment are an act of 'recuperation', which can be described as the counter to response to détournement by capital authorities and institutions to neutralise social revolt. It usually involves commoditisation of the revolutionary act, and is most evident in the fashion industry, where styles such as Punk have been effectively softened and repackaged for consumption by the mainstream.

The Situationists were against the recuperation of radical ideas just as Graffiti writers and early Street artists were against 'selling-out' to an art institution or commercial merchandise, but recent Street artists see recuperation as an opportunity to capitalise on their work.

The idea that something becomes 'mainstream' and commercialised is almost an inevitable process as authorities and corporations attempt to contain and control the tactical artists by appearing to celebrate and commend their work through advertising, celebrity and tourism, while still condemning the practices which slip through the net.

While the justice arm of the State Government tackles graffiti through tough punitive measures, the marketing division, Tourism Victoria, promotes Melbourne's graffiti as a site-seeing destination.⁹⁰

Where authorities were seizing opportunities to nullify tactical ideas, many tacticians were also capitalising on the recuperation, which reflected in their work.

. . . The Obey campaign attempts to stimulate curiosity and bring people to question both the campaign and their relationship with their surroundings. Because people are not used to seeing advertisements or propaganda for which the motive is not obvious, frequent and novel encounters with Obey propaganda provoke thought and frustration, nevertheless revitalizing the viewer's perception and attention to detail. The medium is the message.⁹¹

The Street art style has become such a popular genre that artists are realising the potential for profiteering. However, to maintain its roguish persona it finds a way to capitalise on Street art - realising its popularity – but it does not decide to conform to an institution or advertising

⁹⁰ McGaw 'Complex Relationships between *Détournement* and *Récupération* in Melbourne's Street (Graffiti and Stencil) Art Scene' 2008, (p.223)

⁹¹ Obey manifesto, Shepard Fairey, 1990

company. In this instance it is not lured into corporative commodity but is still self-serving and independent (given any licensing fees it must pay in order to run such a stand at events) in the sense that it creates art-for-art's sake, not for the sake of a gallery or product. – It is still a form of celebration of the Street art style.

Bringing the Street art style into subject it could arguably be a good indication of the waning interest and impact that Street art message of many pieces is slowly beginning to have on the public. The excitement of seeing a Banksy is far greater than understanding his message. Of course, not all Street artists create a piece for a meaning. Many new artists simply wish to create for aesthetic and recognition purposes. But for the pioneers of modern Street art, - such as *Shoe*, Banksy and Shepard Fairey - who began their work as a follow-up to the Punk movement and the post-Situationist, post-Dadaist era, it is no longer a matter of 'putting your point across' but now they have gained so much recognition and fame that their work is now worth thousands. Even their illegal work is revered by the authorities who see the potential for tourism and profiteering, such as in Melbourne which has famously become the Street art and Graffiti capital of the world. Like the river Nile, businesses and galleries exhibiting work by various Street artists are booming along the Street art strips.

In a sense they have become the commodities that they initially sought to oppose.

The romanticised, 'hero vs. villain' idea of the strategic and tactical warfare between the renegade Street artist and oppressing authority describes the familiar and changing attitudes that society has of urban art, particularly non-commissioned urban art, and also accentuates Debord's theory of separation between spectacle and spectator into a more literal sense.

The 'To-and-Fro' tug-of-war between the two is not only applicable between radical forms of art but also political ideas and protests. As a reaction to issues of our spectacular lifestyle, as first criticised by Marxist theory and Debord's Situationist ideas, many Street artists use the tactical approach described by de Certeau as *détournement* which aims to turn our consumerist habits and capitalist systems against themselves.

While the strategists try to maintain control on our society with rules and restrictions and via the strategic approach of recuperation, in which they turn radical images and ideas into a consumerist commodity – thus devouring the non-conformist ideas and regurgitating it back into the mass-media via a controlled system.

As a response to this counter-attack by strategists, tactical artists have exploited this method by addressing it in their work, and many Street artists still continue to slip through the authoritative net and their notorious reputation is gaining them fame and celebrity.

It can, therefore, be argued that one reason why it is gaining public approval and is becoming its own established genre is because governmental strategists are attempting to recuperate and nullify its impact and importance, thus purposely making it mainstream and pushing it into the consumerist arena.

While there is no doubt that many writers and artists are certainly 'taking the bait' at the chance of gaining a name and profit, others are deflecting the 'attack' via Situationist approaches – by turning the capitalist system against itself.

Both sides appear to have adopted a 'vicious circle' methodology as one tactic affects the other which, in turn, re-affects the other and so on.

This idea of tactical Street artists going 'against-the-system', as approached by Situationists, Punkers, Graffiti writers, and Street artists and various other groups over past decades also contains an element of romance which attracts much of the public to the scene, as the often feel the heavy foot of capitalism bearing down upon them but are perhaps too involved with their spectacular lifestyles or are too intimidated by the authorities to react. Therefore, many Street artists, such as Banksy, become not only a celebrity but also a kind of 'outlaw' hero.

As the theory of spectacle and spectator is becoming ever-more apparent in today's *Big Brother* society, so too is the common need to alleviate constraint.

Part 4: The Other Side of the Wall

4.1 The Splasher Group

Phlegm gives his opinions on the current status and situation of Street art in the present and his fears for its future on its commercial path;

Do you feel there is a new appreciation for Street art these days, or not?

"There certainly seems to be some sort of appreciation these days. If it continues as it has for the past few years I think it will begin to suffocate it though. I think the mainstream and commercialism will drive all the meaning out of it. I'm sure the fad will pass and it will carry on. Muralists and cave artists....I guess Street art is just a modernised version of something as old as civilisation."

Or has interest wavered, because it's not 'new' anymore, so to speak?

"I don't know. I don't look at the bigger picture too much. If I can afford rent I'm ok. I think interest will inevitably waver, and I think it will do the scene good if it does. There's too much money and status involved these days."⁹²

⁹² Fragment from an interview with Street artist, Phlegm, from Sheffield, UK, conducted by myself in January 2012

The effects of forming a commodity out of a popular liberal art form like Street art is that more and more artists are now beginning to capitalise on their work, when they may not have done in the past. As Street art moves further and further away from Graffiti and Situationist ideas it seems to be moving further into the commercialised arena of profiteering and branding. This is not necessarily a bad move, but it is often criticised by fellow artists and writers of being a money-searching fad. This particular aspect of Street art is often manipulated by money-making artists such as Fake and Mr Brainwash, whose work reproduces stencilled imagery of other artists purely in order to make money. These two artists in particular are both revered and repelled by the Street art scene and by galleries as they at once utilise this free-thinking and open at movement, and also make a mockery of it, as their names suggest.

