The conceptual notion of "the streets" in graffiti and street art: A search for its role, meaning and characteristics in the city of Utrecht.

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By Christos Alexiou
Student Number: 5993563

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"Questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is arguably the most urgent of services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves".

— Zygmunt Bauman, Globalization: The Human Consequences

Introduction: From a momentary revelation to an undeviating search.

What is "the streets"? What do graffiti artists mean when they say they represent "the streets" or that graffiti has to stay in "the streets"? What do street artists mean when they speak about their art in "the streets"? Do they attribute the same characteristics when they use the same signifier to express their ideas/beliefs and conceptions? "The streets" is a notion, omnipresent and susceptible to a broad spectrum of interpretations with vague connotations concerning its nature and "form". This thesis is research for the conceptual notion of "the streets", encountered in numerous instances throughout my engagement with graffiti and street artists. In the following pages, I collected and enlisted the characteristics and traits of the conceptual notion of "the streets" through the interviews; I conducted with street and graffiti artists in the city of Utrecht. I compiled the different "pieces" which constitute the perspectives of the artists about their practices, their audiences and subsequently their conceptions and beliefs about the meaning of "the streets" in their art and cognisance. Furthermore, I attempted, by coding the data of the interviews concerning the two art forms, to firstly analyse and secondly demystify the importance –if any- the role and "the form" the notion has for the artist's perspectives. Taken into consideration the aforementioned I conducted Ethnographic research in the city of Utrecht. Within four months I to approached graffiti and street artists in the city and interview them to gain more insights and understand how and if the conceptual notion of "the streets" existed in the cognisance of the local subcultures. On this point, I want to mention and clarify to the reader that because street art is an enormous and diverse field with different mediums and disciplines, I approached only street artists who paint murals on walls for various reasons. Firstly, because I did not desire to broaden my "target group" to many disciplines considering my available time (I will elaborate more on the different disciplines of street art in the theoretical section). And secondly, because it would have been more appropriate for the comparison of the two subjects (street art and graffiti) –concerning the notion of "the streets" – to have in my discussion a base or else a common denominator; The walls and the practice of making art on them. In conclusion, this research is an attempt to summarise and uncover "a pattern" with which I became familiar. Incontrovertibly it is certainly not a complete theorem but rather a suggestion based on my observations and lived experiences with graffiti and street artists.

   When I became a teenager and started walking in the streets without a parental figure, I discovered something that actuated and transformed my personality hitherto.

It was a cloudy day of September, the school was not open, and all my friends were at our favourite café. That particular day I also had to do some chores for my family; thus a followed another route before going to the meeting place. After a couple of minutes and while I was walking a storm erupted, pouring enormous amounts of water on the city. Luckily I found refuge under the shed of an old building and waited for the calamity to end. On the opposite side of the road was an uncovered parking area with a big grey wall on its facade, which I later proclaimed as my revelation. That wall was immensely awash with colour, black, silver, white, thick, narrow, bumbling, straight lines which expanded towards any direction with their boundaries interwoven. That wall had given me the impression of a battlefield cramped with opposing forces similar to the currents of the wind which were relentlessly surpassing the buildings. Here and there, elaborative bigger paintings were establishing themselves, similarly to our mega concrete structures. Posters were being at the mercy of the wind battling to stay on the wall, space which gave them meaning, but in the end, could not escape the inevitable and were rendered to pieces. On the corners, legitimate metal signs (parking area, danger high voltage) were contributing to the dynamic patchwork which was unveiled to me for the first time.

After that instance, my perspective of the city changed. My gaze towards any city I visited shifted to other domains. I had become a hunter of "on the wall art" –if the reader would allow me this arbitrary reduction- I could not resist its mystical influence on me. Similarly to an archaeologist, I wondered through neighbourhoods, avenues, abandoned places and streets filled with a desire to discover new walls, new canvases open to interpretation but also vulnerable towards any human agent and to decay, that unstoppable force of time. I was amazed by the aesthetics, anonymity and the power contestations I could observe in every wall. Traces or traits of a practice and art that was revealed to me. Whether the content on the wall was a political statement, a love or philosophical quote, a graffiti "piece", a street art mural, a "tag", stickers or stencils. I was thrilled not only by the outcome but also by the process behind it and the sense of prevalent illegality, the act of intrusion, distraction and disruption. After these considerations –if not realisations – the meaning of the walls as an object had been enriched with different connotations in my perspective. The wall – I believe- is mainly the symbol of territorial designation. From the humble beginnings of our human civilisations hitherto; the walls were/are the structures which did not only establish –visually- the concepts of property, borders and boundaries but also evoke (d) feelings of security, comfort, protection, alienation and power etc. Sometimes stagnant, depersonalised, robust structures and other "canvases" whether interior or exterior which in which "we" depicted our imagination. It was not long after that when I started enriching my knowledge about graffiti and street art (murals).

The next stage (probably the most important and fruitful) of my engagement with these art forms was when I left my city to study my bachelors to another, smaller one. Because those years I did not only interacted with artists but also lived as an integral member of their community for four years. The first step was made when I met a local graffiti artist through an older classmate of mine. After a couple of months, we became friends and he introduced me to the rest of the Hip Hop community. Although

I had some previous knowledge about the culture of Hip Hop and subsequently graffiti, the "passport" for my initiation was not my knowledge but my stance. I understood afterwards that their acceptance and trust –towards me- was established gradually through numerous instances. My presence and the correlation between my "Word" and my actions were the definitive factors in my initiation to their community. Without realising it, I was overcoming stages of an unspoken trial. For my presence and how I was "acting" in their main meeting point (a square in the centre of the city) to how I behaved even in their "eternal" disagreements and whether they needed my help, I felt, subconsciously, that my position was under constant consideration. On this point, I would like to mention that I was not conscious of these "mechanisms" before my engagement. It is/was a procedure, I realised soon after that, and I suggest that neither they were aware of the daily subliminal trials concerning one's social presence. Ultimately trust –especially in secluded subcultures with their hierarches, ideologies and codes that operate on the verge of illegality- is not an element that can be obtained easily or by any institutionalised assurance; it is a feeling that has to be justified.

As my engagement continued, I had the chance –or the privilege- to assist in the creation of new "pieces" (the piece is the term for a graffiti art work in the graffiti slang; I will elaborate more in the theoretical section of this thesis). Progressively I had become an acknowledged member of the community and the members started addressing me with by nickname and not with my actual name. My "fame" preceded my presence and my role gradually become important as more people began to hear and speak about me. I had acquired one the most pivotal characteristic inside these communities and that was the notion of respect. An attribute that was not only responsible for my "fame" but most importantly for my role and the experiences I gained by acquiring it. By being respected, I had the privilege to experience directly how the hierarchies, the codes and the ideology of this subculture existed and substantially to discuss and permeate thoroughly into the realities of these people; a fact that leached me into the conceptual notion of "the streets".

Throughout my engagement as a member of the Hip-Hop community in this little city, I effortlessly became familiar with an idea could not apprehend. In the daily discussions with the members of the local community, "the streets" was one of the main subjects. Phrases such as: "Graffiti has to stay on the streets", "with my art I represent the streets", "everybody has to stay true on/to the streets", "the streets are the truth", "and the streets have ears/mouth", "be careful on the streets». And other similar such as: "the streets are everywhere", "my crew is my family on the streets", "Rap is the voice/music of the streets", "and Graffiti is the art of the streets" and "respect the streets" etc. had become a "commodity" for me; not to elide other words that usually replaced the name of the notion such as "the game" and "the jungle". I was very intrigued by the concept of "the streets" because, although I had an impression which I obtained through embodied experience, I could not reduce it to a simple statement. I had understood that for them "the streets" were not specifically designated areas or geographical spaces. It was a medium or a concept for the understanding of reality vaguer, abstract and far more important for them than the

"rest" of society, as they use to proclaim. It was the core of their ideology and therefore their lifestyle.

When I perceived the importance this conceptual notion/idea had for them, I used my "position" to gain more insights. I started asking and discussing it just to realise that it was more complicated than I had imagined. Because, although all of them –no matter their age – were invoking in their conversation the notion of "the streets", the interpretations about the reasons or most importantly about the meaning, definition or the critical elements of the concept had differences from an individual to another. For instance, some of them by speaking about the notion of "the streets" stretched the importance of their socioeconomic background as its primary element. Their position in society –lower middle class or working class – was a justification of their street lifestyle. As KID44 (Changed nickname) a 14-year-old graffiti apprentice told me: "Society does not care about how we are going to survive, I am from the streets because I do not have future and here is where I grow up. Not in school not in my house playing PlayStation. The streets are the place where I can find people like me". By "growing up" he meant the place of his socialisation and personal development, where he learnt what he considered useful mechanisms and relations for his survival. On this point I would like to address that this teenager was living in a house, none of the members was homeless. The "life on the streets" or "the streets" as space from which someone might "be originated", seemed to appear as a chosen lifestyle. For other members of this subculture, one of the important concepts was the culture of Hip Hop in their definition about the concepts of "the streets". Savorous (changed nickname) a 20-year-old graffiti artist told me: "I am a writer (graffiti artist), so "the streets" is my battlefield. Graffiti came from "the streets" and talks about "the streets", the least that I can do is to respect "the streets" wherever I go and stay true to graffiti the art of the streets". The rest of the portion was constituted from people, which were attributing connotations of power or political relations when defining the notion of the streets. As ONE234 (changed nickname) one of oldest members said to me: "You see this? (Pointing towards the public square in which we were sitting). There you have the anarchists, football hooligans and us (members of the Hip Hop community) we are altogether amongst with anyone who does not fit in. They consider us street urchins, social outcasts, criminals because we do not agree with them (the "rest" of society).With their hegemony, their "perfect" life, because we "woke up" and taking what is ours. We, the people of the street are an anonymous mass. But we have our weapons. When I write (doing graffiti), I want people to think, the same with the anarchist who writes his/ statements on the walls. The streets are all of these people who could not follow the norm".

