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– Graffiti and the negotiations of interests and control at Open walls

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## **“Keep Fighting Malmö” – Graffiti and the negotiations of interests and control at Open walls.**

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### **Introduction**

In the evening of March 8th 2014 – the International Women's Day – a group of young men and women were attacked in the middle of Malmö after having had participated in a demonstration earlier that day. Four of them were severely beaten and stabbed by knives, and one of them was treated in intensive care for his injuries. His name was Showan Shattak, known to the local community for his commitment against racism and homophobia on the streets as well as on the football terraces. Shortly after the incident the police stated that the attackers had links to a Swedish neo-nazi group, which was also confirmed on the following day by the neo-nazi group itself.<sup>1</sup> The news of the attack spread and people gathered on the streets of Malmö on the 9th of March 2014 to express their support with those injured and the fight against racism. A week later a broad movement of organizations and actors including football supporters, autonomous groups, labour unions, political parties as well as people in general participated in the demonstration that consisted of 10000 people making it one of biggest demonstrations in Malmö's history.<sup>2</sup>

In direct relation to the demonstration, the most visible part of one the city's two open graffiti walls was painted with the message "Kämpa Showan" [Keep fighting Showan] in bold white straight letters and light blue background – the colors of the local football team Malmö FF. The graffiti-piece was updated a couple of months later, on Showan's request, to a piece that stated "Kämpa Malmö" [Keep fighting Malmö].<sup>3</sup> The colors were the same, except that a rainbow colored banner was added through the letters as well as the anti-fascist slogan "No Pasaran". The latter piece had slightly more elaborate letter style, and the color scheme was reversed – with light blue letters and white background.

The piece quickly became an unofficial landmark that brought different groups of interests together. People were photographed in front of it and the local neighborhood restored the piece when tags and slogans appeared on it. It became a visual representation of the city's fight for a tolerant and open Malmö as opposed to racism, and calls were even made to turn it into a monument and officially protect it from damage. Altogether the two versions of the piece lasted for more than a year on a wall that otherwise is repainted by graffiti writers at least once a week.



Figure 1: *Kämpa Malmö*, photographed March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a year after the near fatal attack. Photo Jacob Kimvall

In this chapter we want to take the example of the *Kämpa Showan/Malmö*-pieces to define and discuss the notion of open graffiti walls (hereafter referred to as open walls) in a Scandinavian context. In so doing we also want to point to a number of important aspects of open walls in relation to urban studies as well as the research on graffiti and street art: What role does an open wall play in the negotiation of public place? What interests does it represent and what are the consequences for different groups? How does open walls differ from other types of (legal) graffiti, and other types of visual artistic expressions in the public spaces?

We will draw from ethnographic work conducted on graffiti writers in Malmö – gathered by Erik Hannerz as part of a larger investigation of how graffiti writers perceive and make use of urban space – so as to clarify how the openness of the open wall is first and foremost negotiated and realized through subcultural activity and place making. The endurance of the *Kämpa Malmö*-piece and its status as an iconic representation for a broader variety of groups is here used as a deviant case so as elucidate the subcultural boundary work through which Open walls are defined, used and controlled. We will also use mass-mediated and archived material regarding the debate on (legal) graffiti in Sweden from the late 1960s and onwards, gathered by Jacob Kimvall in his PhD-project, as well as a more recent visual study of the open wall in Tantolunden in Stockholm (opened as late as September 2016), as well as other legal graffiti spaces in Sweden and elsewhere. This combination of analyzing contemporary ethnographic material in relation to discursive statements from the 1960s and onwards enables us to frame the phenomena of contemporary legal graffiti in a diachronic historical perspective.

### **Defining the legal within graffiti**

As Ronald Kramer has pointed to, there is a general problem in the previous research on graffiti in its focus on the illegal and resistant aspects of it, leading to that the legal is often assigned a less authentic role within graffiti research.<sup>4</sup> We want to add to this critique by pointing to the imprecise categorization of the legal within graffiti research. The concept ‘legal graffiti’ has become a general category often used to describe everything from canvases and gallery work,<sup>5</sup> to commissioned and permissioned walls,<sup>6</sup> as well as walls designated for graffiti by the local government,<sup>7</sup> and hall of fames.<sup>8</sup> This is unfortunate as it risks downplaying the differences between these activities and spaces, with the result of strengthening a binary distinction between graffiti as either illegal or legal or as crime vs art. Commissioned and permissioned walls describe a temporary and rather exclusive legal aspect of graffiti where access and permission is tied to a specific writer rather than the wall itself. Hall of fames, in turn, are used to describe a variety of walls in graffiti, in a German context it is used to describe legal walls on which high-quality murals are produced, or as legally sprayed graffiti in general.<sup>9</sup> In an Anglo-American context it is used – sometimes with the term “yard” – to describe graffiti produced outside of formal legal boundaries, yet perceived as having either local acceptance outside of the subcultural graffiti context or as occurring at abandoned places and thus without interference of the police.<sup>10</sup> To complicate things further Hall of fames are also used to describe famous meeting points for graffiti, such as the graffiti Hall of Fame in New York.<sup>11</sup>

Instead we want to stress a broader definition of legal graffiti situated in the public realm. Based on the combination of our ethnographic and archival findings as well as in relation to academic, popular and subcultural literature on legal graffiti we would like to conceptualize three different (typological) categories of contemporary legal graffiti; *the exposition*, *the stage* and *the open wall*. The point of which is to define the latter through the differences against the former two. Differences between these categories are thus based on differences in conventional usage and function rather than juridical status – as in commissioned or permissioned walls – or local subcultural terminology – as in the widely used term ‘hall of fame’, that depending on geographic location seem to denote an array of different types of places. These different aspects of the legal within graffiti are obvious when comparing to how walls are differentiated according to their status as inclusive/exclusive, permanence/interchangeability and regulation/access.