As Street art is being accused of gradually conforming to the institutionalised regulations, the divide between followers of Graffiti and Street art are even more apparent - displaying anger at the commercialist aspect that Street artists seem to have acquired:

“Graffiti is a lifestyle. “Street art” is a trend. Graffiti is learned over a period of time, with the journey from a toy to a respected writer being a tough one. There isn’t really any learning process to Street art which is why these yuppies are so clueless. Whilst Street artists are preparing their stencils and paints at home or at Art School – or even getting them professionally made up - Graffiti writers are racking crates of paint. Another thing: writers go All City. That means getting their tag / throw-up / piece up across the length and breadth of the city. Not just all Soho or all Williamsburg. Graffiti writers earn the respect they’re accorded.”⁹³

As a form of *dérive*, Street art, like Graffiti before it, is intimately connected to material conditions that surround life in large urban centres. Where Graffiti writers experimented with new forms of self-promotion in an attempt to counter the reigning economic and cultural hegemony, Street artists experiment with artistic styles and aesthetic forms to gauge public response and find new audiences for their works particularly as the popularity and interest in Street art has grown over recent years.

Where Graffiti writers often try to work against the grain of capitalism and consumer society by stealing supplies and vandalising public and private property, Street artists, with their drive to gain recognition from the art world, tend more toward participation in consumer society. Both practices contain a sense of *dérive*, in that both experiment with styles and forms that are clearly linked to the urban environment.

Despite its use of *dérive* and *détournement*, and despite its relationship to Graffiti, most Street art now runs counter to the resistance inherent in SI doctrines and practices, which refer to Graffiti as a; *“radical critique [that] is pronouncing its declaration of war on the old society.”⁹⁴*

⁹³ NY photographer EZ in 2007

⁹⁴ Knabb, *‘Situationist International Anthology’*, 2006 (p. 43)

As Street art moves further and further away from its associations and many of the characteristics that have shaped it, moving closer to the side of the strategists a new band of tacticians emerge, challenging these new objectives of Street art and harking back to Situationist ideals.

Though the Splasher group began their campaign in late 2006, the earliest responses to the group appeared in January of 2007, on popular street art and urban culture blogs and in a short article in *The New York Times*. The controversial group caused uproar amongst Street art fans, artists and the media when Street art was reaching its peak of hype. Targeting 'big name' Street art pieces which had become worthy of thousands of dollars, particularly works by Swoon and Shepard Fairey, The Splasher was a group of serial vandals who splattered other works of Street art with brightly coloured paint, thus earning the title of 'Splasher'. The Splasher also left documents entitled '*AVANT-GARDE: ADVANCE SCOUTS FOR CAPITAL*' (fig. 30) and '*Art: The Excrement of Action*' pasted alongside the vandalised image:

ART: THE EXCREMENT OF ACTION

A Dadaist once smashed a clock, dipped the pieces in ink, pressed the ink-soaked pieces against a sheet of paper and had it framed. His purpose was to criticize the modernist idealization of efficiency. Rather than inspiring the widespread smashing of clocks and the revaluation of time in society, the piece of paper has become a sought-after commodity. The production of a representative organ (the ink-imprinted paper) for the action (the smashing of the clock) guaranteed this outcome. Like an idealistic politician, the piece of paper, despite its creator's intent, can only represent, and it is for this reason that it instantly became a 'fetishized' object segregated from the action. Only in a culture obsessed with its own excrement are the by-products of action elevated above action itself.

Representation is the most elemental form of alienation. Art as representation is no exception. It is just another means by which our perceptions and desires are mediated. Art is the politician of our senses: it creates actors and an audience, agents and a mass. True creativity is the joyful destruction of this hierarchy; it is the unmediated actualization of desires. The passion for destruction is a creative passion. We are all capable of manifesting our desires directly, free of representation and commodification. We will continue manifesting ours by euthanizing your bourgeois fad.⁹⁵

The document then went on to declare:

Warning: The removal of this document could result in injury as we have mixed the wheat paste with tiny shards of glass.

⁹⁵ www.graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/arts/0628webPAPER7.pdf accessed in April 2012

The radical idea of the Splasher group was extremely reminiscent of the Situationists as it appears to wish to break down the structure of capitalism, which they felt the celebrity status of Street art is enabling.

However, where their methods may be similar in using guerilla tactics and a severe manipulation of medium their motives are have often been questioned.



Fig. 30 Vandalised Street art with a Splasher document pasted alongside; 'AVANT-GARDE: ADVANCE SCOUTS FOR CAPITAL'⁹⁶

The Splasher not only sparked considerable debate about the identity of the vandal but also the motives of the vandal or vandals involved, along with the merit and status of Street art itself. The myth and legend of The Splasher gained considerable notoriety nationwide.

The works of The Splasher raised questions about the validity and status of Street art as art, and the unwritten 'rules' of the field. *The Guardian* commented:

In the more rule-laden graffiti scene, lining someone else's work (crossing it out with spray paint) is the ultimate insult. But street art hasn't developed with those parameters. The transitory nature of street art is what gives it its impact. Many people creating work don't expect longevity - no wall stays the same for

⁹⁶ www.gothamist.com/2007/06/26/the_splasher_sp.php accessed in April 2012

long in a city. Arguably The Splasher's Dadaist political cries are just another form of street art in themselves.⁹⁷

The Splasher group were speculated as possibly being, among other things, a guerrilla marketing campaign or a cry for attention. One theory was proposed that the Splasher was actually advertising for the clothing company, *American Apparel*, based on appearances of *American Apparel* ads alongside pasted Splasher manifestos.

The Manifesto was comparable to the writings of Guy Debord. One art critic for the *New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman, compared The Splasher's actions with the Situationists, and disagreed with the manifesto's claims of gentrification:

Does street art gentrify neighborhoods? Graffiti didn't gentrify SoHo. Wall Street did. It didn't gentrify subways. From West Philadelphia to East Los Angeles, much of the best street painting is in poor neighborhoods that have resisted change. It's hard to feel sympathetic with vandals splashing paint on posters or stenciled pictures, notwithstanding that some of the splashes look kind of aesthetic.

All that said public space and civic justice are difficult issues to which the brouhaha returns our attention. New York neighborhoods are indeed changing, not all for the better, as the city becomes more affluent and homogeneous, and art shouldn't exist in it simply as a symbol of wealth and privilege. It should seize public spaces where it can, to make itself more part of daily life, more relevant in the world, and to become a source of serendipity, pleasure, trouble, controversy and interest to people outside the art world, not just inside it.⁹⁸

The actions of the Splasher group ended when in June, 2007, two men were caught trying to set off a stink-bomb at an art opening in the Dumbo district of Brooklyn, New York.⁹⁹ One escaped and the other was arrested. The arrestee, James Cooper, was alleged to be affiliated with the Splasher group.