My quest for an understanding of the notion of "the streets" inspired me to search "it" in every city I visited. I suggest that the concept of its general idea can be traced in most of the urban societies no matter the local-or not- socio/economic/cultural aspects or agents that apply. If I could exemplify the statement, I believe that the beliefs, opinions and ideas about the essence of the concept of "the streets", for the people they engage with it or preferably embody it in their daily vocabulary or reality is commendably similar in most of the urban societies irrespective of the country.

My experiences throughout the years with these two art forms did not only constitute the core of my motivation in searching for the notion of "the streets". They also "provided" me with the necessary vocabulary for communicating, stance for positioning myself and admiring gaze towards these artists and their practice. My background was also proven as a fundamental arsenal from which I managed to extract the essential knowledge for identifying the possible places from which I started my research. The knowledge of the practices, which were comprised as a starting point for my conversations and lastly the mentality which helped me not only approach these people with empathy about their lifestyle but also with the necessary intellectual tools to extrapolate the concept of "the streets" through the interviews I conducted.

Method:

In this section I will explain the difficulties I encountered throughout my research and I will elaborate in my selection of the Ethnographic method. I will firstly comment on minor problems such as the inadequate data on the graffiti/street art communities of Utrecht and my inability to speak Dutch. Secondly I will express my concerns about confidentiality, an important element of my thesis and lastly I will elaborate on the reasons behind the selection of the Ethnographic method as the most suitable for this study case.

The Rationale:

As I mentioned before the method of my research was the Ethnographic especially as it was expressed by D. Soyini Madison in her prominent book *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, And Performance[1]*, which constituted as the cornerstone of my engagement with the field and my methodology. Especially in the first chapters of the book the author presents plainly and with a considerable care to the potential reader all her recommendations about the stance, background, ethical responsibilities and considerations, methods of interviewing plus techniques for the coding of the data. If I could use one of the terms –mentioned in the book- to explain my position about the interviewees. That would be the positionality of "voices" with some differences. As it is being described in the book: "The positionality of voices is where the subjects themselves are the focus, and their voices forward indigenous meaning and experiences that are in position to dominant discourse and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely presented but not addressed"[2].

In the case of this thesis, although the primary focus of my analysis is the opinions, stance and perspectives of the graffiti and street art practitioners concerning the notion of "the streets". I assert that I am obliged to clarify my position. Because of our utterances –with the artists- are the primary data of the discussion and conclusion I want to propose. My goal is not only to "collect" and present their voices but also attempt to interpret them. Thus my position and my intentions in the field but also towards the reader and the artists had to be distinct and profound. Nonetheless, I am aware that the central element of the method and the core of my research is the notion of subjectivity. From the data to my interpretations of them and finally to my description of the concept of "the streets" subjectivity is in the nucleus of my process. Therefore I devoted so much space to explain to the potential reader my background and the reasons behind the pivotal questions of the research, which is revolving around a mysterious concept –part of a mindset- of interpreting the empirical world.

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[1] D. Soyini. Madison, Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance. (Calif: Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2005). 14.
[2] Ibid. 7.

Inevitably the most suitable method for the perception of the practical world of others –as I believe- is the ethnographic method.

All the interviewees presented in the thesis are active street or graffiti artists from various backgrounds. The route I followed, apart from the communication through the internet, was the one of direct engagement. I went to Hip Hop live shows or parties, skate parks, festivals, graffiti events and to places in which the members of the community gather. My advantage in the field was my previous knowledge and experience of graffiti and street art, their codes and its vocabulary. They were useful traits that helped me appeal to them. All the presented interviews summarise the beliefs and conceptions of the artists in the city regarding the nature of the art forms, the role of the audience and the notion "the streets".

I initially conceived the existence of the concept of "the streets" through my engagement with the Hip Hop community. My experiences and numerous instances created an embodied interpretation of the concept, and it's characteristic. In my theoretical framework, I will try to present to the reader not only the necessary background for the clarification and understanding of the different notions such as graffiti, street art but I will also explain how different fractions of this notion can constitute as prime theoretical lenses for the understanding of the concept through the interviews.

Minor Difficulties:

The first and probably a minor difficulty was the inadequate data about these art practices in Utrecht. Although data or information may exist about street art in general –I am focusing solely on murals- information on the graffiti community did not exist at least in the English language. "A passageway" which was later proved extremely beneficial –if not of great deliverance- was my internship. For my internship, I researched the graffiti and street art community of Utrecht a time salvaging procedure which helped me accomplish –to a certain extent- the goal of my research. If general information about the communities existed, they would have been an important factor that would have saved valuable time.

The one element which I lacked was my inability to speak Dutch. Despite the fact, that the population of the Netherlands –especially the younger ages- has a remarkable English competency. I eventually asserted that if I knew their language, I would have been more capable of extracting more data. The usage of the English language, although it was a necessary medium for the communication with my interviewees, it did not provide the necessary intellectual "freedom" for them to speak about such an abstract/cognitive notion as the concept of "the streets". In numerous instances, I observed that not only I was more descriptive and analytical with the words I was choosing –to simplify them- but also they had difficulties explaining their ideas/opinions in English. Eventually, the nature of my main question was emerging in the sphere of abstract conceptualism and not in the aspects of their everyday reality.

Risks and Confidentiality:

One of the most important drawbacks of my research was the suspicion that I encountered towards my institutionalised position in the field. In this section, I will first describe the phenomenon, and I will present instances which justify to the reader my statement. Consequently, I will explain how I managed to counter this obstacle – in most of the cases- throughout my research, plus the "dangers" that lurk for the validation of my findings. More extensively, while the streets artists, were amendable in creating an appointment, speaking with me and eventually permit me to publish portions of our utterances, if I granted them the document, before its submission. The graffiti artists were reluctant towards my purpose to write about their opinions. But with the fear of not being characterised as ignorant, I want to assert that their stance is/was entirely justifiable. The practice of graffiti artists is illegal, from the simple "tags" to the elaborative artworks on the trains or private and public property they are being considered as vandals. A big portion of the population also believes their practice is not art and usually confuses graffiti with street art. Many graffiti artists ("writers") are very cautious because a handful of lawsuits are pending towards their nickname and any leak of sensitive information (time, space, facial characteristics or even their formal name) could expose them severely with irredeemable consequences. Their secretive communities are based on trust, strong interpersonal bonds and codes of conduct. Therefore the position of an outsider is at least not favourable –if not condemned- in the process of integrating. In most of the instances, when I contacted artists, graffiti magazines, organisation which collaborated with artists or even found people that "might" be affiliated with a graffiti artists, I was confronted with the same response: "We know someone, but we cannot give you his contact". Although I was disappointed, I completely understood their concerns.

One has to surpass these obstacles with his/her stance and personality when he/she engages with the field and tries to approach these artists. But whenever I explained my position in the university they were automatically becoming reluctant, terse and subdued. Despite my assurance and guarantee that I did not want to expose them, some of them did not want to continue any discussion and almost all of them did not want to be recorded. My guaranties were comprised by three facts: Firstly, that I would change their nickname in my thesis, secondly grant them my document prior to its submission and thirdly change or erase any passage or quote with which they did not agree. I firmly believed that these affirmations would had change their mentality towards me, but ultimately the results –the final documented interviews- were under my initial "bar of expectations" prior to my research.

My main fear concerning the medium in which some of the interviews were documented (personal hand written notes) is that they could be characterized apocryphal. I want to explain that this was the only possible device which was not "offending" my interviewees who did not want to be exposed or have their nickname

published. I did/do not intend to be the reason of their possible problems –if any would occur- therefore I implemented these strict "measurements" in my thesis in order to protect their identities, respect their freedom of speech and personal information. Lastly I desire to address that although the number of interviews presented may seem inadequate or insufficient. I subjoined them, because –as I suggested- they summarize the dominant opinions concerning the subject.

The Background:

Hip Hop:

In this section of the thesis I will briefly explore the culture of Hip Hop. The reasons behind this selection are firstly that the practice of graffiti –as we mainly acknowledge it today- originated and gained pivotal recognition through the culture of Hip Hop. Subsequently street art –according to the majority of the bibliography- derived from graffiti, therefore I suggest that introducing the culture Hip Hop is important for the understanding of the two art forms. Lastly Hip Hop and especially its music is closely associated with the notion of "the streets which is also being addressed thoroughly in its thematic.

"A lot of times, when people say hip-hop, they don't know what they're talking about. They just think of the rappers. When you talk about hip-hop, you're talking about the whole culture and movement. You have to take the whole culture for what it is."

-Afrika Bambaataa

When I say hip-hoppers, I mean black, white, Asian, Latino, Chicano, everybody. Hip-hop has united all races. Hip-hop has formed a platform for all people, religions, and occupations to meet on something. We all have a platform to meet on now, due to hip-hop. That, to me, is beyond music. That is just a brilliant, brilliant thing."
-- KRS-One

Hip Hop music is one of the most recognized and widely disseminated genres of music (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1:(Google's Doodle for the 44th anniversary since the beginning of Hip Hop).