First we have what we would like to call *the exposition*, which is a place with a high degree of regulation and a certain degree of permanence, where the most famous example would be Graffiti Hall of Fame in New York.<sup>12</sup> This type of place are usually controlled by a curator or a curatorial team of organizers who invite artists to paint, and who often acts to secure and preserve the paintings until the exposition is repainted, which is often done at annual public events. The slogan “Strictly Kings and Better” have been used in relation to Graffiti Hall of Fame in New York which points at common denominator: the access to paint within *the exposition* are usually limited to small number of the most established, subculturally respected and/or well known graffiti writers. The implicit, or at times explicit, objective of *the exposition* thus seems to be to display graffiti-pieces of highest possible artistic quality and cultural value. The legal aspect is here limited in its exclusivity of access based on artistic skill, talent and prestige.

Secondly we have what we call *the stage* – a place that functions with some degree of regulation and relative high interchangeability. As in the previous case there are often a team or an organization that have a certain control and organizes the painting on the wall. The

world-renowned, now demolished, 5 Pointz in Queens, New York is a primary example of this type of graffiti-project. 5 Pointz was probably also one of the largest of its kind, and offered a wide range of walls, on where a particular piece usually seems to have lasted a few months. 5 Pointz evolved out of the Project Phun Phactory, instigated already in the early 1990s and then using the slogan "A Safe Haven for Graffiti Artists".<sup>13</sup> A common objective of the stage thus seems to be to offer a place for graffiti writers to work under legal circumstances, and the access to use the walls for painting reaches far wider groups of graffiti writers than in the case of the exposition, and also sometimes beyond these subcultural contexts. The stage is however not accessible for each and anyone, and the user usually has to pass some kind of quality control regarding craftsmanship and artistry.<sup>14</sup> The stage is thus open for those who pass the organizers ideas of reasonable quality, and the applicant's ability to produce an artistic work roughly corresponding with the concept 'threshold of originality' in copyright law.

Both the stage and the exposition refer to categories of legal graffiti that are under exclusive control, they are heavily regulated, and permanence is controlled by either a curator or an organization. In direct contrast to this, *the open wall* has no formal regulation and high to extremely high interchangeability. They are, at least formally, open to anyone to paint on, and anyone regardless of merit, skill or objective may use the wall to express oneself, artistically, politically or otherwise. More so, they are open in the sense of access, there is no need of invitation or permission rather it is there to be used at any time by anyone. Neither is there a regulation of motive, there is no curator meaning that inclusivity also includes the motif. Consequently the open wall becomes the equivalent of a large public etch-a-sketch where users rather indifferently paint over each other, in some cases as with the open walls in Stockholm, the entire wall is repainted several times during a single day.<sup>15</sup> Of course, writers still negotiate whom to go over and why, adhering to subcultural norms regarding hierarchies, how long the piece have been there, trying to fill the wall so as to erase any traces of the piece behind, etcetera, yet the interchangeable logic of the wall nevertheless makes it possible to go over anyone without negative sanctions. This spatial relinquish of the sanctity of the individual writer, that characterize other forms of graffiti, including the illegal, is not unique to legal walls. There are similarities to how writers' negotiate out-of-site walls where risks are spatially excluded at the cost of a public and direct visibility, and the lack of available space results in writers going over each other. The interesting aspect here, however, refers to an officially granted and public negotiation of place. Consequently, its roots need to be traced outside of a subcultural logic.

### **Open walls**

The category of open walls refers to a specific form of place that seems to be somewhat unique to Scandinavia. They constitute an open arena for free speech and creative visual acts that can be traced back to a social-democratic ideal of a participatory and democratic public place, where there should be room for organizations and individual citizens to freely express themselves. Hence, the existence of open walls predates the existence of contemporary subcultural graffiti in Sweden. In 1968 an open wall called the "scribble board" (in Swedish "klotterplanket") was placed at a square in the middle of Stockholm so as to give room for voices that could otherwise only be made heard through demonstrations, posters and graffiti. The wall, that was whitewashed every morning by a civil servant, was described in Swedish media at the time as an "uncensored mass medium".<sup>16</sup>

The historic press material of the opening of this wall is crucial in understanding the key feature of open the category of open walls as a kind of official and public institution, and at

the same time open and unregulated. Especially so, the importance of consecration of the open wall through inauguration. This is a performative act that *opens* the wall, and transforms it to a public canvas. David Freedberg has in his book *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (1989) argued for the importance of studying acts of inauguration and consecration as means of institutionalization in order to frame and delimit the meaning and function of an image – in short “making images work”.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the open wall we would build on this to point out that such acts also may be a way to instigate a particular cultural practice or visual culture.

The full name of the wall was “Scribble Board for One Owns Ideas and with One Owns Responsibility” (Klotterplank för egna idéer på eget ansvar) and it was constructed in conjunction with a speaker’s corner. The combination of the full name stressing ideas (rather than for example visuality or form) and individual responsibility combined with the speaker’s corner underlines the democratic potential of the wall. The opening of the scribble board raised considerable attention in mass media, and several of the largest Swedish newspapers covered the event extensively, and could from the viewpoint of consecration pointed out by Freedberg be understood as a part of the inauguration.

