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Essays on interventions in public space

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Urban Creativity

Essays on interventions in public space

Edited by
Erik Hannerz &
Peter Bengtsen

Dokument Press

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Ur ban Cre ati vity

7 A field guide to urban fun

10 Introduction

17 Authors

21 Just urban space:

street art and spatial justice

MATILDA ARVIDSSON

PETER BENGTSEN

43 Openness and porosity:

a socio-spatial analysis of Umbrella Square in Hong Kong

ELTON CHAN

73 Vandals in motion:

the "where" of graffiti in the streets.

ERIK HANNERZ

105 Prolonged graffiti articulation in late 1980's and 1990's Lithuania:

old-school writers' interpretations of graffiti form, content and space

VERONIKA URBONAITĖ-BARKAUSKIENĖ

139 **Free parties, sexuality, creativity and drugs:**
dancing within the urban world
FILIPPA FLAHERTY

169 **Graffiti as critical edgework:**
trains, risks and mobile engagements with railbound infrastructure in Stockholm
ALEXANDER PAULSSON

199 **Remembering old school graffiti:**
subcultural photography, masculinity, and aging
MALCOLM JACOBSON

237 **From writing the streets to Instagram:**
a history of subcultural graffiti as media
ERIK HANNERZ
JACOB KIMVALL

273 **Photo credits**

A field guide to urban fun

The year 1973 is sometimes referred to as a crossroads. From the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Western economy and the ensuing prosperity went straight up. It was the prosperity of a collectivist society. Ask anyone who was there at the time what the streets looked like on an ordinary weekday evening before the arrival of television, when city dwellers came out their often crowded homes after dinner to socialize.

When the first oil crisis erupted in 1973, it became obvious that the economic upturn was broken. Optimistic post-war citizens woke up with a hangover: the 1970s came to be characterized by a gloomier discourse, summed up in the punk slogan "No future". That economic growth could no longer be taken for granted was for many a shock.[1] Rebecca Solnit writes in her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* that her generation lived at the end of something: „… of modernism, the American dream, the industrial economy, a certain kind of urbanity."[2]

Those of us who were born during that hangover grew up with stories of the loss of a better past. In western cities abandoned houses, demolition sites, and declining populations testified that the Golden Age was over. Perhaps there is an economic-cultural law, which says that culture thrives in times of crisis, because many subcultures thrived in these gaps.

From the early 1990s, many cities in the West were revitalized. Financially in any case – the increased amounts of currency needed to be invested, and real estate offered new opportunities to make money. Since then, we have been

living in the era of gentrification. An era when urban subcultures have a harder time asserting themselves. During a conference on situationism and graffiti at the University of Santander, Spain, in 2011[3], one of the participating artists from Berlin was asked by a Spanish architect how a city becomes as culturally exciting as Berlin. "Make sure there are a lot of spaces in between where anyone can create," was the answer.

Hardly an answer that CEOs, eager to report quarterly reports, listen to. In today's super-individualized society, where surface determines content 4[4], the idea of a city with organically emerging details and collective movements meets disinterest at best.

In Urban Creativity, we get to follow a number of urban subcultures in various political contexts. They exist and operate not because of, but in spite of contemporary urban developments. They offer participants community, identity, meaning and potential development, and they continue to bring urban spaces to life, through play-like behaviour. A kind of life that politicians and corporations in highly gentrified cities are faking, in a way that take Baudrillard's simulacra theory to a new level.

Since 2000, Dokument Press publishes books that portray the subcultural elements of the city, sharing stories about the attraction of culture to a growing audience. From a modernist perspective, it should be somewhat strange that subcultures such as graffiti or skateboarding – with almost six decades under their belt – still generate headlines. But perhaps we have entered a new era, in which the concept of "youth culture" says more about how something started than who today's practitioners are, even though youth cultures continue to do just that – attract young people. Practicing a subculture is rarely about individual work nor individuals. It is about the body of work and the collective. The artwork, the

events, are beats in a lifelong rhythm, they are only a part of the subculture tradition, perhaps for centuries to come.

Finally, after 25 years of publishing, we at Dokument Press are proud to present our first academic essay-book. Enjoy. Hopefully the reading is as much fun as playing in the city.

Tobias Barenthin Lindblad, former graffiti writer and editor at Dokument Press

NOTES

1 Bergman, Helena, Florin, Christina & Ljunggren, Jens (ed). 2017. *Känslornas revolution – Kärlek, ilska och lycka på 1970-talet*. Appell förlag.