Its audience is vast, and its diversity has an unprecedented multitude of supporters. But although many people are familiar with it, the percentage which is aware of its history, roots and ideology before becoming a mainstream force is declining. In this section of the theory, I will briefly present the history of Hip Hop as a phenomenon because for its theorists and some of the supporters is not merely or mainly a genre of music. This elaboration is vital for the thesis hence graffiti –and not street art as much- is a crucial element of it. Therefore to formulate a general image about the practices of graffiti a short elaboration on its humble beginnings is essential. For Tricia Rose Hip Hop is: "a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experience of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean History, identity and community"[3]. She highlights that the reasons behind its emergence and creation were the deindustrialisation and the social alienation that occurred as an outcome of the first. Between desire, hope and social disequilibrium Hip Hop's themes, sound, lyrics, practices and style try to negotiate the essence of its core; The life on the margin[4]. Subsequently on his prominent book "That's the joint: the hip hop studies reader" Murray Forman recited:

> (…)early hip-hop was characterized by public actions that were, in many cases, simultaneously accompanied by risks of varying severity. From this vantage, hip-hop can be seen as a series of practices with an evolved history and the ongoing potential to challenge both social norms and legal stricture; in hip hop, there are always stakes of crucial importance[5].

By reading the two statements one can easily conclude that Hip Hop is not simply a mainstream genre of music but on the contrary a cultural form with intimate historical roots and causes. It was the outcome of social conditions, a medium for a response towards a society which under compulsion condemned millions of people to a reality of decay, alienation and destitution. A multitude of scholarly opinions exists concerning different aspects of Hip Hop such as its nature, role, trajectory, style, themes, aesthetics etc. Nonetheless the first academic research on the subject of hip hop was done by to David Toop's Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip-Hop (1984)[6] and Steven Hager's Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap

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[3] Rose, Tricia. Black noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. 1994). 21.
[4] Ibid. 21.
[5] . Murray, Forman, *Introduction* in "That's the joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader" , ed. Neal Mark Anthony, and Murray Forman New York: Routledge. 2004) . 1.
[6] David Toop, The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop. (Boston: South End Press. 1984).

Music, and Graffiti[7].They initially paved the way for an ongoing number of scholars to engage with the subject of the relatively newborn cultural form at that time.

The beginning of hip hop according to the vast majority of the bibliography can be traced in the boroughs of New York in the seventies and more specifically in Bronx. Its founding fathers Kool, DJ Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash were also its main pioneers, who defined its trajectory and shaped it forms and norms[8]. Hip Hop consists of 4 "elements: The Dj (the producer of hip hop music), the break dancing (the dance of hip hop), graffiti (the visual art of hip hop) and rap (the hip hop music, part of which is the mc or rapper, the singer). It started as a cultural form in New York and gradually expanded its tentacles to the whole world, being today one of the most recognisable cultural forms. The reasons behind this astonishing appropriation by almost every society can be observed in the words of Halifu Osumare who examined the collectivity of hip hop. He labelled worldwide hip hop as "connective marginalities", and he argued that the element of blatant rebellious attitude and his resemblance to a youthful mentality, which opposes the adult status quo, helped it germinate worldwide. He also explained that this dynamic approach is not precarious to time because is being "resurrected" towards any socio/political/economic inequality[9].

One of the most omnipresent characteristic in hip hop is the notion of "realness" as the value that calculates ones authenticity and therefore importance which is expressed by the notion of respect. "Keeping it real" is a performative[10] and constant process which can be examined by its different elements that define it. These elements are the underground values[11] (not prostitute oneself to the mainstream) and the attachment to the "street values"[12]. More extensively one member is obligated firstly not to follow the mainstream fashion or narrative and secondly to support and adhere to the "street values" and "represent" –pledge commitment- with his/her stance to his/her local context (your neighbourhood or town). Notwithstanding the two requirements are not being advocated by all of hip hop's supporters or artists. Many critics –from the academia and outside of it, especially fans of hip hop- impeach the new turn in which the culture has been indulged. The denunciations pertain to the exaggerating consumerism, misogyny and drug consumption which today's hip hop promotes. Briefly, a portion of hip hop supporters or agents indicts the rest of the fans that they "sold out" the culture to the mainstream, which supposedly they had to oppose.

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[7] Steven Hager, Hip hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

[8] Nelson George, Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth in "That's the joint!: The Hip-Hop studies reader , ed. Neal, Mark Anthony, and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge. 2004). 1.

[9] Osumare, Halifu, "Beat Streets in Global Hood: Connective Marginalities of the Hip Hop Globe." Journal of American & Comparative Cultures 24 (1/2).Spring. (2001, 1999). 4.

[10] Houston A. Baker, Black Studies, Rap and the Academy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). 62.

[11] Williams, Jonathan D, "Tha Realness": In Search of Hip-Hop Authenticity", CUREJ: College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal University of Pennsylvania, (14 December 2007). http://repository.upenn.edu/curej/78. Accessed at 15 April (2017).7.

[12] Ibid. 8.

But concerning this statement, Tricia Rose argued that hip hop even on its infant days was a medium for the appropriation of public space and commodities. It is wrong to assume that its early practitioners did not interest in profit but rather they were not aware that they could achieve any through hip hop[13].

Hip Hop was and is a dynamic, multilayered cultural form. From the Bronx in the seventies, it has accomplished to dominate the popular culture not only in the USA but around the globe. It was/is a medium which helps subordinated communities to define and express their identities opposed to the dominant narratives. Occasionally as revolutionary and sometimes the epitome of hyper consumerism hip hop with its style, philosophy, ideology, hierarchies, fashion, contradictions and criticism influenced the world to an unprecedented scale.

Graffiti and Street Art:

"The thing I hate the most about advertising is that it attracts all the bright, creative and ambitious young people, leaving us mainly with the slow and self-obsessed to become our artists.. Modern art is a disaster area. Never in the field of human history has so much been used by so many to say so little."
― *Banksy*

"People say graffiti is ugly, irresponsible and childish... but that's only if it's done properly."
― *Banksy, Wall and Piece*

What is graffiti and what is street art? When could a mural be classified as street art and what are its differences from graffiti? Are graffiti and street art two arch enemies or two trajectories whose history and boundaries are frequently interwoven or separated by an exquisitely thin line? In this section of the theory, I will illustrate the histories, present and theory of graffiti and street art. Two art forms which although most of the times use the same material or "canvas", their recognition, legacy and bruit vary in disproportional levels. This section will be comprised out of two main components –as the title explicitly mentions- graffiti and street art. I will present each case differently only to summarise eventually in an attempt accentuate the main characteristic of the two art forms and how they contribute to my research.

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[13] Rose, Tricia. Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. 1994). 40.

Graffiti:

The encyclopedia Britannica describes as graffiti:

> A form of visual communication, usually illegal, involving the unauthorized marking of public space by an individual or group. Although the common image of graffiti is a stylistic symbol or phrase spray-painted on a wall by a member of a street gang, some graffiti is not gang-related. Graffiti can be understood as antisocial behavior performed in order to gain attention or as a form of thrill seeking, but it also can be understood as an expressive art form. Derived from the Italian word graffio ("scratch"), graffiti ("incised inscriptions," plural but often used as singular) has a long history. For example, markings have been found in ancient Roman ruins, in the remains of the Mayan city of Tikal in Central America, on rocks in Spain dating to the 16th century, and in medieval English churches.[14]

The grammatical origins of the word could be also traced to graffito: a drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surface[15] or its resemblance to the ancient Greek world γράφω (gráphō) which can be translate as : scratch, graze, having marked or drawn , brand, mark and document[16]. One may argue action of scribing on a wall is as old the first artifacts of human's visual expression and creation.

Notwithstanding, the practice which we today characterize as graffiti originated from New York in 1960's. Throughout the first decade the practice of writing ones nickname on neighborhood walls was widely known and the reasons were gang related territorial marking[17].But the interviewing of Taki183 by the New York Times and the publishing of his interview in 1971, created a stir of excitement to the teenagers of New York and attached to his name a notoriety which escalated as a desirable asset. Taki183, was a Greek teenager who lived in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan he worked as a messenger; an occupation which allowed him to travel to the five boroughs of New York and "tag" his nickname. After the publication of the article the teenagers of New York realized the fame they could achieve by

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[14] Glen D. Curry and Scott H. Decker. "Graffiti." Encyclopædia Britannica. October 26, 2006. Accessed July 24, 2-017. https://www.britannica.com/art/graffiti-art.

[15] Simpson, J. A., and E. S. C. Weiner. The Oxford English Dictionary. (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1989).

[16] LSJ contributors, "γράφω," LSJ https://lsj.translatum.gr/w/index.php?title=%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%86%CF%89&oldid=3 45263 (accessed July 13, 2017).

[17] Martha Cooper, and Henry Chalfant, Subway art. (New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1997). 14.

transcending their nickname to the rest of the boroughs[18].Enacting thus a fierce competition and the practice of graffiti as it was established until today[19]. This turn of events galvanised the teenagers to engage even more with the practice for the price of fame. But within the rules of this atypical "dispute" new styles and the new combinations of colours had to be pioneered for one to be individuated from the crowd. In this game and race for fame and respect (which was the outcome of fame) the train lines were consolidated as one of the most decisive places for the dissemination of their "message". The trains had been established as a medium to transcend one's nickname to the rest of the boroughs, outside the confinements of one's neighborhood[20]. Many artists tried to appropriate a small area of the train's surface. Entrenching thus the battle for visual contestation as one of the pivotal characteristics of graffiti. Graffiti "writers" also created a slang which various terms about their practice. Some of the most prominent, recognisable and acceptable throughout the world are:

Bite: To intentionally copy another artist's style.