Saturday March 16, 1968, the tabloid *Expressen* declares that “Today we may start scribbling!”<sup>18</sup> The news paper survey the upcoming inauguration, and frames it as “today’s big event” in Stockholm, and discusses the wall in the tradition of (Swedish) freedom of speech, and the stated objective is “to give the ‘odd’ groups a chance to make their opinion heard”.<sup>19</sup> The inauguration-program is extensive and includes: two of the city’s vice mayors, one representative of a local cultural heritage organisation, two museum directors, a journalist, representing Swedish Publicists’ Association, several famous contemporary artists and actors, and the chief city gardener.<sup>20</sup>

To put it short, this is a massive inauguration and consecration of what frankly, and in this context perhaps a little disrespectfully, could be described as a 12 square meter empty white billboard and a balcony for free public messages. Indirectly the voluminous inauguration insists that writing graffiti on walls or make announcements in the public realm are something strange – and perhaps illegal – except in this particular space. This indirect structuring effect of the scribble board, separating between legal/legitimate and illegal/illegitimate has also been pointed out by Jean Baudrillard, discussing the scribble board: “we have met with the Stockholm ‘protest wall’ where one is at liberty to protest on a certain surface, but where it is forbidden to put graffiti on neighbouring surfaces”.<sup>21</sup>

The scribble board and the adjacent speaker’s corner were in use until 1971, when they were closed as the building next to them was turned into a temporary parliament.<sup>22</sup> Still, similar discussions of free speech were raised for example in the discussion concerning the scribbling that appeared opposite Siri Derkert’s commissioned engravings at Östermalmstorg’s subway station in Stockholm in the late 1960s. Here both media and transit authorities described the scribbling a fun pastime as well as a democratic medium.<sup>23</sup> Correspondingly, a decade later the city of Malmö approved a suggestion by an artist assigned to decorate a new parking garage to make two of the four walls flat and painted white so as to invite the public to make use of the place for scribbling, murals and slogans.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2: Klotterplanket, Sergels Torg, 1968. Foto: Studio Gullers, retrieved from Nordiska Museet/Digitalt Museum.  
<https://digitaltmuseum.se/021016862162/en-man-skriver-pa-klotterplanket-vid-sergels-torg-en-kvinna-laser-vad-som/media?slide=0>

Since then, with the advent of subcultural graffiti, also referred to as hip hop-graffiti<sup>25</sup> or TTP-graffiti,<sup>26</sup> in Sweden in the mid 1980s, the idea of the open walls have been expanded to include crime prevention in the sense of offering a legal alternative to those doing graffiti in the streets.<sup>27</sup> Open walls have also been linked to the opposite, as in generating crime. With the consequence that the democratic aspects of open walls are at times suppressed due to a fear that these walls encourage illegal graffiti.<sup>28</sup> During the late 2000s the establishment of open walls and similar legal graffiti spots has also included the idea of graffiti and street art as an important factor in attracting a creative class to a particular area.<sup>29</sup> The policy behind the establishment of the particular open wall in Malmö that is the main focus of the remainder of this chapter covers all three of these aspects. Emma Paulsson describes how the decision to choose this wall – a 75 meter long fence that borders the Folkets Park (The People’s Park or Folkpark)<sup>30</sup> – involved a strong democratic strategy in the sense of enabling local citizens to take part in shaping public space, but also a preventive strategy in the sense of introducing a legal alternative that would reduce cleaning costs as well.<sup>31</sup> Both of these aspects were further linked in policy documents and by politicians to a larger city branding-strategy. It was to be seen as a symbol of Malmö being more alternative and open than Stockholm that at the time marked as by a strict zero tolerance. This new wall would not only provide a space for the citizens to raise their voice and a safe space for street artists and writers it was also described that it added excitement to the area, with its clubs and restaurants.<sup>32</sup>

This definition of open walls as municipality run free spaces for different kinds of expression do seem unique to the Scandinavian context. Cameron McAuliffe in discussing what he calls

“local-government-sanctioned legal walls”<sup>33</sup> describes a somewhat similar phenomenon as he refers to these as “open sites” that are utilized by experienced and inexperienced, young and old writers, as well as by taggers, writers and street artists.<sup>34</sup> There seem to be a difference however in the intended audience for these walls. McAuliffe describes these as legal graffiti walls whereas open walls in Scandinavia are often designed and designated for all kinds of practice, this includes graffiti – as in the preventive aspect – but is far from exclusive to it. It is through the official designation of offering a place for free expressions that the scribbling board of 1960s’ Stockholm is extended to the 2000s’ Folkpark-wall in Malmö. Their articulated function in policy documents and in statements is first and foremost inclusive and broad – as democratic efforts to increase freedom of expression, as well as an active countermove to complaints about commercialisations of public space<sup>35</sup> – rather than being restricted to graffiti. Open walls in this sense are political and ideological constructs as much as they are artistic arenas or spaces for cultural processes. They are open to be used by anyone, be it school children, bachelor/hen parties, corporations and political organizations, artists or someone just wanting to write their name or what is on their mind. This relation between the city, its citizens and the intended users is obvious in how the official actors rarely intervene in how these places are used. Whereas the scribbling board was whitewashed every night to provide new fresh space, later open walls in Scandinavia are often self-regulated. The official documents concerning the establishment of the Folkpark-wall in Malmö for example states that the city expects the local community to take care of any violations, such as racist slogans or sexist comments.<sup>36</sup>

Still, the lack of formal regulation that in part defines open walls at the same time work to limit its inclusive character. Even though our ethnographic data on different open walls in Sweden point to a variety of actors, differing in age, gender, interests and backgrounds, subcultural graffiti dominates its content. Lacking an official authority, graffiti writers thus symbolically asserts a spatial control: by repeatedly excluding non-graffiti from the wall.<sup>37</sup> Even though the wall is physically open in the sense that anyone can access it, graffiti writers intentionally or unintentionally symbolically limit the access to it, through a repeated reinstitution of the wall as a graffiti wall. The subcultural use of the wall could thus be said limits the broader democratic aspects of the wall. This is where the case of Kämpa Showan and Kämpa Malmö become interesting.