As history has shown there have been radical and extremist attacks against many expressive movements within the arts. In 2006 Pierre Pinoncelli attacked Marcel Duchamp's Fountain with a hammer. Police officials said he again called his action a work of art - a tribute to Duchamp and

⁹⁷ Gavin 'The Splasher: Art or Vandalism?' *The Guardian*, March 2007

⁹⁸ Kimmelman 'Splashing the Art World with Anger and Questions' *New York Times*, June 2007

⁹⁹ Moynihan 'As Street Art Goes Commercial, a Resistance Raises a Real Stink' *New York Times*, June 2007

other Dada artists. Most actions involving art-defacement have been an attack, not on the art itself, but on the capitalism of the particular art piece. Just as Duchamp, Shepard Fairey and Banksy initially caused outrage and controversy using art focused against the corporate and capitalist society, the Splasher group also attempted to attack capitalism via commercialised art. With this history of extreme movements turned commercial behind them, it raises questions about their motivations; knowing that actions like these will gain publicity, is the Splasher group trying to gain notoriety via a recognisable visual medium? Just as pioneering Street artists had done with extreme visual images.

Through the destruction, or *détournement*, of works by popular and prominent artists, the Splashers attempt to return some of the subversive resistance that street art lost in its move to the gallery, museum, and advertisement worlds. However, by committing these acts the Splasher is also inadvertently bringing attention back to these pieces which may have otherwise been worn away in time and forgotten.

The charm of Street art lies in its ephemeral and transient characteristic. When Street art works move into the museum and gallery, the ephemeral quality is lost and the works become static, unchanging, and permanent. Even though works by Shepard Fairey, Swoon, and Banksy continue to exist on the street, it can be argued that the fact that similar - and in some cases identical - works by these artists exist in galleries, museums - both of which are also public spaces, but are selective in what they wish to show and are, therefore, specific types of public spaces - and private homes changes the meaning of works on the street. The street works become commodities and their transience loses its charm.

Due to the popularity and market value of some Street art its very evanescence is becoming non-existent due to governmental recuperative organisations. Cities, neighbourhood associations, and other groups work to protect works by Banksy and other prominent Street artists. Other individuals and groups remove the works and auction them for charity or for profit. For example, Network Rail—the owner and operator of Britain’s rail infrastructure—issued its maintenance crews with photographs of Banksy’s work, so that when they come across a particular piece they will recognise it and have it removed for a charity auction.

The Splashers *détourne* valuable street works, returning ephemerality to the works, and reminding viewers of the fragility and transience of Street art - removing any perceived or potential profit from the works.¹⁰⁰ The warning featured at the bottom of the document left at the scene of the Splasher ‘crime’, advising caution due to a use of glass shards, invokes the group’s desire to remain within a resistant and discursive, yet viable, practice that exists outside of the realm of commodities. Where some viewers of Street art remove and preserve works by Banksy and others, with the warning in place, Splasher sympathisers may be wary of removing their written works for posterity. The warning amounts to another use of *détournement*, in that a simple piece of copy paper, wheat-pasted to a wall takes on a dangerous character, thereby widening the distance between the Splasher group and Street art admirers. In theory, this move helps restore subversive potential to Street art.

¹⁰⁰ www.gothamist.com/2007/06/26/the_splasher_sp.php accessed in April 2012

Despite their anti-capitalist and anti-commercialist approach the Splasher group gained more enemies than admirers within the public, as they saw their attack on Street art as a poor attempt at gaining publicity for themselves - the destruction of these art pieces were a tragic loss of culture, and that their attack was the 'Excrement' of their 'Action'. However, it is arguably this particular argument that groups such as the SI and the Splasher had sought to prove as an indication of the commodity which art had become and public's blind defence of the capitalist scheme and the bourgeoisie.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, their destructive exploits have inadvertently gained publicity and martyrdom for many Street artists whose work was defaced. Through the anti-commercialist views and attacks on famed Street art pioneers, the attempted strategist move by the Splashers has served to move the public sympathetically closer to Street art, thus gaining it ever-more popularity. However, their actions are also arguably no worse or different to other pieces of Street art. Both are still regarded as acts of public vandalism.

4.2 Visual Resistance: Working *with* Capitalism *against* Capitalism

A strong anarchistic thread exists in most areas of the street art community, most notably in the Visual Resistance collective, AKA Justseeds, which sponsors a variety of Street art and community action initiatives, and has links to Swoon's community activism.

Visual Resistance sponsors local and national projects that have a direct impact on or benefit to individual communities, such as Street Art Workers;

Started in 2001 and based in the U.S., Street Art Workers (SAW) is a network of printmakers, stencil artists, Graffiti writers and designers who use the streets for art and activism. As a volunteer-run group, they make street art for grassroots campaigns and post each other's work across North America. The SAW use of manipulated media harkens back to Situationist art, with varying themes altering in their work such as media, racial prejudice and the U.S. justice system.

Our art is a creative tool for social change. We support community organizing by making and distributing high-profile publicity across North America. We want to inspire people who have been attacked, oppressed or ignored by the rich and powerful ... We want our art to be thought-provoking and politically radical but not simplistic or dogmatic. We want to push ourselves as individual artists and as group to make work that is creative, complex and emotional without being abstract or self-involved.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Cockroft, '*Street Art and the Splasher: Assimilation and Resistance in Advanced Capitalism*' Stony Brook University, May 2008

¹⁰² www.justseeds.org/blog/2006/12/street-art-workers-posters-hit.html accessed in April 2012

While works by Shepard Fairey and Banksy are extremely lucrative, Swoon rarely sells her works and gives profits she receives from the sale of traditional art works to community action groups of which she is a member.

In this sense Swoon is arguably the Street artist most closely aligned with Situationist, anarchist, and Punk ideologies, and uses her fame and limited wealth to participate in community engagement and social activism. As such, her works seem to be an odd target for the Splasher group. As the least commercially successful Street artist, amongst her pioneering peers, Swoon presents a career path quite different from the ones chosen by Shepard Fairey and Banksy who's profiteering have been very much self-serving. Due to her participation in such groups, Swoon is lauded by various anarchist groups, and the destruction of her works led members of Visual Resistance and other anarchist groups to denounce and ridicule the Splashers and their project.

Many of the techniques developed by the SI to reclaim public space, such as détournement and derive, are present, albeit often unconsciously, in Street art. While the Splasher group has clear links to earlier anarchist and resistant groups and while they employed Situationist tactics consciously and to great effect, Swoon is far more successful with her resistant actions than the Splashers.

Resistance within advanced capitalism requires a relationship to capital, however marginal. Without capital, the means for resistance of any sort are extremely limited. At the very least, resistance requires leisure time to plan, gather support for, and execute the acts of resistance. As such, Swoon has a far greater capacity for resistance than the Splasher group, given the variety of resources available to her through her art making practice and various affinitive groups. Though the Splashers actions are based on theory, Swoon has the support of the public and fans of her work.