Bomb: To create many artworks in one area and the illegal peace

Buff: The erasing of graffiti artworks by the Transit –or any form-of authority.

Crew: The groups that some graffiti artists formulate a team.

Getting Up: Successfully painting a train, and getting fame.

Tag: The signature of the artist with a spray can or a marker.

Piece: A graffiti painting, a graffiti art work.

Style: The form of the letters and the way they connect.

Toy: The unexperienced graffiti artist and most of the times a derogatory term.

Writer: The graffiti artist, the practitioner of the art.[21]

The most important element of graffiti culture is the notion of respect. Every writer by the time he/she starts to "write" is engaged in an endless competition for respect. It can only be obtained gradually, and it requires several accomplishments. For instance, the more difficult to be approached but visible is the position of a piece the more creditable for respect is the writer(s) who accomplished it. Another example is the overall presence of a writer in a city. If the overall visibility –concerning the quantity of his/her nickname appears in public and private space- of a writer's nickname comparing to the rest and the more his/her tag/name can be observed in the city the more respect he/she might obtain. Graffiti is widely considered as vandalism, its process and practice cannot be incorporated into the institutionalized world and in the social consensus is recognized as non-art. The most common thematic in the aesthetics of graffiti is one's nickname. The writers "compete" -with tags or

[18] Tricia Rose, Black Noise : Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. (Hanover, NH :University Press of New England, 1994) .42.

[19] Martha Cooper, and Henry Chalfant. Subway art. (New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1997).

[20] Ibid. 23.

[21] Ibid. 29.

elaborative pieces- to paint their name in the most intricate styles. Therefore their art work can only be appreciated and recognized by those who have the necessary competence with these abstract fonts. (**Figure 2**, **Figure 3**).
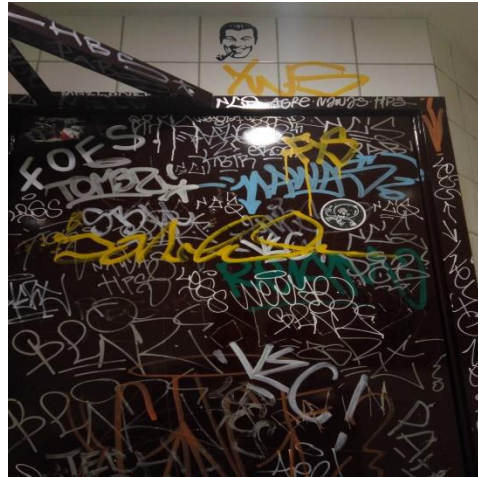

Figure 2: "Example of visual contestation between graffiti artists" (Photograph was taken by the author, Utrecht).

Figure 3: "Example of visual contestation between institutionalized agents and graffiti artists" (Photograph was taken by the author, Utrecht).

Considering the presence graffiti has in a city one can assume its important relation with spatial orientation and the appropriation of public or private property through art. As Colin L. Anderson argued when discussed the mechanics of graffiti in space and the reasons behind the illegality of the practice:

> The need for graffiti writers to make visible not only their individual identities, but also their lived spaces, demonstrates the linkages between spatial confinement, social mobility and identity. In order for the writer's identity to escape from the invisibility of social exclusion, the space the writer

occupies must also be transformed, as it is essential in constituting that identity[22].

Therefore graffiti questions and attempts to tackle the status quo by violating and appropriating space through a performative and artistic process[23]. Nonetheless graffiti was never a stable anti –authoritarian art practice. By the early days of its recognition a handful of artists decided to exhibit their art into galleries, causing thus a discourse among the graffiti subculture which continues until today, pointing out not only the contradictions of graffiti but also the fractions of a contemporary anti-establishment ideology. When explaining about the process of "institutionalization" which occurred in graffiti, Ian Bourland explained that the illegal, performative and anti-commercial practice of graffiti and its evolution of style in the trains constituted it as absent from the main/formal art history[24]. But by the time different writers started infuse their art into the mainstream "rivers" especially in East village in 1980-1985 the turn was inevitable.[25] This incident incorporated graffiti to the mainstream art history giving the opportunity to many people to examine, "advertise" it, become familiar with it and evolve –if not revolutionize- its aesthetics and techniques. A turn which for many researchers and not only set the fundamentals for the beginning of street art.

Street Art:

Street art is probably one of the most recognizable art forms and most researched contemporary artistic phenomena. Even specific "milestones" –although not mandatory- such as its beginning as an art form   are yet to be entrenched. Most of the theorists though agree that street art started approximately in the 1980 and 1990 from graffiti artists who exceeded the rules and norms of graffiti with different aesthetics but continued working on the streets.[26].Street art is an extremely diverse genre or practice which cannot be reduced solely on one medium or strategy. Another example of the confusion, the phenomenon street art might evoke is its different terminology. Apart from street art; terms such as "neo-graffiti art" or "urban painting"[27] are also prevalent. Subsequently according to Martin Irvine street art:

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[22] Colin L. Anderson . "Going 'All City': The Spatial Politics of Graffiti .", Shift: Graduate Journal of Visual and Material Culture , no. 5 (2012): 1-23. Accessed April 3, 2017. http://shiftjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/anderson.pdf. 8.

[23] Ibid. 9.

[24] Bourland, Ian. "Graffiti's Discursive Spaces.", Chicago Art Journal 17 (Fall 2007): 56-83. Accessed April 3, 2017. http://ianbourland.typepad.com/files/graffiti.pdf. 66.

[25] Ibid. 59.

[26] Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, Aaron Rose. Art in the Streets. 3rd ed. Rizzoli International Publications, Incorporated, 2011.

[27] Ganz, Nicholas, and Tristan Manco. Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents. (London: Thames & Hudson. 2004) 10.

Is a paradigm of hybridity in global visual culture, a post postmodern genre being defined more by real-time practice than by any sense of unified theory, movement, or message. Many artists associated with the "urban art movement" don't consider themselves "street" or "graffiti" artists, but as artists who consider the city their necessary working environment[28]

He also notes that street art is also considered as a provocative, anarchist movement whose goal is the (appropriation) of public and visual space but occasionally is closely associated with galleries and museums[29]. The main media of street art are the stencil, the paste up, the sticker, yarn bombing and guerilla knitting. The diversity of trajectories and mediums has constituted street art as a genre open to interpretation. But what is the element that defines street art? Is the medium, the public space, the practice the message or combined? Alison Young also comments that street art has not a definitive delineation and that it is not safe or necessary for one to be given. Nonetheless, she describes the street art work as situational artwork, wherefore firstly the position/place of the work constitutes pivotal for its meaning. Secondly, the intention of the artists creating a work in public is the primal cause of any other being preliminary and thirdly because the concept of illegality that revolves around is either profound or pre-assumed (even in a legal artwork)[30]. Street art has and still is evoking a stir of controversy with its equivocal presence and role. For many, the ideology of street art and therefore its role derives from a political most of the times anti-authoritarian base. But simultaneously street art has been incorporated in the ranks of big enterprises and local authorities. If one wants to examine this two-pronged role and function of street art; a significant element of caution is necessary. And a scrutinised gaze on each case individually is advised. Commenting on the political aspect –or background- of street art Alison Young noted that the intention of the street artist is to contribute with or his/her art to the neighbourhood, city or community. By any means, this action is not axiomatic, but comparing it to the advertisement industry, which predominately occupies our social space bombarding us with stimuli for consumption, the gesture of a gift –contrary to the street artist's work, which could be seen as such- is rare. The second characteristic which reinforces the argument for the political stance of street art is its perceived democratic essence. As street artists suggest, street art is for everyone and could be done by anyone. Regardless of his/her cultural, economic and educational background[31].This statement/action –especially when it is actually implemented- challenges the norms of the institutionalized world in which the role expert for any action is essential.

On the contrary street art has also been exploited by big enterprises, governments and authorities. Not only this on growing familiarity has shifted the audience

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[28]Martin Irvine "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture ", in The Handbook of Visual Culture, ed. Heywood, Ian, Barry Sandywell, Michael Gardiner, Gunalan Nadarajan, and Catherine M. Soussloff (London: Berg. 2012).235-278. 1.

[29] Ibid. 1.

[30] Alison Young, Street Art, Public City: Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination (Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017 : Routledge , 2014). 8.

[31] Ibid. 27.

knowledge concerning it's –in some cases- illicit practice or –for some- roots. But with its worldwide recognition –especially through the names of Banksy, Keith Haring, Shepard Fairey and Keith Haring- Street art has been established as one of the most recognizable "genres" of art. Its popularity and ability to convey its message through its relation with its surroundings have constituted street art as one of the main mediums for -not only public- advertisement. This new turn has raised waves of controversy especially within the graffiti and street art world because this incorporation and "conscription" results to a self-evident oxymoron and irony (concerning the anti-establishment fundamentals of street art).Subsequently, street art has been used thoroughly by many institutionalized agents – such as local governments- for the enchantment of a specific rhetoric quite prominent in our present days. Nowadays street art is being used for its aesthetics in order to present a city with abundance in cultural creativity, diversity and quality of life. A manifold "to be sold in prosperous citizens as a signifier of urban vitality and success".[32]

Some convergence points:

Street art and graffiti share a bewildering relationship, but despite their differences, one can point out the specific aspects which adjoin them as two similar practices. On this section, I will summarize the key concepts that occur in the theory of the two practices. And pinpoint the essential elements for the following sections. Apart from firstly the aspects of visual contestation prominent and omnipotent in the nucleus of the two practices whether their dispute occurs with institutionalized agents or not (**Figure 4**, **Figure 5**, **Figure 6**).