### **Keep Fighting Malmö!**

The Folkpark-wall where the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-pieces were made stretches an area of 75 meters. The wall was inaugurated August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 by a deputy director of Traffic Department (Gatukontoret), who held a short speech that pointed out that Malmö is a city that listens to its citizens, and puts it in contrast to those cities that don’t have open walls. He ends his speech by writing the words ‘Malmö äger’ [roughly ‘Malmö rules’] with white spray paint on the wall.<sup>38</sup> On one level, this inauguration thus links the wall to the ideas of the open wall as a democratic public place, and not as a place restricted to graffiti writers or street artists. But it also links it to a city-branding context – through the contrasting of Malmö to other cities, implicitly less democratic and less open. The latter reminds us of the role of graffiti and street art in attracting a creative class mentioned above.<sup>39</sup> The creative appeal is also further underlined in the YouTube-video, released by the Folkpark, documenting the event – visualised as leisure-time, creativity and craftsmanship. On another, more general level, the inauguration frames the open wall as a public institution, unregulated and open for anyone.

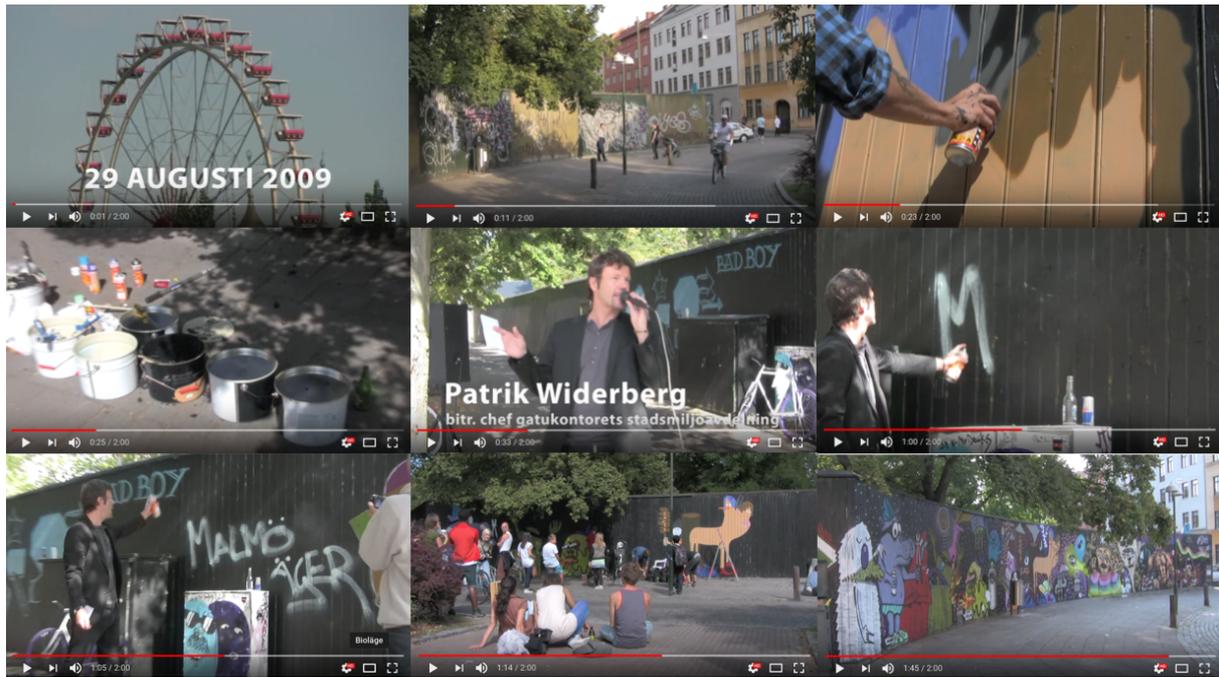


Figure 3: Stills from a video documenting the inauguration of the Open Wall at the Folkpark in Malmö. The video situates the viewer in Malmö at August 29<sup>th</sup> 2009, and starts by showing the soon to be open(ed) wall as already full of graffiti, but not as colourful as in the end of the video. The video underlines Malmö as an open and democratic municipality, as well as a creative appeal – visualised as leisure-time (people hanging out watching the artists painting), craftsmanship (displaying an array of artistic tools) and artistry (in the close-ups of acts of painting as well as panoramic views of the resulting artworks).

While approximately two thirds of the wall are located next to a bike and walking path in the busy restaurant and club district of Malmö, the last third of the wall has a concave shape and partly encircles a roundabout. This part of the wall is not only the most visible but also the easiest to document as there are no trees in front of it and photos can be taken from a distance so as to include the entire wall. While the other sections of the wall are repainted if not daily then at least every three days, this part of the wall is often used for larger productions where writers collaborate and pieces that cover the entire wall may remain, in some cases, for up to a month. It has also been used to commemorate deceased writers. As such, the initial piece “Kämpa Showan” was not an anomaly: it covered the entire wall with rounded white straight letters with hearts forming the interior of the letter O, a black outline and a light blue background. Besides the light blue colour the words “MFF Family” together with smaller hearts were written in between the piece’s two words strengthening the link to the local football team MFF. On the Monday, two days after the attack, the football team, gathered in front of the piece, making an official statement of support to Showan and the other victims of the violence. The event was documented and the image and the statement was published on MFF:s website. The photo of the team, who also includes several players from the Swedish national soccer team, in front of the piece was also later republished in various news channels. This event could be seen as a new inauguration, but this time as an indefinite but obvious ‘closing’ of the open wall.