While Swoon's art may indeed reify and commodify the struggles of everyday life with her use of images of poverty and, societal prejudice – often accused of glamorising the wretchedness of society - sales of her art works provide the funding needed to work with groups like Visual Resistance. While Swoon's community projects do not entirely resist capitalism, they show the power of community organising, an option rejected by the Splasher group and which ultimately led to their failure.

However, and despite such failures, not only has the Splasher group demonstrated the power and importance of Street art but it has also revealed continued possibilities for resistance from within assimilated cultural practices. Though advanced capitalism has Street art firmly within its grasp, spray paint and wheat-paste remain excellent tools for direct action and community engagement.

Together, Swoon's community engagement and the Splasher group's critical actions and writings reveal the potential for art to continue to function as an agent of change in the sense that Street art is an open movement which has the ability to remain contextual and contemporary – as affected by its situation and surroundings which are ever-changing - and as a powerful communicative tool for both individuals and groups.

4.3 Psychogeography

One of the principle tasks of the capitalist state is to locate power in those spaces which the bourgeoisie control, and disempower those spaces which oppositional movements have the greatest potentiality to command.¹⁰³

As well as the Visual Resistance, SAW and Justseeds, another group in which Swoon is a key activist is Toyshop.

The Brooklyn-based artist collective, consisting of around twenty people, most with a background in the arts, have staged a number of street interventions and actions over the last few years. Centred on the street artist, Swoon and previously called Swoon Union or Swoon Squad, is concerned with public space and its democratisation through what it calls;

....creative forms of productive mischief... rooting around the edges of appropriate acts of citizenship we are using every means at our disposal to make a city that instigates our creative impulses and fosters the feral spirit.¹⁰⁴

They describe how they work with the city as a muse and a medium, criticising the privatisation of public space and the associated passiveness of city-dwellers. Through example, they attempt to create a participatory model for the public to take part in the physical and social structure of the domestic environment. Through Street art, parades, gatherings, and other interventions, its members seek to exploit opportunities for play and subversion as they interact with the city's spaces.

The geography of protest and demonstration is the spatial expression of an extended sphere of politics. Spaces of protest, even if temporary and unstable, give shape to a conception of power as something that is contested at diverse sites between different social actors. The politics of resistance - [demonstrations, picketing and forms of visual and aural protests] - frequently makes its point in [authoritative, urban] space.¹⁰⁵

Swoon's own art in particular involves the creation of life-sized figures on walls from delicate paper cut-outs (fig. 31) or woodblock prints. They often represent figures from her life or characters associated with particular places. They are an example of how work on the streets can give people a new, often transient set of landmarks with which to guide themselves, and allow them to see the manifestation of a certain kind of vitality in the city - breaking away from the concrete brutalism of the urban environment.

¹⁰³ Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* 1989, (p. 237)

¹⁰⁴ Swoon Union, www.fingerweb.org/finger8_12/finger11/swoon.html accessed in April 2012

¹⁰⁵ Tonkiss *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* 2005, (p. 60)

The Toyshop and other such groups focus their activities around the idea of 'psycho geography' - defined in 1955 by Guy Debord as;

...the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.¹⁰⁶



Fig. 31 Swoon paper cut-out mural on the Lower East Side, New York. ¹⁰⁷

In layman's terms psycho geography can be described as the way people shape their environment, and the way the environment shape people. The geography of a landscape is designed to manipulate the way the public thinks on a sub-conscious level. The consumerist district of a town or city is a calculated and deliberate series of images to try to control the public's movements around the urban environment and to encourage them to act accordingly – whether it is to encourage consumerism within a shopping district, controlled leisure spaces such as parks and café-culture areas, the promotion of tourism within museum and gallery districts, or even to discourage access via the use of borders, locks, CCTV cameras, and various warnings. Many of the actions people make in a public space are sub-conscious movements dictated by a set of institutions and un-spoken rules of etiquette and conduct. Just as subliminal

¹⁰⁶ Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography' *Les Lèvres Nues*, Issue No. 6, 1955

¹⁰⁷ www.gammablog.com/2007/01/16/swoon-mural-lower-east-side/ accessed in April 2012

advertising might encourage someone to buy a particular brand of soft drink, the psychogeography of a public space can pre-determine the direction a person walks through a city centre, which areas of a public space they are allowed to access, and even keeps them walking in a straight line on an empty pavement rather than allows them to meander down their path.

Street art and Graffiti have always acted against the grain of the authoritarian use of psychogeography by not only accessing areas and locations deemed as 'forbidden' to the general public, but also by the act of creating a piece onto a building or item ironically labelled as 'public property'. The fact that the public do *not* have that 'authority' to access the particular building or item, much less are they 'allowed' to manipulate its image as Graffiti writers and Street artists tend to, leads one to question the very idea of '*public* property' and many areas are indeed being classified by their more politically correct label of 'government property', which is much more appropriate given its limited use by the public.

By following the works of Street artists and Graffiti writers, fans of the genre are also dismissive of authoritative areas of control as they access locations that 'they don't want you to see'. It was this kind of break-down of control with urban artists which initially instigated the use of recuperation. By *allowing* the public to follow many Street artists and in a sense encouraging Graffiti and Street art in certain designated areas, such as skate parks and the Melbourne Street art district, they are attempting to control and capitalise on this popular culture.¹⁰⁸

In many towns and cities in the UK particularly in the North, which had undergone a process of regeneration - after a period of unemployment and urban desolation in the 1980s, due to the close of many major industries such as coal mining, steel works and cotton milling - had also been redesigned with the new consumerist culture in mind. In order to bring people back into the degraded and degenerated city and town centres and encourage them to spend their money, bringing money back into the system.¹⁰⁹ These previously desolate areas were 'home' to many different groups of 'rebellious delinquents' such as Punks, who had watched their home towns deteriorate and, under the threat of the Cold War and a looming apocalypse, and un-employed youths living off governmental benefits. It was these groups that had taken on-board the freeing expression of Graffiti and began tagging their alias and messages around their territory just as gangs of youths and Punks in the US and much of Europe were also reacting to a situation and world which they feel had 'let them down'.¹¹⁰

It can be argued that Graffiti was born out of anger at the authoritative 'oppressor', as mentioned earlier in this text. However, it was this expression of anger that the 'oppressor' could not 'control' which eventually prompted the recuperative strategy building designated areas for Graffiti writers, such as the ball park and basketball court in Sheffield, UK (fig. 32). This area was

¹⁰⁸ www.melbournstreetart.com/ accessed in May 2012

¹⁰⁹ www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/regeneration.html accessed in May 2012

¹¹⁰ Thomas, Pritchard, Ballas, Vickers, Dorling 'A Tale of Two Cities: The Sheffield Project', 2009 (p. 46)

an attempt at the governmental control over the youths which had graffitied much of the run-down areas of Sheffield city centre prior to its regeneration and enforced café/consumerist-culture. It is an areas designated for the creation of Graffiti writing. The area was indeed covered by many Graffiti writes but it did not discourage the tagging of 'unofficial' areas.