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[32] Jeff Ferrel, "Graffiti, Street Art and the Dialectics of the City". in Graffiti and Street art: Reading, Writing and Representing the city, ed Avramidis, Konstantinos, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi. (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2017). 28.

Figure 4: "Example of visual contestation between graffiti tags, street art works and legitimate signs (Photograph taken by the author, Amsterdam).

Figure 5: "Example of visual contestation between institutionalized agents and graffiti tags" (Photograph taken by the author, Utrecht).

Figure 6: "Example of visual contestation between institutionalized agents and street artists in Amsterdam, probably the famous INVADER" (Photograph taken by the author).

Secondly, the temporal nature of their artworks as both use the cityscape as a canvas, whereupon are exposed to any danger could hinder or eradicate them. From institutionalized agents to the weather conditions. An element or danger, most of the artists are aware since they choose to create art in contested spaces. (**Figure 7, Figure 8)**

Figure 7: "Example of temporal graffiti tag" (Photograph taken by the author).

Figure 8: "Example of temporal street art work" (Photograph taken by the author).

Occasionally graffiti and street art continue their trajectories in parallel lines most of the times as signifiers of particular phenomena. According to Jeff Ferrell, the unprecedented emergence of street art and graffiti as worldwide trends can help as note the redefinition of urban life by two new strategies (hypes). Firstly "the spread of restrictive environmental designs" and secondly "the evolution of new regime of social control that includes the exponential growth of urban surveillance and street policing strategies, expanding micro-governance based on risk management ideologies[33].Graffiti has been degraded as the sign of urban decay whereas street art has been crown as the "jewel" of the creative cities. Thus the audience and therefore the public have numerous misconceptions concerning the art practices and their ideologies towards society and space. But whether it is graffiti's complicated fonts specifically oriented for a secretive group (graffiti community) or general aesthetics open to interpretation (street art) both of these art forms have intergraded into their process the performative action and the appropriation of public or private space. As Alison Young asserts " Despite the diversity of writers and artists intention, mark making without permission is always a damage according to the Law, irrespective of aesthetics., medium of expression or style"[34]. Only for Kurt Iverson to subsequently comment " if we think about graffiti writers and street artist as people who are enacting their own forms of authority rather than simply contesting authority this opens up interesting horizons for reading the politics of graffiti and street art in the

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[33] Ibid. 27.

[34] Alison Young. "Art or Crime or Both at the Same Time? On the Ambiguity of Images in Public Space". In Graffiti and Street art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City, ed Avramidis, Konstantinos, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi..(London and New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2017). 44.

city"[35]. I believe that street art and graffiti are two immeasurable subjects and one in order to examine them thoroughly he /she has to engage with them through specific "lenses". Hence I choose to research the role of the conceptual notion of the streets and its attributes through graffiti and street artists. The street and is connection with street art and graffiti is not new in the scientific community. Nicholas Elden Riggle in his paper "Street art the transfiguration of common places" attempted to examine the meaning of "street" in the definition of street art. After his suggestion that street art is a medium to reenact the correlation between art and everyday life[36].A relation which was abolished by the accomplishments of modernism through the formalist criticism (the non-relation between art and everyday life and the fact that art ought to be self-evident).He notes that street art could be characterized as anti-formalist art, because "it's anonymity and ephemerality hinders the construction of a master narrative"[37]. When examining the condition on previous arguments on whether an artwork is street art or not he concluded that "An artwork is street art if, and only if, its material use of the street is internal to its meaning"[38]. By using the same theorem he examines the notion of graffiti. After he separates "artistic graffiti" from "mere graffiti", although he stated that usually their boarders are vague[39], he separates the usage of the streets in "general" and "specific" use of the streets and elaborates by arguing:

> A general use of the street is a use of a public surface for its publicity. A specific use of the street is use of the specific features of a public space. Specific uses of the street are either specific uses of a type of street space (for example, a doorway or a brick wall) or specific uses of a tokens pace(this particular brick wall).It is difficult to imagine how any artistic graffiti that makes a specific use of the street is not street art according to our definition. So the argument that graffiti is not street art must be the argument that artistic graffiti that makes a general use of the street is not, qua artistic graffiti, street art because its use of the street is not internal to its meaning[40].

Street art and graffiti constitute one of the main binaries in the visual arts discourse. Both of the two art practices had caused "altercations" between their supporters and not only. I believe that street art and graffiti expose to a great extent the power relations of our realities. With their performative process and thematic have managed to be constituted as the two of primary forms of controversy in the relation between

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[35] Kurt Iverson. "Graffiti, Street Art and the Democratic City". In Graffiti and street art: reading, writing and representing the city. ed Avramidis, Konstantinos, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi.. (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2017). 97.

[36] Nicholas Alden Riggle, "The Transfiguration of Common Places", The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 68, no.3 (2010).243-257. Accesed June 25 ,2017. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jaac.2010.68.issue-3/issuetoc. 243.

[37] Ibid. 243.

[38] Ibid. 246.

[39] Ibid. 251.

[40] Ibid . 252.

art and public space. Although with their unprecedented dissemination on the internet most of their important notion such as the ephemerality will vanish. The latitude of their precipitating legacy will eventually enact them as one of the main reasons of our social dialogue.

The elaborations on the theory constitute a tool for firstly understanding and secondly interpreting the findings of the interviews. I could have expanded the theoretical framework in many other trajectories –as I believe that the reader ought to have a general overview- but this action would not have been sufficed. My main question permeated around the conception of the artists about the notion of "the streets". I elaborated on –what I believe- fundamental theory for the reader to understand the diversity of those cultures and have meaningful insights from the utterances below. In the following section, I will present first the general findings for the local street art and graffiti culture in Utrecht and then illustrate the interviews from which I will begin the description with the notion of "the streets".

Discussion:

The case of Utrecht:

Through my research in the city of Utrecht, I became acquainted with the history of the city's graffiti scene; it's main and most respected predecessors plus its current figures. I spoke with several street artists from different disciplinary backgrounds and with city officials about the case of street art and graffiti; I discovered many myths and gained valuable information which –as a beacon of light- unraveled the a priori misty landscape concerning the case of the city. In this section, I will first present data about Utrecht and then elaborate on my findings concerning the notion of "the streets" in the city.

Street art and Graffiti in the city: "The crime scene"

One of the first and most compelling findings of the two similar but different practices in the city is that graffiti artists belong to a unified, secretive group with its rules, hierarchies, language and most of the times similar beliefs towards the essence of the reasons behind their actions. On the contrary street artists (muralist) do not constitute a "community" or a homogenous group. I have discovered –through some interviews I conducted- that street art practitioners are a "group" –I use this term to speak generally about the practitioners and not because they constitute a group- which is being characterized by dazzling diversity concerning their backgrounds and therefore their ideologies towards street art. As I explained in the previous pages street art is a genre of art which is being transformed daily; new mediums are being incorporated, and the discourse around it is constantly "under construction". The boundaries/rules that define an art work in public space as street art are open to interpretation. The common mentality towards street art –subsidies, hype, and recognition- has encouraged many artists from different disciplinary backgrounds to engage with it. Through the interviews I conducted with street artists I discovered that they do not belong in a street art community –contrary to my expectations- nor does that one exist in the city. They derive from different disciplinary or educational backgrounds (for instance fine arts, graffiti or even colage, sculptures). The use of various mediums in the process of creation and have different ideologies towards street art, its definition,

cause, ideology, benefits and aesthetics. Their beliefs about their "audience" differ similarly to their expectations –if any- from it. Therefore as it will be justified afterwards, I examined every interviewee and our utterances separately without any attempt of inclusion in an artistic community or group.

On the contrary graffiti artists shared the characteristics that constitute them part of an artistic community with almost the same ideology, perception and similar practices. In our discussion, they expressed the influence hip hop has in their art (same "theoretical" background). The importance the same code of conduct and vocabulary has for them(same modes of communication), the significance of their aesthetics and illegal practice (same ideology) and their differentiation from street art (a sense of belonging that defines them through the negation of the "the others"). It is noteworthy that the most of them in some instances used the word "we" rather than "I", contrary wise to the street artists. An innocent subconscious sign, which I believe reinforces the previous statements. In this point, I will firstly present my findings of the graffiti community of Utrecht (history and current) and then start my elaboration on the conceptions of the artists about the notion of "the streets".

The culture of graffiti is prominent in the country of the Netherlands. A country which has consistently been an important cultural centre could not "escape" the frenzy transcendence of Hip Hop and thus graffiti. As Philip Jonas said to me –former graffiti artist and now prominent street artist, who lives in Utrecht - graffiti in Utrecht started approximately in the mid/the late 80's. One of the local scene's old "masters" is RHONE. Although most of his works have probably vanished, a handful of people informed me that one can still find them in the Overvecht train station. Other notable names of that period are APACHE, WOOD, SNARE, CAMEL and SHARK. The first generation of local artists set the foundations for the local culture that was slowly breeding in the city. Respect for graffiti, as it was explained in the previous chapters, it is one of the fundamental traits or accomplishments a writer can obtain. The most notable contemporary names are Beaps, Steen, Dusk, Seaz, Deef Feed, Verfdokter (street artist), JanIsDeMan (street artist) and KBTR, the most notorious writer of the city. One of the characteristics of the graffiti scene in Utrecht and the Netherlands is the mobility of the writers from city to city. As Fluffy Desk (changed nickname) said to me "We go all over the Netherlands, next weekend I might "write" in Tilburg (…)I have made pieces in Rotterdam, Eindhoven, and Utrecht". Although "Getting Up" is not easy and constitutes a risky procedure, a lot of artists strive to practice their skills in the "bananas" (the yellow intercity trains) and gain the respect and fame with a possible accomplishment of the task (**Figure 9).**

Figure 9: "Example of graffiti piece on a train" (Photograph taken by the author, Utrecht).