AKTUELLT BILJETTER A-LAGET UNGDOM DITT MFF FÖRETAG EVENT SAMHÄLLE SHOP KONTAKT 

**Aktuellt**

**NYHETER**

Nyheter  
Kommande matcher  
Kalender

**MEDIA**

MFFtv  
Nyhetsarkiv  
2014  
2013  
2012  
2011  
2010  
2009  
2008  
2007  
2006  
2005  
2004  
2003  
2002  
2001

Prenumerera på  
vårt nyhetsbrev

## Kämpa Showan

2014-03-10 13:43:00



I lördags kväll fördes MFF-supportern Showan till sjukhus med livshotande skador. Malmö FF lider med Showan och övriga drabbade och tar starkt avstånd från våldet i samhället. Bilden är en manifestation av MFF:s ställningstagande mot våld och en innerlig önskan om att Showan ska återhämta sig.

Kämpa Showan!

In June when Showan was released from the hospital the piece was updated and transformed

Figure 4: Facsimile from MFF:s website. Kämpa Showan (Keep Fighting Showan), portrait of MFF soccer team in front of the Kämpa Showan-piece at the Folkpark, published at the News Section on MFF:s Website March 10, 2014. The photo was republished in social media and news papers such as **Aftonbladet the same day.**

into a piece that stated "Kämpa Malmö" [Keep Fighting Malmö]. The piece was still in the colors of the local football team but was now draped by a rainbow flag running through all the letters and forming a rainbow heart in the midst of the last letter. The anti-fascist slogan "no pasaran" was also written next to last letter. There was thus a change from the particular to the general as the local patriotism associated with football supporters was altered to a struggle against racism that the entire city was facing. Still, in comparison to other work on this particular wall, both the original and the updated version involved simplified letters and were done mostly using house paint. From a subcultural graffiti-perspective the usage of so called straight letters indicates an ambition to reach beyond the immediate context of graffiti writers and aficionados.<sup>40</sup> There are also textual, visual and geographical links between the graffiti piece and the culture of the MFF-football supporters, as Kämpa Malmö also had a history of a slogan at the football terraces, and messages in support of Showan Shatack and against nazi-violence became present at the football matches.<sup>41</sup>

Altogether the versions of the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece remained in place for 14 months, until it was, allegedly unintendedly, painted over in late May 2015, as part of an advertisement campaign for a musical festival in Copenhagen, Denmark.<sup>42</sup> The new piece was immediately crossed over by activists and passers-by while the part that was still in place was quickly painted over by a graffiti piece the same day.<sup>43</sup> Calls were made to re-establish the piece but the local graffiti writers were not inclined to do so and Showan himself tweeted that the wall was now "reopened" so as to capture new interests and messages of the city. As the wall was quickly filled up with graffiti – it was described in the media as the end of an era.<sup>44</sup> Considering Showan's central role in the events described above, we would argue that his tweet should best be understood as yet a third inauguration, or perhaps better a re-

inauguration, of the wall as an open wall, and thus as a transformation from a possible monument to a site for visual messages.

Between March, 2014 and until the reopening of the wall by the seemingly accidental overpainting in May, 2015 – the two different pieces seems to have gained status as a potential monument. The latter type of object has been defined by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl as “a work of man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies (or a complex accumulation thereof) alive and present in the consciousness of future generations”.<sup>45</sup> Defined as a monument it comes into conflict with the wall's function as an open wall for graffiti art. In this context it is also important to underline that there in contemporary culture is a certain conceptual discrepancy between an artwork and a monument. As Dan Karlholm has pointed out the artwork is primarily understood as a free expression by an individual artist and as such characterized by a hermeneutic openness, while the monument has a certain mission: “to serve the history and the so-called collective memory. [...] The monument-artist always earns a collective commissioner; the people or a larger public”.<sup>46</sup>

In many ways, the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece is an example of how graffiti can add to public space and give a voice of local interests. The piece in itself worked to represent the fuse the interests of different groups together including the local neighbourhood, football supporters, political groups, and city officials.<sup>47</sup> More so, both versions of the piece were accomplished through a relation between graffiti writers and other groups, as when the second version was carried out:

When Showan woke from his coma, he asked a friend of mine if he could replace his name on the wall with “Malmö”. Showan did not want to become a hero, he did not think of himself as one, he wanted to point to the others injured, as well as to the fight against racism. It was the city that was fighting. And so, my friend asked me to help out, as the wall was big, and we replaced the first piece with Kämpa Malmö, and then it just stayed on [...] I mean as a writer it is always fun when your work stays on, that people can see it, and in this case I mean the message was so important, and we had signed it, so I had no problem with it staying on.<sup>48</sup>

From this perspective, the high status of the piece fused with the interests of the graffiti writers in question, they had signed the piece with their tags and were only happy that it remained in place. However, even if the piece was made by two graffiti writers and its message were largely appreciated by writers, the persistence of the piece came to threaten the subcultural control of the wall. Accordingly, at the same time as the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece gained the status of an venerated representation of the city's tolerance and plurality, graffiti writers in Malmö started complaining that the piece had closed down the best part of the open wall. For the graffiti writers, the piece itself was thus becoming a problem as it risked shifting the control of the wall from the writers to the local neighbourhood:

I mean this is not how it is supposed to be, this is a graffiti wall, and there aren't that much available space. I mean I like the message, but it is for the city, and there are so many other spots where that could be, just put it somewhere else, this wall is supposed to be used by writers.<sup>49</sup>

The discrepancy between the designated official purpose and use of the wall and graffiti writers' attempts to restrict access to it is here obvious. The democratic and inclusive aspect is here declined on the basis of arguing that the city has plenty of other spots where that could be achieved. Given the attention within the previous research on subcultures resisting the

mainstream, what is interesting here is that the encompassing public is denounced not for fighting graffiti, but for supporting a particular piece to the point that it infringes on the subcultural interests of control.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, for more than an entire year local writers accepted being shut out from this part of the wall, not in respect of the graffiti writers responsible for the piece, which otherwise is the main argument for not going over someone else, but because they feared repercussions from the general public. Among the writers one of the authors followed during this time there were talks even in the first few weeks of going over the piece, yet no one wanted to be responsible for doing so. The piece itself was thus not considered the problem, after all it was done by two writers who were well aware of the previous constant repainting of the wall, and Showan himself had tweeted that he had since long “authorized” painting over it, instead it was the reverence of the piece by the general public that closed the wall. Far from championing an outsider and rebel position often associated with graffiti<sup>51</sup> the negotiation among writers of the status of the wall as closed was marked by an unwillingness of being named and blamed for going over it:

I don't get it, why doesn't someone just dare to go over it, but then again, I mean is it worth taking all the shit? I'm not gonna do it, some fucking ecological latte-mom just gonna start screaming at me, but I'd be happy if someone did, I like that wall.<sup>52</sup>

The piece thus disrupted the subcultural order of the wall in a number of ways. Not just in terms of the convergence of the message and the local community, but also to the local authorities and other groups. For the local authorities the piece fused well with articulated purpose of the wall as adding to Malmö's image as a tolerant and creative city as well as the general idea of an open wall as an arena for free speech and participatory democracy. There was also an investment of meaning in the piece by other subcultural groups; the elements of the piece such as the colours white and blue and the phrasing “Keep Fighting Malmö” resonated with the football supporters, and the “No Pasaran” and rainbow-parts fused with the autonomous left. Going over the piece would then in some part involve taking on groups that are overlapping the graffiti scene in Malmö. More so, the public character of the wall, which typically gave it much of its appeal for writers, became a potential problem as it was hard to go over the piece without being spotted by someone while doing so. Going over it would thus mean having to answer for it, and most likely doing so in public. Writers complained that going over it meant the risk of being outed on social media by those who had invested in the piece, and therefore did not want to be responsible for doing so. These different convergences between the piece and the general public, as well as with the interest of other groups, worked to effectively close off the wall from the writers. The openness of the wall is exactly what enabled it to be closed. And as a consequence the graffiti writers had lost control over the wall as a subcultural place.

Similarly, writers curiously watched how the piece was restored again and again by non-writers. Usually, a piece that has been up for a while is eventually crossed out by passers-by finding a discarded spray can and using it to write a message or their name over it. Such, more spontaneous, forms of graffiti are often used by writers to legitimize going over a piece that has stayed on for quite some time. It enables them to point to that it was already crossed over. However, when such tags appeared on the Kämpa Malmö piece it was painted over by non-writers who were continuously restoring the wall, as is here noted by one of the originators of the piece:

I was surprised to see that swastikas and insults as well as tags that were written onto the piece were actually painted over by the local community, by people living nearby. I went there once, I think, just to improve the background and the letters with the right colour as they had used the

wrong shades of white and blue to fix it. Funny thing is that they probably thought of our tags as added as well, as these were erased. It was if the piece took on a life of its own.<sup>53</sup>

The local community thus made the piece theirs, restoring it and protecting it and even preparing a demand to the municipality to protect the wall as in making it illegal to go over it. This could have been a possible step to actually turn Kämpa Malmö from a possible, to a de facto, monument, and thus possibly closing the wall for good. In this process ownership of the wall was literally transferred from the graffiti writers and to the public – as the signatures of those responsible were removed as they interfered with the public perception of the piece – as well as symbolically – through the maintenance and protection of the piece.

Given local writers' articulated frustration of losing control over the wall while at the same time fearing repercussions from the local community if they dared to reclaim control, the piece's eventual demise was ideal from a subcultural perspective. On an early morning in late May 2015, two writers arrived to the wall and started quickly covering two thirds of the piece with a rather simply executed advertisement for a Danish music festival. When news broke through social media that the piece-almost-gone-monument was desecrated, non-writers gathered and quickly destroyed the advertisement obliterating it with house paint and adding offensive insults and threats against the organizers of the music festival.<sup>54</sup> The organizers in turn became an ideal scapegoat in direct juxtaposition to the wall and its message: They had replaced a message of tolerance and plurality with an advertisement, trying to cash in on subcultural aesthetics. And they had done so by claiming one of the few alternatives within an increasingly privatized public space where advertisements are abounding. The insults and anger reached the point that the music festival publicly denounced having ordered the piece, nor having known about it in advance.<sup>55</sup> At the same time that local groups were discussing how to restore the wall, writers had begun covering up the remaining parts of the wall "as it was already crossed over" as well as painting over the insults and the festival piece "because that was not ok".<sup>56</sup> Similarly, whereas proponents of the wall decried its desecration in media and on social media, writers cheered as the wall was finally opened up. One of the authors received text messages from five different writers that same day with the same message, that the wall was finally reopened. That the open wall was now liberated, a status soon also confirmed by Showan's tweet. Subcultural order was thus perceived as restored.

While this might seem as an interesting coincidence and ending that adds to how subcultural groups negotiate space it is even more interesting how this was played out subculturally. The two writers who were responsible for going over the piece were quickly forgotten. They had quickly left the wall when having finished the wall, and news media kept them out of the story. Rumours spread that they were two Danish writers who had had no idea of the importance of the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece. To some writers they became victims of those ordering the piece. Regardless of which they were quickly exempted from responsibility and their identities remained unknown, even to large part of the graffiti subculture.