The fact that governmental applications, such as these designated areas for Graffiti, tried to *contain* Graffiti tagging demonstrates the lack of understanding that authoritarian groups had over the concept of tagging and territory. This is particularly important where gang Graffiti is involved as they are not easily contained and limited by a 'designated' area but are intent on labelling their territory and claiming ownership over their 'turf'. They do not use Graffiti purely for the sake of creativity, excitement, and personal recognition like many taggers, but as a communicative tool and symbol of their existence. Gang Graffiti is not meant to be art; it is meant to send a message¹¹¹ and will not be contained by governmental policies.

(Social) space is a (social) product.... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action.... in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.¹¹²

The Sheffield Ball Park Graffiti zone was an attempt at containment by the city council, who understood little about the nature of Graffiti. The Eindhoven 'Hall of Fame' - which 'celebrates' rather than tries to 'limit' Graffiti - perhaps demonstrates the changing governmental attitudes towards dealing with Graffiti.

*"Graffiti is an underground art; no-one knows how to approach it."*¹¹³

Similarly to the '*Step in the Arena*' event held in the Eindhoven 'Hall of Fame' is the Sheffield-based event, hosted by ex Graffiti writer, Such-Des, entitled '*Graff Jams*' - an entire festival of Hip Hop culture featuring break-dancers, rappers and writers¹¹⁴ - intended for young writers and taggers who wish to develop and practice their style and have a taste of the Graffiti scene in a controlled and safe environment. As Graffiti becomes ever-more intriguing to the younger generation this event allows them an insight into the Graffiti arena without the danger of police interference. For most it serves to satisfy a passing phase in which many youths wish to experiment with Graffiti, but for many established writers the idea of having a designated Graffiti area defeats the object of the Graffiti sub-culture.

¹¹¹ Fragment from a discussion with Hyland Mathers, owner of the Andenken Gallery, conducted by myself in May 2012

¹¹² Lefebvre '*The Production of Space*' 1991, review: *Notbored*

¹¹³ Fragment from an interview with Such-Des at the Duplo Pub in Sheffield, conducted by myself in November 2006

¹¹⁴ www.yorkshirejunkies.co.uk/forum/ accessed in May 2012



Fig. 32 The ball park and basketball court in Sheffield, UK.¹¹⁵

“When Graffiti is ‘allowed’, then it’s not Graffiti..... Graffiti ‘shows’ are not displays of Graffiti but merely painting displays in the style of Graffiti. Unlike Street art, Graffiti is raw. Where Street artists create illegal work it is through the act of Graffiti, but it is not raw like Graffiti..... Street artists often ask where to paint. Writers do not.”¹¹⁶

The governmental attempt at control initiated the ever-growing means of capitalism on Street art and Graffiti today, which is becoming ever-more apparent with Street art events and the celebrity-status of particular Street artists. However, while Graffiti writers continue to tag their territory regardless of sanction, many Street artists like Swoon and her affiliated social groups are finding new ways to challenge authoritative control and alter the psychogeography of the urban environment.

¹¹⁵ Photograph of the ball park and basketball court in Sheffield, UK, taken by myself in May 2007

¹¹⁶ Fragment from a discussion with Hyland Mathers, owner of the Andenken Gallery, conducted by myself in May 2012

The chronology of psychogeography in this sense is indicative of the struggles which both strategists and tacticians have endured and are continuing to endure in order to implement their purpose.

As strategists take a step to reclaim the urban milieu the tacticians maintain one step ahead to avoid capture by the authoritarian grip and to disrupt the psychogeography as dictated by the bureaucracy.

4.4 Street Art Snackbar

Taking the strategic approach of recuperation is another, modern form of Street art production, which does not look to work against the system so much as along-side it. Understanding the popularity of the Street art commodity, and utilising its aesthetic possibilities along with its speed of production, the Street Art Snackbar (fig(s). 33& 34) was created by a group of artists who work on stalls at events producing Street art 'on the go' and demonstrating the changing methods of the strategist, adopting tactician approaches of mass production and capitalisation, but still utilising the traditional technique of skilful and speedy production of images as undergone by Graffiti Writers and Street Artists previously. This independent form of Street Art production manipulates various aspects of both the strategist and the tactician to its own means.

One may choose the canvas colour and any stencilled image from the 'menu' along with any text to be written in Graffiti style to be applied to the canvas – working similarly to a snack bar.



Fig(s) 33 & 34 The Street Art Snackbar producing Street Art 'to go'¹¹⁷

The Street Art Snackbar is a good indication of the direction that most Street art is going. A money-making, mass-producing scheme which no longer values the Situationist ideal but which

¹¹⁷ Google Images

is succumbing to the idea that Street art is a commodity. The images have no meaning, they are only images aesthetically applied onto a canvas according to public specificities.

The Street Art SnackBar is one such scheme which has derived from the idea of popularity of the Street art style. Although working independent from any known institution, the artists themselves have turned the genre into a commodity and made it possible to literally order a personalised piece of Street art, whereas before Street art was similar to Graffiti in its covert operations often meaningful imagery. However, although realising the marketing potential for Street art they have successfully remained independent from any gallery or company. – This could be viewed as a future indication of both Street art production and the dwindling importance of the gallery, particularly when trying to exhibit a notoriously free-spirited genre such as Street art.

However, it is also an action which is critical of Street art's preoccupation of commercialism. By mass-producing canvas pieces of 'Street art' it not only acts upon the style of the genre and its popularity, but also questions the authenticity of the status of Street art and many Street artists. It seems to mock it in a way, which is possibly indicative of the criticism which Street art is currently facing from its peers as it loses much of its credibility by often-times being made-to-order through popular demand. The Street Art SnackBar is symbolic of the current attitude adopted by many Street artists at present. For many well-known artists and ex writers, it is a lucrative business as they can easily live off their names. They are in demand by many galleries and institutions who wish to attract buyers and collectors into their establishments. Merchandising with Street art pieces has also proven successful. Arguably much of the heart and passion has been lost from the work of many well-known artists who now produce pieces with little or no meaning in context but are purely using their fame and name for profit.¹¹⁸

New York ex writer and pioneering Street artist, Quik, still manipulates the dated Hip Hop *Wild Style* lettering in his work, which often means that they represent nothing more than recognisable images as his work no longer relates to current events or fashion. This is perhaps suitable for the nature of Graffiti in establishing a name, but now, as he openly states, is an easy means of making money.