2 Solnit, Rebecca. 2006. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Penguin Books.

3 *Graffiti as Psychogeographical Map*: The New European Intervention, International conference 22–26th August 2011, Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo, Palace of La Magdalena, Santander, Spain. Director: Javier Abarca.

4 Interview with Erik Hannerz in "The Writing on the Wall" by Tobias Barenthin Lindblad, from Per Englund's book Kul att det körs, Dokument Press 2017.

Introduction

From 1 October 2018 to 31 May 2019, an interdisciplinary group of researchers met weekly at the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies at Lund University. The Urban Creativity IAS Theme, as the group was formally known, consisted of members from four faculties at Lund University (Humanities and Theology, Social Sciences, School of Economics and Management, and Faculty of Engineering) as well as one member from the Department of Law at Gothenburg University and one member from Faculty of Humanities at Stockholm University.

What tied the members of the group together was an interest in the cultural, social and societal implications and attributed values of different types of urban creativity. Urban creativity was tentatively defined as an umbrella term referring to activities within, or in direct relation to, the city. These activities strive to, or are perceived to strive to, intervene in how the spatial, temporal, and material aspects of urban life are communicated, interpreted and acted upon. An important characteristic of situated urban creative practices is that they push legal, moral and cultural boundaries by intervening and exploring alternative ways of using and understanding the city.

During seven months, the group hosted weekly seminars, of which twenty were open to the public. The speakers invited for these seminars included both practitioners and researchers. We wanted to hear both from people with a predominantly academic background and others who are actively engaged in different forms of urban creativity (obviously these are not mutually exclusive categories). The seminars involving practitioners often did not focus explicitly on research or theory, although this did underpin the

vivid discussions that always followed invited speakers' presentations. One purpose of these presentations was to lay the groundwork for future research by inspiring core theme members and other seminar participants. Having practitioners present was conducive to interdisciplinary discussions as, typically, the material presented could be discussed from a number of disciplinary angles (unlike, say, very discipline-specific – and sometimes complex – theories or concepts, which might feel excluding to some participants not at home in a particular field). It was interesting to note the blurring of the boundary between research and creative practices that often would become apparent in these seminar discussions. In addition to our ongoing seminar series at the Pufendorf IAS, we also organised and participated in seminars and other activities in collaboration with external partners. This book is in part a result of these discussions, seminars and meetings.

Urban creativity includes a plethora of ways to intervene in public space. The chapters in this anthology discuss several, but certainly not all, of these practices. In Chapter one, "Just urban space: street art and spatial justice", legal scholar Matilda Arvidsson and art historian and sociologist Peter Bengtsen investigate the relationship between street art and law through the notion of *spatial justice*. A key idea presented is that the relation between law and street art goes beyond the dichotomy legal/illegal. Rather, street art causes a rift in the lawscape and makes apparent the need for justice in an exchange of taking place, withdrawing and pronouncing legal and moral claims to urban public space.

Like Chapter one, the second chapter, "Openness and porosity: a socio-spatial analysis of Umbrella Square in Hong Kong", explores how public space is created by people temporarily taking possession of their surroundings. Here, sociologist Elton Chan discusses the case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and Umbrella Square. The emergence

of the latter is seen as a case of open and porous public space that should have implications for future planning and designing of public spaces.

The third chapter, "Vandals in motion: the 'where' of graffiti in the streets", by sociologist Erik Hannerz picks up on the open and porous aspect of public space. Drawing from an extensive fieldwork, Hannerz unpicks the rituals and rhythms of doing graffiti in the streets, and points to how graffiti mimics and rewrites an affective conception of space.

Sociologist Veronika Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė outlines in Chapter four, "Prolonged graffiti articulation in late 1980s and 1990s Lithuania: old-school writers' interpretations of graffiti form, content and space", the history and characteristics of the graffiti writing subculture in Lithuania. Based on interviews with graffiti writers, the chapter shows the special conditions under which graffiti emerged in a Soviet and post-Soviet context and provides a unique insight to an often overlooked part of the graffiti world.

In Chapter five, "Free parties, sexuality, creativity and drugs: dancing within the urban world", criminologist Filippa Flaherty examines the illegal rave subculture and its use of the city's out-of-the-way environments. Flaherty shows that central to this subculture is the construction of identity through the notion of *freedom*. Standing in opposition to mainstream clubbing, which is framed as unfree and limited, members of the free party culture achieve this perceived freedom in part through the autonomous and unsanctioned appropriation of urban public space and the creation of a heterotopia founded on "respectable" performances in relation to dancing, creativity, drug consumption, sexual expression and gender construction.