The ethnographic data surrounding this event however points to another story. First of all, the two writers responsible for the piece were two well-established local writers who were well aware of both the almost sacred status of the piece and the subcultural importance of the wall. Those responsible for the original Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece tell for example how they were informed the day before that the piece would be painted over, albeit claiming they were not informed of the content. Other writers point to that they had finally had enough and that the appointment by the organizers of the festival to paint an advertisement piece was perfect. The same stone thus killed two flies, the wall was reopened and the responsible writers were

exempted from responsibility as they were paid to do so. That they could have easily chosen another part of the wall, or another open wall was not discussed. As one of the writers put it "it was brilliantly played".<sup>57</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

While to some this might seem like a tragic end of a monument made to represent tolerance and plurality, this particular case captures crucial aspects of the performative aspects of public space and control. The category of open walls, introduced here, describes how traditional social democratic appeals for free speech and participatory democracy are fused with neoliberal interests of crime prevention and city branding, and negotiated to be primarily used subculturally – by graffiti writers. More so the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece itself and the whole process surrounding it – from piece to possible monument to desecrated and removed – points to the multiple boundary work concerning different interests within urban space. This process points to how the trifold purpose of the open wall discussed here – as a participatory democratic space, as a legal and preventive alternative, and as part of creating an image of the creative and innovative neighbourhood – temporarily converged but with the consequence that the group in control of the wall felt excluded and fought to regain that control. Even though the graffiti writers had actively taken part in establishing the Kämpa Showan/Malmö-piece, its status as a possible monument not only altered the meaning of the piece but of the entire wall, or even the space. Part of understanding this struggle for subcultural control is to understand different aspects and definitions of legal graffiti. In this chapter we have argued for a recategorization of the legal within graffiti and that legal walls within graffiti are negotiated on the basis of different levels of perceived control over access and participation. Using this particular case we have demonstrated how boundaries to the defined outside are drawn symbolically, as the public character of the wall excludes the establishment of physical boundaries. In so doing we have argued against the simplified view within previous research on graffiti as inherently illegal and resistant. Rather this case points to how writers pursue, represent, negotiate, and even exploit interests and meanings of different groups. The concept of open walls has therefore to be placed alongside both graffiti in the street and on trains, as well as alongside other forms of legal graffiti such as commissioned and permissioned walls. It also calls upon the necessity of framing the legal and illegal in subcultural graffiti, in relation to different social, geographical and political contexts.

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Erik Hannerz is senior lecturer in Sociology at Lund University. Erik received his Ph.D. at Uppsala University in 2014. His thesis on the refinement of subcultural theory, using punk in Sweden and Indonesia as the main cases, was published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2015. He is currently working on a four-year project funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond on how graffiti writers in Sweden perceive and make use of urban space. He is, since 2013, Faculty Fellow at the Center for Cultural Sociology, Yale University.

Jacob Kimvall is an art historian and art critic, working at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University. His PhD-thesis *The G-Word: virtuosity and violation, negotiating and transforming graffiti* (Dokument Press, 2014) examines the historiography of contemporary graffiti and suggests that this often subculturally framed phenomena should be

understood as jointly produced by subcultural and institutional agents. A recent project that have been used in the current text is #tantoväggen, where he during three month, on a daily basis, followed and documented the open wall in Tantolunden, Stockholm, on site and in social media.

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<sup>1</sup> Josefin Waldenström & Tilda Wennerstål, “#Kämpamalmö: Mobilisering, reaktivitet, gemenskap”, *Förtjänstfulla examensarbeten i MKV 2015:1*, Media and Communication Studies, Lund University, Lund 2015

<sup>2</sup> Anders Malmström, Yvonne Johansson, and Marcus Svensson, ”Polisen: Nazister bakom nattens attack på Möllevången.” *Sydsvenskan*, [accessed 2014-12-01] (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Rasmussen, *Ingen jävla hjälte*, Kira förlag, Malmö 2016

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Kramer, *The Rise of Legal Graffiti Writing in New York and Beyond*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2017

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality*, Northeastern University Press, Boston 1996 and MacDonald, Nancy, *The graffiti subculture: Youth, masculinity and identity in London and New York*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2001

<sup>6</sup> Kramer, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Cameron McAuliffe, ”Legal Walls and Professional Paths: The Mobilities of Graffiti Writers in Sydney”, in *Urban Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2013), pp. 518–537

<sup>8</sup> MacDonald, 2001, and Cecile Høigård, *Gategallerier*, Pax Forlag, Oslo 2002

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Kimvall, *The G-Word: Virtuosity and Violation, Negotiating and Transforming Graffiti*, Dokument Press, Årsta 2014

<sup>10</sup> MacDonald, 2001, Høigård 2002, Faye Docuyan, “Governing Graffiti in Contested Urban Spaces”, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, No. 23 (2000), pp 103-121, Malcolm Jacobson & Tobias Barenthin Lindblad (red.), *Overground: 9 nordiska graffitimålare : 9 Scandinavian graffiti writers*, Dokument, Stockholm 2003, Mark Halsey & Ben Pederick, “The game of fame: Mural, graffiti, erasure”, in *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, no. 1-2, (2010), pp. 82–98, and Jeff Ferrell & Robert D. Weide, “Spot theory”, in *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, no. 1-2, (2010), pp. 48-62

<sup>11</sup> Staffan Jacobson, *Den Spraymålade Bilden: Graffiti som bildform, konströrelse och läroprocess*, Aerosol Art Archives, Lund 1996

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob Kimvall, ”Phun Phactory”, in *Edge*, no. 4 (1999)

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Jacobson and Jacob Kimvall, ”New York – Graffiti Everywhere. Except in the Subway”, *Underground Productions*, No. 19 (2001)

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Kimvall (unpublished). On a near daily documentation (an average of slightly less than 6 days a week) of the open wall in Tantolunden during six weeks from March 28 to May 7 (except 5/4, 7/4 12-15/4, 21/4, 29-30/4) shows a wall in constant flux, often several times a day. Less than a handful pieces remained more than 48 hours, none of those covered the whole wall, and none remained a whole week.