One of the most pivotal places for the local graffiti scene is the abounded yard, Grindbak, a sanctioned place where every week new pieces are being created by local –or not- graffiti artists. It is a circular abandoned yard with a wall that constitutes its perimeter for approximately one kilometer. Grindbak is probably one of the most important places for the graffiti aesthetics and productions in the city, because given its sanctioned character (the fact that the writers can (re)paint walls without being prosecuted). Someone might consider it as "the exhibition space for local graffiti" A multitude of colors which contrasts the faceless, derelict, rumbles of concrete (**Figure 10**, **Figure 11**, and **Figure 12).**

Figure 10: "Graffiti in Grindbak 1" (Photograph taken by the author, Utrecht).

Figure 11: "Graffiti in Grindbak 2" (Photograph taken by the author, Utrecht).

Figure 12 : "Graffiti in Grindbak 3" (Photograph taken by the author, Utrecht).

Another place(s) where one can observe large accumulations of graffiti pieces is the walls by the railroad tracks. From big elaborative art works to the simplest tags one can always note the graffiti presence by the railroads, a fact that justifies –as I suggest- the connection between the environments of the trains with the graffiti culture and the importance of the first for the latter one (**Figure 13**,**Figure 14**, **Figure 15**).

Figure 13: "Graffiti piece by the railroad" (Photograph taken by the author).

Figure 14: "Graffiti pieces by the railroad" (Photograph taken by the author).

Figure 15: "Graffiti pieces by the railroad 2" (Photograph taken by the author).

The majority of the interviewees that had information about the local scene mentioned to me that no constant and major disputes between crews, writers or neighborhoods occurred within the city. Similarly, when I asked if the community of Utrecht has any disputes with other cities the answers had the same consistency. Whether it was the words of Philip Jonas "No, there is no beef with Utrecht and another city I think the beef is between Rotterdam and Amsterdam (…)maybe think football is the reason for that", Crazy Horse (changed nickname) "No, No, No, Utrecht has not any battles with any other city" or PacPull (changed nickname) "I don't remember any battles apart from the Dutch cup, that was a nice one"[41]. In this instance PacPull is referring to the graffiti battle between writers from Rotterdam and Utrecht on the possible outcome of the Dutch football cup. The artists created pieces in which their signature characters could be observed stealing the trophy from the other signature characters. This unconventional "battle" was given with graffiti pieces which were uploaded on the internet in the form of insults. In conclusion, I believe that it was easier for me to discover the lineage of graffiti in Utrecht, rather than street art. Graffiti artists are an artistic community which apart from the fact of respect to its predecessor could be characterized by a sense of homogeneity in its philosophy, practice, mediums and the "feeling" of a community. On the contrary the street artists, although part of worldwide movement tend to be more individualistic towards their art. The relatively vague term of street art and the diversity of the artists' backgrounds in the city did not provide the opportunity or the necessary data for a possible lineage of street art in the city.

Interviews: A contrapuntal voice which needs to be heard.

In this section, I will introduce the most important points that I discussed with the artists in the interviews. The discussions were comprised out of three main pillars. Firstly the artists' beliefs about street art and graffiti in general, their definition of the practices and their importance. Secondly their opinions about the audience's perspective on their art and its role. And lastly their ideas or conceptions about the notion of "the streets", its characteristics, dynamics and significance in their art. Before continuing, I will pinpoint two critical remarks. Firstly, I did not use predetermined questions in my interviews but rather pillars/trajectories which I wanted to discuss. The circumstances and the diversity of places, individuals and the concerns I explained in my method did not "offer" the format of a formal interview in most of the cases. Secondly, in all of my utterances, the concept of "the streets was expressed by me plainly, wherein the artists could elaborate on their beliefs.

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[41] "GRAFFITI WAR BETWEEN FEYENOORD AND UTRECHT FANS". www.ultras-tifo.net, 18. April 2016. Accesed 31 March 2017. http://www.ultras-tifo.net/photo-news/4233-frfc-utrecht-graffiti-war.html

Examining the findings:

When I started examining the interviews, it was made abundantly clear to me that one of my main assumptions before the beginning of the research could not be justified. I firmly believed that the conception/perspectives of the artists about the notion of the streets were similar, irrespective of their background. Nevertheless one of the first discoveries was that their opinions and interpretation of the concept depended –if not influenced- by their theoretical (artistic) background. I suggest that hitherto a separation between the artists acquainted with graffiti and its philosophy has to be made from the ones that are not. Wherefore their beliefs about the role of graffiti and street art, their audience and the notion of the streets varied to an unforeseeable extent.

The artist who did not have a background on graffiti spoke about the connection of their art with the communities or places in which they paint. They stretched the importance of its locality and expressed their satisfaction over the fact that their audience relates to their art. They also believe that street art is a collaborative procedure with the community and that their action is partly servitude. As Miss Marij Nielsen commented:

> "When you do art in public space it has to be together with the people, you cannot just create something that suits your taste, you have to interfere with the people in the street, because they will have to live with this work. In my own job as painter I do something completely different, it suits me better, I am my own judge. But my attitude changes when I do street art, I make a contribution to someone, I am more less a servant."[42]

And Miss Eline Janssen who noted:

> "One of the territories of my art-work is: art in public space. Art for public space is commissioned work and go together with interesting budgets. I'm working in public space because I want to put a smile in people's faces during their normal way of traveling to work, home, school."[43]

Both of the artists commented that street art is a collaborative procedure with the community and that their action is partly servitude. Through their quotes, I think it is

[42] Marij Nielen professional painter with over 30 years of experience in street art .She lives in Utrecht and currently is evolved with a handful of projects. She has made street art works in various cities such as Amersfoort , Amsterdam and Utrecht.

[43] Eline Janssen , professional artists with a wide spectrum of interests and mediums. She has over 20 years of experience with street art. Many artworks of her can be found in Utrecht.

fair to assume that in their process of creating a street art work, they consider the audience not only their final "recipient" but also their judge and inspiration. Therefore for street artists the audience has a more important role, than in the institutionalized art world, because it is more than spectator. Subsequently the street artists elaborated on the aesthetics of their art on a bigger extent than the graffiti artists and commented that they are easily comprehensible from the audience rather than graffiti fonts. Miss Eline Janssen said: "I use (silhouettes of) animals in my work. It is a concept that people can relate very easily and can transfer easily to their own knowledge of art and fun". Or as NSGW elaborated "(...) Graffiti is illegal and people they don't understand it, it abstract for them, whereas the majority of the people like street art because most of the time is cartoons, stencils other images people can relate to"[44]. Both of the artists in the discussion about the street art aesthetics stretched the importance of the connection that the audience might have with them because of their comprehensible figures. A particular attribute of streets art which I believe is the main reason aside from its presence in the public space which helped it receive its current recognition. It would have been false to accuse them that they spoke about graffiti in a derogatory manner, albeit it would not have been false to mention that they believe graffiti is not "high art" rather than a game that youth artists are engaged into. Which they do not necessarily disapprove as practice, but they do not believe in its possible aesthetic value. For instance, both of them characterized when speaking about graffiti mentioned: "Street art has nothing to do with autonomy it comes (derives) from the community that's what graffiti artists I think do not "understand". Personally, I am not a rebel in public space(…).I think graffiti artist can to do more deep art, but more often they stick to the letters"[45] and "If you ask me if there should be more graffiti, I would say Yes. But in the same way as my kind of work: it takes a lot of time and know - how to make a beautiful piece"[46]. I firmly suggest that their opinions towards their aesthetic value of graffiti are justifiable. Considering the artists' backgrounds in fine arts; both of them is also a significant portion of the population does not consider graffiti an art form. Graffiti as a visual art, questions specific fundamentals of our world which - as I assert- oppose specific norms of our society. For instance, the fact of appropriating public and private surface and using it as a canvas questions the concept of property, enacting thus graffiti as vandalism. Furthermore the fact that almost all the graffiti artists are autodidacts questions the idea of the institutionalized concept of art. As something that has to be taught by a mentor or institution. More extensively the idea, that the "label" or status of the artist – attributed to a person- has to be justified and validated by an institutionalized agent. These two conditions do not occur so prominently in street art. Although street art is appropriating public and private space similarly to graffiti, a wide percentage of the street art works in the city are sanctioned and legal. Consequently, nowadays some of the street artists have a previous educational background on art. Not all of them are

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[44] NSGW (changed nickname) street artist. Street artist who lives in Utrecht and works of him can be seen in different neighborhoods. His is engaged for over 30 year with these art forms.

[45] Marij Nielen, during the same discussion with the author.

[46] Eline Janssen, during the same discussion with the author.

autodidacts and most of them –especially in as it was mentioned in the interviews- do street art, not as their primary artistic practice.