Chapter six, "Graffiti as critical edgework: trains, risks and mobile engagements with railbound infrastructure in Stockholm", by business administration scholar Alexander

Paulsson, considers the importance for train graffiti writers of knowledge about, and practical use of, the usually-hidden infrastructure of metro transportation systems. Based on the analysis of podcast conversations between graffiti writers, Paulsson argues that such knowledge is crucial, as graffiti writing on metro trains involves voluntary risk-taking related to the physical and technical environs where the trains are accessed when painting.

In Chapter seven, "Remembering old school graffiti: subcultural photography, masculinity, and aging", sociologist Malcolm Jacobson investigates how middle-aged graffiti writers construct a common social identity and past through the sharing of photographs. Based in part on netnographic fieldwork, the chapter offers insight into aging and community in a subculture that is often associated with youth, masculinity and crime. A central point of interest is that the memory work undertaken by these graffiti writers does not aim to reframe the relation between them and other parts of society. Thus, while the writers' efforts do to some extent contribute to establishing the broader cultural heritage value of graffiti, the subcultural markers that set graffiti writing aside from mainstream culture are maintained.

The eighth and final chapter, "From writing the streets to Instagram: a history of subcultural graffiti as media", by Erik Hannerz and art historian Jacob Kimvall, shifts the focus from the doings of graffiti to the mediation of graffiti. Tracing subcultural graffiti from a media historical perspective, the authors point to a history of addition – in the sense that no established graffiti media have ever ceased to exist. The chapter expands on media as technologies, modalities and social environments, pointing to the transgression of the popular distinction between mass media and subcultural media.

All the contributions in this anthology address different notions of the value and use of urban public space and/

or ways of taking possession of urban public space. While many of the texts happen to focus on different aspects of graffiti writing, urban creativity – as previously noted – includes a plethora of ways to engage with and understand urban public space. More importantly, these chapters point to urban creativity as a practical, affective and conceptual approach to how the city and its rules, borders, rhythms, and representations are perceived and used.

As editors of this book, and as coordinators of the Urban Creativity IAS, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Emma Nilsson, Georgios Stampoulidis and Anders Lund Hansen. All three were part of the core group of the Urban Creativity IAS Theme and have contributed to some of the ideas presented in this book, in some cases by directly commenting on the chapters included. We miss hanging out with you!

We also want to thank Iliaria Hoppe, Annette Markham, David Pinder and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos who were kind enough to accept our invitation to be guest researchers at the Pufendorf IAS as part of the Urban Creativity Theme. Your enthusiasm, expertise and input were invaluable. And, of course, we wish to thank the Pufendorf IAS for seeing the potential in our proposed research theme, for providing us with a home and for supporting financially the publication of this book.

Further, The Museum of Artistic Process and Public Art in Lund has been, and remains, an important partner to us. Thank you, especially, for making available the beautiful Birgit Rausing Hall for one of our 2019 conference keynotes and for collaborating with us on artist talks and other events. Also, thanks to MKB for allowing us to use the Graffiti Hangar in Malmö as the venue for our conference dinner.

An enormous thank you is owed to the anonymous peer reviewers who read and commented on all of the chapters, thereby greatly improving the arguments made.

Last, but not least, Sebastian Wadsted has done a wonderful job on the book design and Tobias Barenthin Lindblad at Dokument Press has with his encouragement and competence helped to finalize the book. Thank you!

Peter Bengtsen and Erik Hannerz
Lund, April 2024

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01

Just urban space: street art and spatial justice

Matilda Arvidsson
Peter Bengtsen

Introduction

In this chapter we explore the relationship between street art and law through the notion of *spatial justice* (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015; 2013; 2012; 2010; see also Pavoni 2010).[1] Street art encompasses – but is not limited to – *stenciling* (by which paintings are created by spraying paint through a pre-cut stencil), *wheat-pasting* (the adhering of thin sheets of previously painted or printed paper to surfaces in urban public space) and *yarn bombing* (the covering of objects with knitted or crocheted yarn). Our interest in the relationship between street art and law is borne out of a more general concern with public space and urban creative practices like parkour and skateboarding. A distinction is commonly made between street art and the related field of graffiti (on the latter, see, for example, Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume).[2] However, in this chapter we have opted to use the term 'street art' as shorthand for both street art and graffiti, since the observations we make in relation to spatial justice pertain to both types of expression. For a visual example of street art as the term is used in this chapter, see Figure 1.