"These days I'm only in it for the money."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Fragment from a discussion with Hugo Kaagman, conducted by myself in May 2012

¹¹⁹ Statement by Quik, extracted from an email discussion with myself, May 2012

Part 5: Conclusion

The fluctuation of the Street art genre is one that maintains perpetual motion. It changes and develops as its concept and technique and content changes and develops. There are numerous versions of both good and bad Street art, and those which sit on the border of classification. It is widely agreed that in comparison to Graffiti which acts as a self-serving visual expression of ownership, communicating its style, skill and technique to other Graffiti writers, Street art is usually created by an individual who uses the public realm to express their creativity using a variety of mediums. Where Graffiti tends to be exclusive for those who move within its circles and who comprehend its coded significance, Street art is much more visually coherent as an image of meaning or indifference. Due to its liberal activity and open surroundings it is able to communicate its message to the public or simply alter the aesthetics of the urban environment - Street art for art's sake.

The notion of communication between Street artist and public, and Graffiti writer to Graffiti writer, both serve completely different means within the two genres. The Graffiti culture usually consists of a complex set of codes and initiations. The hierarchy within a Graffiti group is defined by experience and skill. Many writers are often self-taught whereas some novices, a.k.a. 'toys', learn these skills on the street from masters as they develop a unique and recognisable tag which can be quickly and effectively implemented onto almost any surface, serving to identify a particular writer or group. Another writer will recognise a piece by its style and method. They are able to accurately estimate the speed and skill of execution by the movement and flow of the image, also taking into consideration the risk-factor of its location and difficulty of applying it to a particular surface.

Street art differs in that it is often developed by artists within a studio and then implemented in the urban environment. Many Street art pieces are stencils and wheat-paste posters which can also be quickly and effectively applied in the street. This is not to say that only Graffiti writers use spray cans and Street artists use everything else, but that the writer's general preferred 'weapon of choice' is the spray can for a quick execution of image. Many writers, despite having a flare for creativity, do not have an artistic background, whereas many Street artists are practicing art students and designers whom develop their images from home.

The nature of Graffiti, as it has developed from the predominant New York Hip Hop style, also known as *Wild Style*, is to promote ownership of territory. Therefore as most writers prowl the street at night, can in hand, they are often checking whether their tags have been removed or replaced by rival groups, only to speedily re-mark their patch. This constant renewal of image purports the state of perpetual uniqueness within Graffiti images. No two images from the same writer are ever identical. However, other writers will recognise the image as well as its creator.

Street art is also at the disposal of using spray cans and various artists do, such as the Amsterdam Street artist Laser 3.14. Nevertheless it appears to be more common for Street artists to manipulate other materials including, stencil, poster, stickers, mosaic and paint – all of which require pre-planning before execution. Whereas a tag requires only one well-done image

to be reproduced in locations which they will be noticed by other writers, the art piece can change and develop and be located at various sites regardless of being noticed.

Although an artist's style can be recognised within various different images, it is not the intention of the artist to lay claim to territory but to merely apply their piece within the urban environment – they have chosen the urban milieu as their canvas.

Although bearing various resemblances and often being mistakenly labelled as each other, Graffiti and Street art are completely different in means, motive, concept and development. The similarities they share can sometimes be the medium and definitely the environment and stealth of execution which they both must undertake in order to create.

In this sense, Graffiti has not changed since it began. The Hip Hop style, developed by gangs of youths laying claim to areas of the New York 'Street Scene', is still maintaining an unchanged level of both public distain and admiration, with its own following and 'have-a-go' would-be writers and taggers. There are various levels of skill within Graffiti, some aesthetically good and others with not aesthetic qualities at all. Many of the older, more established writers, whom have developed a cult following amongst younger writes and fans of the genre, are well respected and if their work is recognised, a writer will often highlight the piece as a mark of respect.

Punk Graffiti, on the other hand, with its apocalyptic warnings and topics of political revolt – born out of the youths need for expression and revolution - has formed part of the DNA for much of Street art today.

Developing itself based on theories and ideas of Dadaism and subsequently the Situationist International, and appropriating methods of *détournement* into their art, many Punk pieces and ensuing Street art addressed the issues raised by Debord in '*Society and Spectacle*'. Their wish was that art not be made as segregate from society and thus separate the world into 'spectacle' and 'spectators'. The aim was to re-connect society using artistic statements about societal issues through the use of manipulated media. Banksy and Shepard Fairey also adopt this method into their own work with well-known images altered in such a way that they alert the viewer to the issue.

Between Street art and Graffiti are many cross-overs and adaptations. Some Graffiti writers adapt their work into a gallery, while Street artists may also dabble in Graffiti. There are definite definitions the wholly encompass both branches of this urban-visual genre as it is constantly changing and transgressing.

Both maintain the same tactical level of guerrilla movements in order to create, which has resulted in them existing now side-by-side, either in competition or collaboration with each other. The differences lie predominantly in their means. Graffiti reacts with the viewer – be it a writer or fan - on a restricted and closed scale. Street art interacts with its environment on a larger scale.

Dérive, another Situationist concept which can be described as the spontaneous exploration of urban landscapes guided by aesthetic instinct, is one that can be applicably applied to both de Certeau's idea of the strategist and the tactician. The strategist attempt to reclaim areas struck

by Street art and capitalise on a famed Street artist's work, therefore nullify its importance and impact is one method of recuperation in which it ensures it becomes ensnared by consumerism and falls prey to the mainstream. Once a powerful or radical image or medium has become conventionalised it is lost forever, unless it can be regenerated via a method of détournement.

As most anti-conventionalist groups often feel that 'big-name' Street artists are throwing in the towel with the outlaw art on the Street in favour of profit and comfort of conformity they have endeavoured to move against the capitalism of Street art. The attempts of the Splasher group to deface any 'brand' of high-market Street art by artists such as Swoon and Shepard were met with mixed reviews. Their manifesto which claims that 'passion for destruction is a creative passion' came under scrutiny by the media and by Street art fans as being an attention-seeking ploy to gain as much publicity as the art which they destroyed.

Their actions, however flawed, do reflect Dadaist concern of art becoming a commodity, which was the issue they wished to address. Although their message was effectively and powerfully executed their short duration was reflective of the outrage they caused amongst fans of the Street art genre. Their radical approach seemed to go very much against the grain of the general populace and, despite re-alighting the concern about capitalism of a liberal form of art; their plea had little effect on the matter. If anything it achieved a higher renowned for the pieces in question.

It is fair to say that both Graffiti and Street art were born out of a need for visual expression in the most extreme sense. Graffiti developed as an underground subculture amongst youths and gangs almost as separate from the all-encompassing 'art' label. Although many Graffiti pieces do display a talented use of medium and writers can often produce a well executed image with artistic qualities. But they are not often learnt within the art field and tend to maintain an aversion to the art market with a few exceptions who have adapted their style onto a canvas. The Graffiti need to be noticed and recognised is the key factor which defines its existence and creation today.