<sup>16</sup> Jacobson, 1996, p. 178

<sup>17</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989, p. 82-83 & 98

<sup>18</sup> Mattsson, Lasse, “Idag får vi börja klottra!”, in *Expressen*, 1968-03-16, (1968)

<sup>19</sup> Mattsson, 1968

<sup>20</sup> Mattsson, 1968

<sup>21</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Sage Publications, London 1993, p. 80

<sup>22</sup> Tobias Barenthin Lindblad, ”Världens första klotterplank”, *Hjärnstorm*, No. 123-124 (2015)

<sup>23</sup> Jacobson, 1996, p. 178

<sup>24</sup> Emma Paulsson, *Göra plats: Graffiti, kommunal förvaltning och plats som relationell effect*, University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp 2016, p. 114

<sup>25</sup> Ferrell, 1996

<sup>26</sup> Jacobson, 1996

<sup>27</sup> Mark Halsey & Alison Young, “The Meanings of Graffiti and Municipal Administration”, in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 35:2 (2002), pp. 165-186, Mika Helin, “Legal graffiti in Helsinki”, in *Helsinki Quarterly*, no. 3 (2013), pp. 64-76, Björn Jonsson, *Graffitins spänningsfält: En studie av graffitikultur och interventioner på en lokal arena*, Institutionen för socialt arbete, Göteborgs universitet, Göteborg, 2016. In his dissertation Jack Stewart actually does claim that the official scribble board in Stockholm (mentioned above) was “perhaps unique among all the cities that became faced with a growing graffiti problem”, and thus indirectly also frames it as in a crime prevention-context. However, he does not substantiate this indirect claim, and the other sources we have assessed, stress the democratic potential of the project. See Jack Stewart, *Subway Graffiti*:

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*An Aesthetic Study of Graffiti on the Subway System of New York City, 1970-1978*, New York University, New York 1989, p. 170

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Kimvall, *Noll tolerans: Kampen mot graffiti*, Verbal förlag, Stockholm 2012 and Kimvall, 2014

<sup>29</sup> Iveson, Kurt, "War is over (if you want it): rethinking the graffiti problem", *Australian Planner*, vol. 46, nr. 4 (2009), pp. 24–34, Alison Young, *Judging the Image: Art, value, law*, Routledge, New York 2005, and Mats Franzén, Nils Hertting & Catharina Thörn, *Stad till salu: entreprenörsurbanismen och det offentliga rummets värde*, Daidalos, Göteborg 2016

<sup>30</sup> The literal meaning of Folkets Park could be translated to The People's Park but the concept is difficult to translate and we will hereafter refer to it as Folkpark.

<sup>31</sup> Paulsson, 2016, p. 168

<sup>32</sup> Kolbjörn Guwallius, *Sätta färg på staden: Obeställd kreativitet i det offentliga rummet*, Dokument Press, Årsta 2010, p. 100

<sup>33</sup> McAuliffe, 2013, p. 531

<sup>34</sup> McAuliffe, 2013, p. 533

<sup>35</sup> Jacobson, 1996, p. 178ff

<sup>36</sup> Paulsson 2016, p. 171

<sup>37</sup> cf. Hannerz, Erik, *Performing Punk*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2015

<sup>38</sup> FolketsPark1, "Gatukonst på Folkets Park i Malmö", *YouTube*

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_NL0GQ50UU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_NL0GQ50UU)> [accessed 2017-12-12] (published 2010) and Karin Sandström, "Ny Graffiti vägg i Malmö invigs", Pressrelease Malmö Stad, dated 2009-08-27 (2009)

<sup>39</sup> Iveson, 2009, Young, 2005, Franzen, Hertting and Thörn, 2016

<sup>40</sup> In their seminal book *Subway Art* Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper discuss the difficulties of deciphering wildstyle and reference the famous graffiti artist Dondi (White) who says that he uses wildstyle "when he writes for other writers [...] and when he writes for the public, he uses straight letters". See Martha Cooper & Henry Chalfant, *Subway Art*, Thames & Hudson, London 1984, p. 70

<sup>41</sup> Henrik Widmark, "The Visual Culture of Football Supporters: The Borderland of Urban Activism and Art", (in publishing).

<sup>42</sup> André Jönsson, "En era går i graven på Möllan – 'Kämpa Malmö'-målningen övermålad", in *Sydsvenskan*, 2015-05-23 (2015)

<sup>43</sup> André Lovén, "Övermålad 'Kämpa Malmö'-målning målades över igen", in *Sydsvenskan*, 2015-05-24 (2015)

<sup>44</sup> Jönsson, 2015

<sup>45</sup> Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin", transl. Forster and Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982, originally published in 1903)

<sup>46</sup> Dan Karlholm, "Det tomma monumentet", in Thomas Hall, Ewa Kron, Lempi BorgWik (ed.): *Vad betyder verket?: konstvetenskapliga studier kring måleri, skulptur, stadsplanering och arkitektur*. Konstvetenskapliga institutionen, Stockholms universitet, Stockholm 2001, p. 44. Author's translation from Swedish: "[Monumentets slavuppgift är] att betjäna historien och det så kallade kollektiva minnet.[...] Monumentkonstnären tjänar alltid en kollektiv uppdragsgivare; folket eller en större offentlighet".

<sup>47</sup> cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander, 2010 "Iconic Consciousness: The material feeling of meaning." *Thesis Eleven*, No. 103 (10), 2010, pp. 10-25

<sup>48</sup> Erik Hannerz, Interview Writer 1, 2017

<sup>49</sup> Erik Hannerz, Field note Fall 2014

<sup>50</sup> Hannerz, 2015

<sup>51</sup> cf. MacDonald, 2001

<sup>52</sup> Erik Hannerz, Field note Spring 2015

<sup>53</sup> Erik Hannerz, Interview Writer 2 2017

<sup>54</sup> Lovén, 2015

<sup>55</sup> Jönsson, 2015

<sup>56</sup> Erik Hannerz, Field notes Spring 2017

<sup>57</sup> Erik Hannerz, Field notes Summer 2017