Being unsanctioned and/or illegal is often discussed as a significant trait of street art (Bengtsen 2014b; Lewisohn 2008; Riggle 2010). But what does the unsanctioned, and sometimes illegal, nature of street art mean for the art and for law? We explore this question in the following by relating street art to Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' *lawscape* (2012): a way of framing how law permeates and creates the public spaces where street art takes place, as well as how there is always already a spatial dimension of law (law cannot exist besides or beyond space). We further consider street art as part of the practice of spatial justice (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015; 2013; 2012; 2010; Pavoni 2010; Bengtsen & Arvidsson 2014). Street art is here understood as both a practice and a process-oriented artistic

product consisting of ephemeral unsanctioned expressions which emerge and disappear continuously, predominantly in urban public space. The lawscape is a way to understand the infinite materiality of law within the urban landscape; and spatial justice is a practice that is reliant on the taking of and subsequent withdrawal from space – an oscillation through which conditions for justice in urban public space emerge (see Chan, this volume).

Figure 1: Street art in Copenhagen, including graffiti tags and a paste-up by Armsrock (2010).

The lawscape, street art and spatial justice

In our thinking about urban space and ways to understand the relationship between law and street art, we turn away from traditional criminological, juridical and sociological approaches to the subject. We acknowledge that it is relevant at certain junctures to consider the legality or illegality of street art (e.g. Edwards 2009) and to think about the relationship between law and art in terms of legal decisions or reviews of current jurisprudential and/or executive approaches towards street art. However, this is not our focus. We are neither invested in the project of securing street art as intellectual property (see e.g. Lerman 2013; Smith 2014; Bonadio (ed.) 2019) nor are we explicitly addressing the social or political implications of the criminalization of practices of street art (e.g. Dickinson 2008; Young 2012; 2014). Instead, we want to elucidate on how the relationality between law and street art may be thought otherwise by drawing on Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' work (see also Arvidsson 2014; Bengtsen 2014a). Approaching street art and law in this way, we have arrived at an understanding of law and street art as mutually informing, producing and creating urban public space: not as opposite poles, and not simply in terms of illegality/legality. Rather than being of an 'illegal nature', we see street art as bringing to the fore both law and justice and their spatial interdependencies. Conversely, law and the possibility for street art to emerge in contestation to law as an ephemeral articulation of spatial justice produce some of street art's central potentialities as an expression of creativity in urban public space.

What interest us is the following: (1) street art takes place and thus produces space in a material and legal sense, (2) it takes place specifically in contestation to law, (3) but street art does not usually aim to work with permanent appropriation from which legal title can be drawn, and, conver-

sely, it does not usually aim to work with legal title through which permanent appropriation, or place-taking, might be pursued. It should be noted that there are exceptions to the understanding of street art as impermanent. For example, when the graffiti spot 5Pointz in New York City was whitewashed by the building owner in 2013, some of the affected "artists filed for monetary damages due to evidence spoliation" in relation to a pending case that was to consider the recognized stature of some of the graffiti works on the building (Bruce 2019: 191). Also, the ephemerality of, and legal title to, street art has recently been challenged as street artworks – predominantly those attributed to the famed British artist Banksy – have been moved from the street into private ownership (Bengtsen 2014b: 86; 2016; 2019).[3]

Despite these developments, street art still largely works within an ontology of material place-taking, ephemerality, oscillation and withdrawal. This position of materiality and non-stasis is of importance for our development of an argument concerning the relationality between law and street art. Street art, as we conceive of it in this chapter, is inherently non-permanent (although the different material properties of individual artworks make some more durable than others). Further, we make a distinction between commissioned and uncommissioned works of art, including only the latter in our study.[4] The ambiguousness of the term street art should be noted. It refers to art pursued in the 'street' which means that it produces public space within space – an artscape in public space. The notion of the 'street' does not solely refer to actual streets, but rather denotes places that are publicly accessible and/or visible in or from public space (e.g. train stations, walls and parks) (see Hannerz, this volume). Street art, as we conceive of it, invites a radical oscillation between appropriation and dispossession of public space, while – literally – drawing on privately and publicly owned property, as well as on legal commons. In

virtue of this radical appropriation and dispossession, we might say that any street artwork is a taking of a place which is already taken in both a material and legal sense. However, due to street artworks' ephemerality, this place-taking is not permanent. Although taking possession of place, street artworks are always about to take leave of this same place and the public space they have produced and claimed, as the place is overtaken by new street artworks or other forms of appropriation, not the least of which is the removal of street art by public authority or through private initiative.[5] On open or legal graffiti walls, a painting could be gone within an hour.[6]

The gesture of ephemeral place-taking and withdrawal inherent in street art might be understood in

Figure 2: Graffiti on a train in Malmö, which has been partly covered with yellow and black tape (2012).

contrast to other – though not all – forms of art where law provides a legal title often necessary for safeguarding the artistic ownership of the piece of art in question, thus inviting capital as an artistic partner. While it goes beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the questions related to intellectual property and street art, it is worth noting that it is an issue that has received increasing attention in recent years (Bonadio (ed.) 2019).