Lastly elaborating on the notion of the streets they highlighted the importance of public space in street art and its connection with the audience which most of the times is a particular community. Street art has a dynamic role for the communities because the artist creates a concept which could easily relate to their reality. Its aesthetics can be easily analyzed by its bystanders/audience (are not abstract) and its procedure it's a spectacle whose outcome is widely acceptable, as an ornament, by the community. As Miss Nielen stated:

"(…) But my attitude changes when I do street art, I make a contribution to someone I am more less a servant. Nonetheless I think that the people in public space really enjoy art in their places, they think it is their own, people get very attracted to public art(…).When you want art in the city usually comes from above but when it comes from underneath is different because "the what needs to be done" (context, aesthetics etc.) is being created by the people of the community and that is something that most of the art experts do not appreciate because they have other parameters (when it comes to defining art as valuable)."[47]

And as Miss Janssen commented:

"You can't take my art out of its place, it is place-specific. I made it especially for that place. The history, the stories about the place, the common use, everything is incorporated in the work. If for example you take my art out of the tunnel it loses it context, I made it for the tunnel, I chose specific colors for that place, I learn about the history of it, the name of the street, is site specific."[48]

Through my discussions with the street artists, I understood that for them the relation between their art and the place on which it occurs were of pivotal importance. They named their art works as site-specific and stretched the significance of this connection. For them, the characteristics and attributes they appointed to the notion of "the streets" were the ones of public space. In our utterances, whenever I mentioned "the streets" in a question. They replied as if they were discussing the public space. By saying art on "the streets", they highlighted the importance of the bystanders and the community. The servitude of their action towards the audience and the power relations this practice reveals.

On the contrary, the artists that are acquainted with the graffiti culture expressed differently about their aesthetics, practice and audience and more complex ideas about the notion of "the streets". More extensively almost all of them spoke meticulously

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[47] Marij Nielen, during the same discussion with the author.
[48] Eline Janssen during the same discussion with the author.

about the concept of style and respect in their practice, its prominent position and how it has been constituted as value currency for the atypical hierarchy which occurs in the graffiti subculture. They were acutely aware that graffiti aesthetics are not accepted by the mainstream or institutionalized art world or people outside the hip/hop and graffiti community. As JanIsDeMan stated :

> "I was little when I started with tags, and then I continued to get better. I liked the rush inside me and the respect that came. It helped me as a person. You have to be all over the city if you want to get respect it is part of the game(…)Now when someone asks for a professional job and I say to them that I do graffiti they don't like it (they frown), but when I say I do street art/murals they get amazed."[49]

As Philip Jonas noted:

> What I think it is difficult to be understood for the most of the people it that graffiti is and (was in a bigger scale) about the style and the respect that came with it, you had to invent a style and evolve it. Street art with its anti-style broke the boundaries and created a big hype around it, is not about your personal style anymore, you don't have to have one you can make the building part of the style. What I don't like is that I don't see anything original nowadays."[50]

Through the words of Jasper Van Es:

> "Graffiti has to follow certain rules, style wise and social(…).Tagging (you see over there) many people say it is ugly but I like the way to put yourself out there ,to say "hey man the streets are for everyone this is public space"(…). Graffiti always gets the stigma of criminality. Because if it is graffiti people think a region is unsafe. But graffiti writers go to places already unsafe places, because nobody will arrest you there. The graffiti is there to remind people that a place is unsafe because they are not people there (…) I think it is a myth that graffiti writers actively oppose society. But they do. They do not want to but they do. That's the good about graffiti. Graffiti is for graffiti writers. Some people believe graffiti is for graffiti writers like a culture within a culture. But everyone can see it. It is a completive and performative process. It is more like what you need to do in order to leave your mark. The more risky the more unique you are. For me that is graffiti. Someone that paints in a "bubble" for

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[49] JanIsDeMan street, tattoo artist and former graffiti artist. He is reputable in the city of Utrecht for his art not only amongst graffiti artists but also for a wide spectrum of the population . in discussion with the author .March 2017.

[50] Philip Jonas professional street and former graffiti artists. He lives and works in Utrecht for approximately 20 years. Works of his can be seen in Utrecht. in discussion with the author. March 2017.

hours is muralism, graffiti is about the action and that's why I like it (…) I think the biggest difference is the audience. The streets artists want to say something they are more about the content. The aesthetics in street art are more important than in graffiti."[51]

And lastly as Fluffy Desk(changed nickname) mentioned:

"You can't make graffiti in your house or in canvas, you have to go out paint a wall and find the courage to do it (...).Is not the same with street art. We have codes, we value respect, we are illegal most of the times people can't understand our styles (…) because they are not easy from someone who doesn't know (…)."[52]

I firmly believe that the audience that can appreciate the abstract fonts of graffiti is the audience that has a particular competence with this art form. Ad hoc many art practitioners -or not-"disagree" with the aesthetics or practice of graffiti which they consider vandalism and sometimes not an art. The –former or not- graffiti artists shared the same belief. All of them spoke about the importance of personal style in their art as a holy personal endeavour. The style, namely the way of one's nickname letters are being depicted as the signifier of a writers competency and artistic skills. Thus all the graffiti artists strive to create the more complex and elaborative fonts. The final artwork, for someone who is not aware of this atypical mechanism in graffiti, seems abstract and alien. It is not easy for a spectator to relate or appreciate, for instance, a two coloured elaborative piece of graffiti. Because it's aesthetics and thematic, do not a correlate with someone's reality and contradict with his preconceptions about what is or could be art. Therefore the audience applicable for understanding graffiti is the graffiti artists and the members hip hop community, who are familiar with searching and identifying the name of the "perpetrator" and valuing his/her style. Constituting, thus graffiti a selective art form. Subsequently, all of the graffiti artists also made a clear distinction between their practice and street art. The majority of them commented the impact negatively; street art had into graffiti. They characterised their practice not simply as an art form but rather as a culture with codes of conduct, hierarchies and the prevalent importance of respect.

Probably the most striking feature of the interviews was the utterances and the characterisation about the notion of the streets from all the interviewees –who were or are- part of the graffiti community. They spoke about the notion vaguely and abstractly. When asked about "the streets" they expressed annotation such as "the game"[53], "the underground"[54] , "the true reality"[55] , "the smart thinking" [56], "the life

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[51] Jasper Van Es , former graffiti artist ,creative producer and independent curator. In his late 30's he curated the exhibition Viral Vandals in Eidhoven in the MU art space which examined thoroughly the contemporary issues of graffiti.

[52] Fluffy Desk (changed nickname), graffiti artist from Utrecht with 15 years of graffiti experience who lives in another city of the Netherlands.

[53] Philip Jonas, during the same discussion with the author.

outside the rules"[57] , "a part of our art"[58], "the battlefield"[59] , "the playground"[60] , "another dimension"[61] etc.

The notion of "the streets" in the minds of artists engaged with graffiti seems to have a prominent role similarly to an amendment. Through the interviews with the aforementioned but also numerous artists who were not mentioned because did not agree to be documented. "The streets" were expressed with different characteristic and connotations attributed to them. As Fluffy Desk commented:

> "You asked me about the street, do you want to know what I believe? I didn't grow up in a ghetto or something, but I have seen stuff. And that stuff happens in the street and no matter where you are in which country or city the street stuff are always the same. I have travelled and I have seen the things I am talking about. That why I think "the streets" are the same everywhere" You should think about it."[62]

The notion of "the streets" appeared in the interviews as an abstract space, omnipresent and omnipotent. Sometimes a space in every society where particular circumstances occur. Similarly to another reality or an underground and unseen world. Sometimes as a specific mentality or way of living, thinking and acting apart from the established norm.

> "The streets, have different meaning for different people. I never lived in a poor neighborhood. We were outside ,the street it was for us to find new way to live outside(…)When people say street I think they mean they're authentic, they say that someone form the streets is more free, it comes for a context with not so many rules. People from the streets are not sheep they are not part of the sheep culture."[63]

A cognitive/conceptual idea which is the pivotal element of a culture which opposes the dominant one: "The streets are our everything". Graffiti has to stay underground this is how it started, and I know that things change, but we cannot let it get mainstream"[64]. Different narrative or an abstract lens –as another perspective- from which the initiated analyze and perceive the world. A notion that justifies a lifestyle

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[54]PacPull (changed nickname) graffiti artist: Active graffiti artists with pieces, in many cities of the Netherlands.

[55] Crazy Horse (changed nickname) graffiti artists with 10 yers of experience in graffiti and many pieces in the Utrecht.

[56] Jasper Van Es, during the same discussion with the author.

[57] Jasper Van Es, during the same discussion with the author.

[58] PacPull, during the same discussion with the author.

[59] Crazy Horse, during the same discussion with the author.

[60] Fluffy Desk during the same discussion with the author.

[61] Philip Jonas, during the same discussion with the author.

[62] Fluffy Desk, during the same discussion with author.

[63] Jasper Van Es, during same discussion with the author.

[64] PacPull, during the same discussion with the author.

which for the people outside of this secretive group, seems ludicrous, preposterous and illegal. But for its members is a holy bible to which they are grateful, and they support. Whether their motives is the pleasure of the outlaw that emerges with illegality or the respect and the significance that comes with it in one's self-esteem. Whether it is just the adrenaline that comes with the illegality or an attempt for meaning in life or a perspective in which someone finds the reasons and the touchstone to oppose the dominant narratives of culture. "The streets" not as a designated area and not as a local infrastructure, but rather as an abstract conceptual notion is one of the most important theoretical element in a lifestyle and artistic practice that many people have chosen.