Street art, developing from a chronology of publicly visual and blatant expression, acts as an outlet for many artists whom either wish to put their point across or to alter the aesthetics of the urban landscape with their own idea of scenic manipulation. It does not follow the same codes and laws as Graffiti and is therefore often changing and adapting to its location or context – representing the manifestation of the artists visual creativity.

The label of 'Street art' no longer only refers to the context in which it is normally cast but is now an embodiment of the entire genre. Just as the Graffiti culture grew and now signifies the movement as manifested into various forms, Street art is now also a denotive term for the entire genus of the culture.

The styles can and are being developed for commercialisation as the market demands but, as with any significant art which represents a militant theme, as soon as it is commercialised it loses its original meaning and the crux of the work is completely altered into a more pertinent essence of the commodity. The effects of commercialisation is arguably much more frowned upon and detrimental to Graffiti rather than Street art as the basis of Graffiti is the labelling of territory and a demonstration the skill representing a particular writer, Street art, although choosing to challenge the concept of 'public' space can essentially highlight many of its points by using another medium. This is where much of its money-making and publicity, and ultimately –

commercial aspects, come into play as the Street art genre is particularly popular and adaptable that it can be easily applied to many popularist consumption.

Although the strategic method of recuperation is a means of bringing Street art and any form of activist action into the mainstream, and it is generally opposed by most Street artists, as the Street art market grows stronger some artists have resolved to work with the market in order to fund and carry out various demonstrations and movements. The Street artist, Swoon, is a key activist in movements like Justseeds and SAW, which challenge and question the concept and use of 'public' space through artistic demonstrations and public gatherings. – Unlike the Splasher group, they are much more effective and engaging as they work in sync with the populace rather than against it.

It may seem contradictory to use capitalism and celebrity within the genre to fund events which demonstrate against conformity and authoritarian restriction, but it also presents the level of resourcefulness and tenacity of the determination of some larger name Street artists whom feel they can use their market-value and celebrity-status in order to be 'heard' and acknowledged. Shepard Fairey and Banksy are both major names in the Street art field and are known internationally. Their work is in high demand amongst collectors and galleries and their images have become iconic of the time and historically reflective of the period of the modern age. - Shepard's *'Obey the Giant'* image is now just as emblematic of the era as Warhol's *'Campbell's Soup Cans'* or Duchamp's *'Fountain'*.

However, does the fact that it has become a symbol of the age, and therefore a well-liked commodity and well-known image indeed nullify its impact? Anything, once achieved, tends to lose something of its initial essence once it stagnates into the 'norm'. However, we as the public still recognise the image and understand from whence it was born, even if the issue is no longer applicable to the present time. They are successful in addressing the issue in question inasmuch as the public are willing to acknowledge it. Thus it is no longer a question of Street art choosing to conform, but that capitalisation is inevitable for all famous visual movements. Just as Punk was once representative of the youthful angst of a pre-apocalyptic age that many fashion companies are providing Punk-style clothing. The Punk-age has passed along with its concerns, but its anarchic residue still remains.

There will always be a radical movement which acts against authority and a form of art which challenges and questions the conformity of an institution. But as times, technologies, and trepidations change and evolve so does the individual's methods for rebellion and nonconformity. The tactician's method's of acting against the institution is something which can and will always be addressed through the human gift for creativity, it is only their style and choice of medium which determines the classification of its genre. The popularity of a particular genre or artist is the key influence for its journey into a capitalist grip. But as consumerism attempts to devour Street art into the mainstream, which it may have already successfully achieved in quashing its influence it has not managed to contain the individual's need for freedom of creative expression within a public space. Therefore, capitalism is successful into reducing the influence on the public but not the individual's need for expression.

Street art is a major key-stone in freedom of expression, predominantly because of its context both within and without. There are, of course, many directions to take within Street art and various versions of the genus with differing aims and directions – many are unsuccessful – but the human need for freedom and opposition of the controlling forces is a key to the popularity and strength of Street art. It acts as a beacon of resistance and inspiration for the masses. Plus the ingenuity and originality, as well as the fearlessness of execution of these often stunning images, is also a stirring dynamic of admiration.

One of its most effective aspects is that, unlike traditional art pieces stored in a collection, it is in a perpetual state of renewal. Its transient nature is so unpredictable that it maintains alertness amongst the authorities who may wish to catch the artist red-handed or try to preserve certain pieces before it is hit by another radical group or Graffiti writer, amongst its followers who 'hunt' for pieces by certain artists and view it before it is removed or defaced, and amongst artists as they continue to design new images and find new areas in which to display them. The excitement caused by finding a new piece by a certain artist is something which cannot be reconstructed within a gallery, in which a preconceived order of artists is already made available.

The methods used by Street artists, even though largely prohibited, can be perfectly appropriate to their means - if the result is the circumvention of the elite art world with the intent of introducing art into everyday life as a type of oppositional 'art for the people'. Street art by its very nature is implicitly political, whether it is done for purely aesthetic reasons or not. It conveys a social message in that it redefines public space as delineated by capital. Street art transforms cheerless urban setting into kinds of colourful outdoor art 'galleries' and gives voice to those who cannot pay inordinate amounts of money to have their ideas 'legally' presented to the multitudes.

However, there are those who participate in Street art because they have a social vision, and those who participate because they feel it offers an opportunity for fame and fortune. By breaking the sanctified laws of private property - violating one of the cardinal rules of capitalist society - Street art has been classified as "vandalism." In some quarters having an outlaw reputation no doubt accounts to some level of credibility amongst radical movements and is therefore extremely appealing to youths and would-be artists. There is therefore no mystery as to why elite art-circles that are enamoured of the bizarre and always in search of the "next big thing" have embraced such gimmickry and endeavour to board the band-wagon of the Street art phenomenon by attempting to bring it and its huge following into the gallery, thus capitalising on its popularity, which has often left a bitter taste in the mouths of both artists and enthusiasts.

Street art is ephemeral and was never meant to be long lasting, its romantic and poetic resonance can be found in its transient quality. It is an art movement which has the ability to continue renewing itself, broadening its classification as new artists broach new and varying issues and develop different styles and methods, as well as mediums and objectives. Due to its freeing and ephemeral nature it invites everyone to participate and can be accessed by anyone. It has no limitations or regulations to which it must conform such as Graffiti law or a gallery institution - there are images of poorly-made Street art just as there are well-made Street art. The controversial use of public space is not only a means of raising societal concerns but is also

promotes freedom of artistic expression and aesthetic ability, regardless of restrictions – art-for-art’s sake.

Graffiti too is now realising the potential popularity of urban art. The observation of the segregation of the two genres not only brings each genre individually into the light but also instigates recognition and therefore a distinction of the two by identifying the different ways they portray themselves. The hype of urban art is not only for Street art but is now also embracing the diversity within the Graffiti culture with events and festivals celebrating Graffiti traditions and ethos in a way which best suits the life-style and therefore not conforming to an institution as it had tried to before. However, many have also stated that these events are defeating the object as they *allow* Graffiti to occur. Although, with regards to a celebration of Graffiti, there is little else that can be done other than illegal Graffiti competitions and ‘battles’.