The train graffiti depicted in Figure 2 is an example of the place-taking and withdrawal which we find to occur continuously in urban public spaces. Here a place on the side of a passenger train, which was already claimed in a material and legal sense (by the property owner of the train wagon in question), has been claimed anew by way of a graffiti piece. In creating the graffiti painting, a spatial definition which counters the spatial claims of law (in this case property law excluding the coexistence of more than just one legal claim to the outer surface of the train wagon) has been created and has forced law to momentarily withdraw. Law momentarily recedes, yet while doing so it is simultaneously curiously intensely present in its absence, loudly pronounced and highlighted by the graffiti piece literally taking colorful place. The graffiti piece draws to our attention that the train is not just a train, but also a space of legal claims which are ours to relate to in contestation, approval or otherwise. In other words, street art in this example expresses and reminds us of the possibility of justice in the face of law. The taking of place on the train wagon is done with the understanding that the appropriation, and the spatial definition created by the presence of the graffiti piece, will not be permanent.[7]

In the case depicted in Figure 2, the place – and by extension the space – has already been symbolically reclaimed by law. While the graffiti piece has not yet been removed, black and yellow strips of tape have been put on top of it by the train authorities. This gesture indicates the presence

of law in public space, and it constitutes a promise that a complete return to law is imminent. Law (in terms of the reaffirmation of the legal claim to space pursuant to property law) will return, but so will – it can be assumed – graffiti. The oscillation between place-taking and withdrawal on the part of both art and of law produces public space. Simultaneously, the oscillation is part of the production of art (we must remember that the taking place of graffiti precisely here is no accident but in part flows from its contestation to law and space as produced and claimed by law), and the reiteration of law as a mimetic and material practice. What is particularly interesting about the case depicted in Figure 2 is that the claims of the graffiti artist and the train authorities are co-visible. This gives us insight into the layering (both in a material and symbolic sense) of the claims to urban public space that are continuously put forward.

In our search for a language by which our interest in street art, law and the ongoing processes of negotiation for urban public space can be pursued, we have turned to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' work on the lawscape and spatial justice. Apart from his work – which situates itself in law, theory and aesthetics – there is a broad scholarship on spatial justice within human geography, urban planning and architecture (e.g. Harvey 2001; Soja 2010). Most recently, the question of spatial justice has taken a (renewed) turn towards the (human) 'rights to the city' (e.g. Attoh 2011; Brown 2010; Friendly 2013; Purcell 2013; Grigolo 2019) as originally discussed by Henri Lefebvre (1996 [1968]), and elaborated by David Harvey (2001) and Don Michell (2003). However, the attention given to the place and function of law in these scholarships is often underplayed and underdeveloped. Law, we find it, is seen as a static form and institution external to 'the social', space, justice and materiality. Moreover, the 'rights-based approach' – including the turn to 'human rights cities' (Grigolo 2019; Davis et al 2017)[8] – is

characterized by problems inherited from the field and practice of human rights. These include universalist claims on particularistic bases, excluding practices, Eurocentrism and the idea that once a 'right' is being introduced, justice can 'just' arrive (e.g. Nesiah 2014; Lacroix & Pranchère 2018).

Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos draws on Doreen Massey (2007) as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2013) when he defines space not as that which surrounds us (as if we were not space ourselves), but as the 'product of interrelations and embedded practices; a sphere of multiple possibilities; a ground of chance and undecidability, and as such always becoming, always open to the future', always conditioned on politics, always conditioned by law (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013: 123). Spatial justice is, in this understanding, first and foremost an embodied practice. It concerns one's own corporeal, ephemeral and repetitious relational emplacement as space in space – a unique and singular place-taking in the metaphysical, psychological and material senses. This emplacement by necessity excludes all other claims to the same spatial position at the very same time. Spatial justice, however, also entails the radical gesture of withdrawing from the space one occupies momentarily. A fundamental distinction – drawn from Derrida's 'law (droit) is not justice' (Derrida 1990: 947) – permeates the theoretical underpinnings of spatial justice to which we adhere: just because there is law it does not mean that there is justice and, conversely, justice does not necessarily entail law. Law involves legislation and legal praxis, legislative and judicial bodies, as well as the distribution and embodiment of rights and duties. Justice is, in contrast, a relational movement with, as Derrida points out, no point of arrival (Derrida 1990). Or, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it: justice is a constant 'involution' of becoming with one's others – something which necessitates constant openness, movement, force and inclusive practices of recognition and acceptance

(Deleuze & Guattari 2013; Arvidsson 2020). Moreover, and in contrast to what is sometimes argued (e.g. Soja 2010), spatial justice is, as Andrea Pavoni puts it, 'neither an aspect nor a companion of social justice – more radically, it questions the very notion of (social) justice. It neither spatialises nor materialises justice – it shows its always-already spatial and material nature' (Pavoni 2010). We argue that this 'always-already' is an essential part of not only justice but also street art. Spatial justice, thus, is an integral part of the practice and relation of street art and law in public urban space.