Elijah Anderson in his prominent book *The Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the moral Life of the Inner City* conducted an Ethnographic research on the deprived inner city neighborhoods of Philadelphia where he described how the code of the streets occurs in their society. When exampling the code he stated:

At the heart of this code is a set of prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, of behavior organized around desperate search for respect that governs social relations, especially violence, among so many residents, particularly young men and women. Possession of respect – and the credible threat of vengeance-is highly valued for shielding the ordinary person from the interpersonal violence of the street. (…)The code of the street emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin, resulting in a kind of "people's law», based on "street justice".[65]

In the next pages he explains that the factors responsible for the street culture and the code of the streets are the harsh reality of the inner city neighborhoods. By mentioning few such as the scarcity of jobs which offer a humane income, the inadequate public services infrastructure, the stigmatization of race, the severe outcomes of drug use and trafficking and the lack of hope for the future; Outcome of the ongoing isolation from mainstream society and its institutions[66].He concludes that the code of the street is a reality and an informal set of rules which reasons are social condition. The code emerges and is being reinforced in all aspects and places of the social life such as alleys, squares, playground where children begin to learn the norms of the code in their campaign for respect and therefore social survival[67].Because as he suggest the code appertains in the presentation of one's self. Concepts of manhood and respect are the two faces of the same coin interwoven to the extent that it is difficult to understand which one may have a slight advantage –as the more important- in this atypical value system. Respect on the street for Mr. Elijah Anderson is the corner stone of this code. It takes the form of an extremely valuable social

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[65] Elijah Anderson, "The Code of The Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City" (500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110: W. W. Norton & Company, 17 Sep 2000). 9.
[66] Ibid. 32.
[67] Ibid. 79.

capital which does not only define ones self-esteem but also it is its only expression and justification[68].He concluded:

What has formed as a result is a kind of institutionalized oppositional culture, a reaction to history of prejudice and discrimination that now finds its way into schools and other institutions; it makes meaningful participation in institutions dominated by those closely associated with the wider society problematic, if not impossible ,many. The most public manifestation of this alienation is the code of the street, a kind of adaptation to a lost sense of security of the local inner-city neighborhood and, by extension, a profound lack of faith in the police and judicial system.[69]

I assert that the most important points which were presented above about the code of the streets have similarities with some of the most important characteristic of the notion "the streets". I believe, and I will try to explain that the important aspect of the concept of "the streets" can be found in the code of the streets as it was defined by Elijah Anderson. It is a fact that the same social problems which occurred in the ghettos of Philadelphia occur(ed) in every deindustrialized megalopolis of the United States especially in the boroughs of the inner cities. The same conditions occurred in the collapsing New York of the seventies which was the birthplace of Hip Hop. The code of the streets mitigates itself when communities are being led in the verge of destruction and alienation. Thus it is fair to assume that these populations incorporated the code as value system because they were abandoned by the mainstream narratives and infrastructure. Constituting thus the code as an unwritten law and the streets as a "mythical conceptual space" with its mental maps. Yi Fu Tuan asserted that human beings regardless of our individuality and cultural background we construct mental maps which provide to us cues for our behavior[70].He extended his analysis by introducing the notion of mythical space as a "sophisticated product of the mind" which derives from the needs of a communal group. Furthermore he asserted that the (the ongoing) conceptualization gradually removes the spatial structures, constituting the mental maps self-evident as their being part of natural process which occurs in the mind[71].

I suggest that the dynamics, characteristic and rules of the code and especially its notion of respect as social capital and currency as long with the perceptive about an alternative life(style) against the establishment, were part of the reality from which Hip-Hop derived, and therefore part of its thematic and its ideology. I assert that the notion of "The Streets" as seems to have the characteristic of the mythical place was a product of that reality by being the concept which was created by the cognisance of the socially alienated and economically deprived communities. The notion of "the streets" appears as a reality, an abstract space omnipresent outside geographical

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[68] Ibid. 66.
[69] Ibid. 323.
[70] Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and place: The Perspective of Experience. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1977). 389.
[71] Ibid. 407.

designations. I assume that this abstract conceptual mapping of "the streets" and the code of the streets, both products of the same conceived and experienced reality were incorporated into the culture of Hip Hop. I want to propose that through Hip Hop's dissemination and transcendence these incorporated –into the culture of hip hop conceptual notions- were absorbed by young people –or not- who desired to adopt the culture of Hip Hop. Whoever has a competence or an experience with Hip Hop and its four elements (Dj, Rap, Graffiti, Breakdancing) he/she is familiar with the different manifestations of the concepts such as the respect as the ultimate goal. The responsibility for yourself and the sanctification of individuality, the anti-establishment/anti-authoritarian actions the disrespect about the judicial system and the police and "the streets" as the actual reality of life. All these beliefs or ideas are being expressed explicitly in the thematic of rap, and it's vulgar, frivolous and honest vocabulary. A handful of these "traits" can also be observed on the interviews above. The similarities between the utterances I had with the some of the elements of the code of the streets led me to the conclusion that although, the circumstances of the Dutch society cannot be compared with one of the ghettos in the USA. The traits of the code and abstract mapping of the streets exist incorporated into the culture of Hip Hop in particular for this case in graffiti. The graffiti artists of Utrecht do not resolve their disputes with extreme violence, nor their present or future lurks the same dangers as one of their coevals in the USA. But they value respect as the most important characteristic of their culture, and they desire from their practice to continue being illegal and part of "the streets". They chose an art practice and lifestyle with mutinous connotations.

Conclusion:

"Where there is power, there is resistance."

― *Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*

"Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space. Because space, which seems homogeneous, which appears as a whole in its objectivity, in its pure form, such as we determine it, is a social product."
― *Henri Lefebvre*

In conclusion, the notion of "the streets" appears to have different connotations according to the artist's background. Contrariwise to my initial assumptions before the beginning of the research. For the street artists not acquainted with graffiti and hip hop "the streets" seem to appear as the justification or manifestation of public or more specifically communal space. It appears to be "open", democratic and free to interpretation. Space where "bottom up" forces occur, where most of the people meet, express themselves and have a voice. Street art works are presented as the adornment of public space and sometimes the bond or the justification of the community's mentality. "The streets" also place where the notion of illegality concerning the artistic practice is being exposed to the bystander or spectator. Whether an artwork is sanctioned or unsanctioned its presence appears to be a spectacle, despite any consideration of its legality. I assert that the perceptive on the notion of the streets being a public space, where power, interpersonal and artistic relations occur. "The streets" appear as a place open to interpretations, creations of bonds and meanings, visualization of power relations and crucial aspect of our urban realities.

On the contrary, for the graffiti artists the notion of "the streets" appears as an abstract concept at the core of their culture but with different connotations. "The streets" seem not only to be the place where they operate their art, but also a notion closely related to anyone outside the mainstream narrative and society. It is not only "their battlefield" in which the contest with the mainstream authorities or other graffiti writers occurs. But also the core of their ideology and lifestyle, given the meaning of "the streets" being the place of "illegals", "outlaws", and "the marginalised" –not necessarily economically- from society. It is an omnipresent, outside of geographical designations, a refuge for the alienated or those who want to oppose the mainstream

institutions or narratives. Another perceptive, which accentuates some characteristics, beliefs or people which we usually surpass, suppress or avoid mentioning in our narratives of progress. Many young people chose these ideas and lifestyle as their own. The abstract conceptual notion of "the streets" with its different manifestations and interpretation exists infiltrated and incorporated into the philosophy of an art form and its practitioners they support it as one of the most valuable, fundamental and universal truths –if not certainties- in their life.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the final findings of the research, summarise the diversity of opinions, perceptions and conceptions about a notion that we encounter every day. Even if we do not contemplate on the different perspectives that it might "create", the feelings that it might "evoke" for some people and lastly the connection and resemblance that it might have with one's lifestyle or circumstances.The notion of "the streets" influences people with its different interpretations.Apart from the differences that were recorded through the interviews between these two interpretations, it is clear that a common denominator could be observed. Whether the interpretation was a place in which meanings are being generated/created, (public space) or a "mythical space" for all the pariahs. "The streets" are the manifestation all the forms of power relations/struggles in our societies. The role of street art and graffiti it was and is simply to reveal them to us. Lastly, I would like to assert that the aforementioned opinions of mine are not a product of a complete theorem, but rather a suggestion. For a complete theorem to be established more extensive research is essential. Firstly, to conceptualize a theory about the notion of "the streets" more data through interviews have to be acquired. Not exclusively in the city of Utrecht or the Netherlands but in other urban contexts, to observe if the notion and its characteristics occur –and if not in what format- in other cities and graffiti and street art communities. I believe that the academic community must research more the concept of "the streets" because not only it has the means and expertise to accomplish this research but also and most importantly as it is one of the central institution, which has the power to generate meaning. It could change the perspectives towards these art forms and delve into these lifestyles and their practitioners as intercessor to establish them as a voice into the mainstream and dominant art and social discourses. I firmly suggest that is the role of the academic community –and specifically the Humanities- to diverge from its stagnant, institutionalized position and indulge into the sociocultural domain.

Specifically for the city of Utrecht, I think it is essential for the local government in coalition with the University and the HKU, to research these two art practices and to formulate specific policies for their production and dissemination in the city. More sanctioned places for graffiti writers and subsidies for the production of street art throughout the city would have not only constituted the art forms more accessible to wider audience. But would have also reinforced and enriched the "image" of the city and the number of possible new practitioners. Since many young –and not only- people practice them, but also support them throughout the country. Lastly, as I explained before I am aware that for the validation of my suggestions about the concept of "the streets" and its relation to the two art forms an extensive research is

essential. My thesis is a proposal about a concept that I perceived through my years of experience and engagement with these art practices. I would argue that it is a starting point, which I hope will contribute into the existing discourses, create a discussion for the understanding of the two art forms and substantially our urban realities and their hidden meanings.

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-Christos Alexiou