Street art’s inevitable commoditisation of particular well-known pieces may mark the loss of contemporary relevance to certain societal topics, but its ephemeral nature also makes its interpretation temporary. Much of Street art is a reaction to issues and visual attitudes of the present and is not meant to last. It is not only its physical presence which is temporal but also its metaphysical presents. Therefore, although its meaning and impact may have been removed when it was reproduced, who’s to say that it’s meaning and impact would remain intact had it have been left where it was on the street?

Street art is constantly renewing itself. It is the descendant of a series of radical movements acting against the authorities and conformist attitudes. As long as the public feel they need an outlet and the individual is instrumental in producing that creative outlet it will retain its energy and momentum through adversity. Whether a new movement is born out of Street art is not yet determinable, but in the mean time it can be argued that Street art is one of the most powerful and effective art genres in existence at present, and will be until artists find a new means of creating a publicly heard voice of resistance against conformity and freedom of public expression.

Bibliography;

Books

Crowther, Paul *'Defining Art, Creating the Canon: Artistic Value in an Era of Doubt'*, 2007, Oxford University Press

Debord, Guy *'The Society of the Spectacle'*, 1967, Zone Books Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1994

De Certeau, Henri *'The Practice of Everyday Life'*, 1984, University of California Press Translated by Stephen Rendall

Deitch, Jeffery, Gastman, Roger & Rose, Aaron *'Art in the Streets'*, 2011, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Harvey, David *'The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change'* 1989, Blackwell Publishers

Hauser, Arnold *'The Sociology of Art'*, 1982, The University of Chicago

Jonker, Leonor *'Nu Future Nu'*, 2012, Lebowski Publishers

Knabb, Ken *'Situationist International Anthology'*, 2006, revised and expanded edition. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets

Lefebvre, Henri *'The Production of Space'*, 1991, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishers

Lewis, Cedar *'Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution'*, 2008, Tate Museum, London

MacDonald, Nancy *'The Graffiti Subculture; Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York'*, 2001, Palgrave Macmillan

Mailer, Norman *'The Faith of Graffiti'*, 1979, Lebowski Publishers

McGaw, Janet *'Complex Relationships between Détournement and Récupération in Melbourne's Street (Graffiti and Stencil) Art Scene'*, 2008, Architectural Theory Review, Routledge

Rose, Aaron & Strike, Christian (EDT.) *'Beautiful Losers'*, 2004, Iconoclast

Snyder, Gregory J. *'Graffiti media and the perpetuation of an illegal subculture'*, 2007, Queens College, USA

Thomas, Bethan, Pritchard, John, Ballas, Dimitris, Vickers and Dorling, Danny *'A Tale of Two Cities: The Sheffield Project'*, 2009, The University of Sheffield

Tonkiss, Fran *'Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms'* 2005, Polity Press

Essays & Journals

Alter, Bonnie *'Banksy's Graffiti Wars on the Canal'* *The Times*, Jan 2010

Christen, Richard S. *'Hip Hop Learning: Graffiti as an Educator of Urban Teenagers.'* *Educational Foundations*, Feb. 2003

'Claustrophobia Magazine' Winter Edition, 1999

Cockroft, James Easley *'Street Art and the Splasher: Assimilation and Resistance in Advanced Capitalism'* Stony Brook University, May 2008

Debord, Guy-Ernest *'Theory of the Dérive'* *Internationale Situationniste* Issue No. 2 (1958)
Translation by Ken Knabb, 1981

Debord, Guy-Ernest *'An Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography'* *Les Lèvres Nues*, Issue No. 6, 1955

Eric *'History of Graffiti'*, *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner*, June 1998

Gavin, Francesca *'The Splasher: Art or Vandalism?'* *The Guardian*, March 2007

Harding, Luke *'No Paris trip for Russia's kissing policemen'* *The Guardian*, Oct. 2007

Kimmelman, Michael *'Splashing the Art World with Anger and Questions'* *New York Times*, June 2007

Lampert, Nicolas *'The Problem with Taking "Art in the Streets" Into the Museum'* *Blouin Artinfo*, Jan. 2011

MacDonald, Heather *'Tagging MOCA'* *Los Angeles Times*, May 2011

Malazarte, Mark *'The Mystery of Banksy and the Situationist Movement'* Art Institute of Tampa, Feb. 2006

Mizota, Sharon *'Art review: "Art in the Streets" at the Geffen Contemporary at MOCA'* *Los Angeles Times*, April 2011

Moore, Samantha *'Street Art: Experiment in Dialogue'* Stetson, 2012

Moynihan, Colin *'As Street Art Goes Commercial, a Resistance Raises a Real Stink'* *New York Times*, June 2007

Pinder, David *'Arts of Urban Exploration'* *Cultural Geographies*, Issue No. 12, 2005

Ratcliff, Carter *'The Art Establishment: Rising Stars Vs. The Machine'* *New York Magazine*, Nov. 1978

Sayer, Monica *'Sub-culture as Big Business'* *World Wide Bulletin*, May 2005

Stocker, Terrence L., Dutcher, Linda W., Hargrove, Stephen M., Cooke, Edwin A. *'Social Analysis of Graffiti'* *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 85, Issue No. 338, Oct. - Dec. 1972

Ward, Ossian *'How Graffiti Became Art'* *Time Out London*, Jan. 2008

Webb, Christopher *'Blek Le Rat: This Is Not a Banksy'* *The Independent*, Sep. 2011

Websites

www.lindafashionspot.blogspot.com (Jan. 2012)

www.graffiti-letters-styles.blogspot.com (Jan. 2012)

www.iconolo.gy (Jan. 2012)

www.artofthestate.co.uk (Jan. 2012)

www.ukstreetart.co.uk (Jan. 2012)

www.florenceblanchard.com (March 2012)

www.obeygiant.com (April 2011)

www.gothamist.com (April 2012)

www.graphics8.nytimes.com (April 2012)

www.fingerweb.org (April 2012)

www.gammablog.com (April 2012)

www.wallstreetmeeting.de/ (May 2012)

www.sheffield.gov.uk (May 2012)

www.melbournestreetart.com/ (May 2012)

www.yorkshirejunkies.co.uk (May 2012)

www.stepinthearena.nl (May 2012)

www.libcom.org (May 2012)

www.facebook.com (May 2012)

Film Footage

'Riding Zone' (documentary), 2008 (www.youtube.com, 2009)

JR TED Talks: *'Use art to turn the world inside out'*, (www.TED.com, 2011)

'Short Stories; Graffiti Wars' (documentary), Channel 4, 1999 (Sheffield Hallam video library, 2007)