The example presented in Figure 2 of graffiti on a passenger train illustrates this point. For justice to arrive (if only temporarily – as it is always-already) law must temporarily recede. As law is always material and embodied (there is no outside of law – there is no non-material and disembodied law), this places a demand for a withdrawal as a condition for justice. Justice cannot be a legal demand (because it demands law's withdrawal) but emerges as a relational practice in the concrete situation. The notion of spatial justice brings forth law's spatial dimensions: law – being material and embodied – produces, at each given moment, entitlement to emplacement. Law 'translates' the desire to be 'here' (painting this wall, standing at this corner, living in this building) into legal claims, making desire appear within the legal framework as legal argumentation and distribution of legal rights and duties.

When law names rights, for example property law giving legal title to walls, train wagons or billboards in public space, it distributes emplacement. In other words, it distributes the legal right to occupy a particular place at a particular time. As is the case with street art, however, not all place-taking operates on the basis of an established legal right, a legal emplacement. Law as the distributor of space calls for something else to intervene on the side of law's other. With the process of legal emplacement, the need for justice arises.

Justice is thus understood as that which law cannot entail but must recognize, which arises when law becomes materialized: in the Deleuze-Guattarian (2013) sense it becomes, rather than arrives as, matter. Both law and justice in this sense depend on, and is inter-related with, space. The notion of spatial justice precisely concerns the need for law – the retortion to legal claims of rights and duties as finitely distributed – to withdraw in the face of justice, as space is not only produced by and through legal entitlement but also by and through law's other: in this case manifest as street art.

The urban public space in which we find ourselves – where our interest in law and street art arise and reside – is a striated space characterized by boundaries, demarcations, points, lines and zones: walls meet streets which in turn are divided into sidewalks and separate driving lanes; traffic lights orchestrate the flow of traffic which pulses through the city; zebra crossings punctuate this movement and allow streams of pedestrians to pass from one sidewalk to another; framed billboards demarcate spaces of commercial advertisement separate from that of regular walls (see Figure 3). Urban public space is saturated by laws and regulations that zone, delimit and demarcate space. Emplacement and embodiment are done through and in contestation to these laws and regulations. Drawing on Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, we think of this urban public space as a lawscape, as the 'fusion of law and normativity' where 'the city is interlaced with the law' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2012: 1).

Spatial justice entails a rupture of the circularity between law and space, a circularity in which law and space otherwise reinforce each other mutually in the lawscape. While law at each given moment might have an answer to street art in terms of illegal/legal, the question of spatial justice is one which inserts alteration, disruption, and issue in the

lawscape: spatial justice distorts the lawscape's horizon and demands law to temporarily withdraw before reemerging.

In our everyday life we might think of law as the normal that we do not see, hear or smell but which flows beneath our feet (e.g. municipal planning laws regulating the size of the sidewalk), marks and names our bodies (e.g. inscribing gender through health and family law regulations) and traverses the sky (e.g. telecommunication law regulating the ways in which we are reachable through our cell phones). Although we are saturated in law, it appears as heightened, visible and pronounced only at certain junctures (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2012: 1). As the example of the graffiti on the passenger train in Figure 2 shows, those junctures might be precisely, although by no means exclusively, the moments in which street art enters urban public space in contestation to that space already being taken, occupied and appropriated by someone or something else laying claim to a right to be 'here' through legal title. Law, in this situation, meets its other (see Chan, this volume).

While we argue that street art can always be understood as an expression of contestation to an already-existing legal claim to urban public space, some cases are particularly well suited to illustrate this.[9] We have already introduced the example of train graffiti (Figure 2). Another example is the type of street art which targets and subverts, or 'destroys', commercial messages in urban public space. Like train graffiti, these practices of street art are inherently ephemeral. They exist in contestation to the commodification of public space, creating momentarily other spaces. The Dior commercial depicted in Figure 3 – as well as numerous previous commercials for the same brand in the same place (on the corner of Nørrebrogade and Stengade in Copenhagen, Denmark) – has repeatedly been de/refaced, but has always subsequently been restored by the legal property owner of the billboard.

The history of repeated oscillation of place-taking and withdrawal, exemplified by the ongoing negotiation for this particular urban public space, demonstrates the way spatial justice emerges through the relationality between street art and law: while the repeated disruptions of the legal claim to public space in the example in Figure 3 force law to momentarily withdraw, they do so with the understanding that the disruptions, too, are only momentary. Spatial justice is here, just as justice is in the Derridian sense, always only possible as a deferment of its own fulfilment. What we witness in such place-taking is a struggle between different spatial definitions which oppose, but also inform and co-produce, one another.

Figure 3: Add disruption in Copenhagen, Denmark (2012).

Conclusion

The demand to take place and also to withdraw inherent in the notion of spatial justice is directed at individuals, at street art as well as at law. One does not withdraw because one does not desire a certain place, or someone else's space, but precisely because the demand is to take leave of one's desire and expose oneself in a vulnerable request for others to do the same. The demand is not to withdraw and go away, but to withdraw and remain in an oscillation (which is not a dialectic duality) that does not fully position the individual, law or justice at a single place or moment, but rather allows one to interact without staying put (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2011: 201). Spatial justice thus entails withdrawing as part of one's taking place, as well as recognizing the priority of the other's claim to be, to take place without succumbing to self-annihilation or the annihilation of the other (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2011: 200). It is, in other words, a way of constantly 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari 2013). As can been seen in the empirical examples presented in this chapter, in relation to street art, the demand to withdraw is directed at carriers of legal title (public and private property owners), at municipalities' urban planning management, and at street art and street art practitioners. For spatial justice to become realized, street art must not turn into permanent appropriation of space, nor must property rights – or other legal rights – constantly supersede other claims to urban public space.

In this chapter, we have contended that spatial justice converses well with an effort to think the relationality between law and street art in a manner beyond the dichotomy legal/illegal: street art literally takes a place already taken and imposes itself on an already appropriated space. Street art thus makes space anew and takes a place for itself in contestation to a conflicting claim to space. By its very nature, it is ephemeral: it withdraws while remaining, it

re-emerges in new zones, bending and bleeding over lines, points and demarcations of the lawscape. Street art creates a rupture in the lawscape and conjures up the notion of, and need for, justice – a spatial justice – in urban public space as it calls on law to pronounce itself: 'Come on and talk to me!', 'Who are you? What do you say? What is your position?', 'What is your proper name?', 'I dare you!' (Arvidsson 2011; 2017).

The question of relationality between law and street art which we have brought forward here plays itself out as a production of space and spatial justice in an exchange of taking place, withdrawing and pronouncing law and street art. It is a relation that calls on justice as a means of co-producing urban public space: spatial justice becomes the very tangibly pronounced demand to withdraw. The lawscape and law are loudly pronounced as street art takes place in urban public space. In this ongoing process, the need for spatial justice arises and a multitude of spaces are produced and dispossession takes place. Spatial justice is thus not only a relational demand but also an exposition of vulnerability to the desire of the other: it enforces a bond of permanent oscillation, mutual reinforcement and creativity.

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NOTES

1 The chapter is adapted from Peter Bengtsen and Matilda Arvidsson, 'Spatial Justice and Street Art' in *Nordic Journal of Law and Social Research* 5, 2014, pp. 117-130. Reprinted here with permission from the publisher.

2 This distinction partly has its roots in studies of the often-antagonistic attitude of graffiti writers towards street art practitioners. There is also an aesthetic and communicative side to the distinction: while street art often speaks to a broad audience (in part by including features like images of human beings, animals and other recognizable characters, as well as references to current events), a lot of graffiti is primarily or solely aimed at other graffiti writers rather than the general public. Graffiti is often letter-based but is frequently stylized to the point where the writing becomes unintelligible to anyone not already familiar with the subculture.

3 See e.g. 'Banksy makes a splash in New York – but what will become of the murals?' in *The Guardian*, October 6, 2013; 'Off the Street: Onto the Auction Block' in *The New York Times*, May 2, 2014. While Banksy has so far been the prime target of the removal and attempted sale of artworks from the street, this has also happened to work by others, such as the French artist Invader, the American artist Bast and the Canadian-American artist collective Faile.

4 Over the last decade, the emergence of so-called street art festivals in many parts of the world – e.g. the Fame Festival in Grottaglie, Italy (2008–2012) and Artscape in various places in Sweden (2014–) – has meant that some street art practitioners have been given the opportunity to create large-scale sanctioned murals, which are often of a permanent or semi-permanent nature and are hard to distinguish from sanctioned public art. While these artworks are commonly discussed as 'street art', their sanctioned nature means that they fall outside of the definition of street art in this article. Another and related development is designated places for street art (Bengtsen 2020). At these places street art is not commissioned, yet it is not generally approached by authorities as contesting legal claims – at least not claims to be present at the same place at the same time. As street art in these places is uncommissioned, it falls within the definition of this article. However, the (semi)permanent withdrawal of law from designated places makes the oscillation of place-taking between law and street art inoperable. Without that oscillation, spatial justice, such as we conceive of it in this article cannot emerge. Under these circumstances, street art cannot perform itself as an articulation of spatial justice as it does not take a place already occupied by law. This does not, however, preclude the art and place from becoming subjects to competing claims by different artists.

5 A curious phenomenon is the unsanctioned removal of street art and graffiti by individuals who take upon themselves to systematically 'clean' the city. The result of their effort to battle street art and graffiti is that they end up committing the same transgressions in the eyes of the law as the people whose practices they are fighting. This paradox is the topic of the documentary film *Vigilante Vigilante. The Battle for Expression*

by Max Good (2011). It should be noted that more recently an opposing trend has emerged: citizens rallying to restore and protect certain street artworks when these have been defaced.

6 See, for example: Epstein, Lars, 'Nya graffitiväggen i Tanto poppis, målas över tre gånger per dygn', 28 September, 2016, *Dagens Nyheter*: https://www.dn.se/blogg/epstein/2016/09/28/nya-graffitivaggen-i-tanto-poppis-malas-over-tre-ganger-per-dygn/ (last visited 30 August 2020).

7 This is especially true when it comes to graffiti on trains and on the street level of the city, where law often reclaims the place rather quickly through the removal of the unsanctioned artistic expression. However, when artists work without permission on the façades of tall buildings (for example by lying on the edge of a rooftop and painting the upper part of a façade with a paint roller), the legal structures of the city (e.g. safety regulations stipulating legally acceptable working conditions for workers commissioned to subsequently remove the artworks) actually mean that artworks often remain for a prolonged period of time. It is simply very costly for property owners to set up scaffolding and other safety elements required by law. Here the legal structures mean that unsanctioned, and often unwanted, artistic expressions can remain in situ for years.

8 See also the 'Human Rights City Project', led by Martha F. Davis, at the Raul Wallenberg Institute, Lund, Sweden: https://rwi.lu.se/the-swedish-human-rights-city-project/?fbclid=IwAR1X-UdCMnViOWNKEIou-VJz6beka0nyvQRPgrSq02QhancIDeKY-0OdNGBs.

9 It should be noted that we do not claim that all street art is created with contestation in mind. Street art practitioners create their work for many different reasons.

02

Openness and porosity: a socio-spatial analysis of Umbrella Square in Hong Kong

Elton Chan

Introduction

According to Richard Sennett (2018: 586), a public realm 'can be simply defined as where strangers meet'. Unlike Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas who consider the public realm to be 'an activity that is clarified by communication with strangers' (Sennett 2003: 384), Sennett (2018: 586) insists that the public realm is first and foremost a place that is 'defined in terms of physical ground' (see Hannerz, this volume). Traditional public spaces such as the Greek agora and the Roman forum are exemplary cases of how the public realm is not only manifested physically but is also inherently urban. While the proliferation of the internet and social media has intensified debates on whether the public realm can exist virtually, physical public spaces such as public squares and city parks remain an important aspect of the public realm. Hence, it could be argued that when Sennett addresses the public realm, he is most interested in the built environment and the physical aspects of public space. It is against this background that Sennett conceptualised the ideal public realm based on the distinction between open and closed systems. A closed system is centred on over-determined form and is in 'harmonious equilibrium', whereas an open system is a system that tends to be incomplete and in 'unstable evolution' (Sennett 2018: 585). Even though its application can be both broad and varied, Sennett suggests that the understanding of open and closed systems is particularly useful in the planning and design of public spaces.

Using Sennett's conception of open and closed systems, this chapter will examine the social and spatial organisation of Umbrella Square – the main protest site of the 2014 Umbrella Movement where tens of thousands of people gathered and occupied a stretch of an eight-lane highway in the centre of Hong Kong. Although the tent city only lasted for 74 days,[1] Umbrella Square was one of the most vibrant and dynamic urban spaces in the city during

a time when most of the public spaces were stagnant, homogenous, and commercialised as a result of increasing privatisation as well as over-regulation by the government (Chan 2020; 2023). The chapter will first outline the context of the Umbrella Movement and the methods used in this study. I will then look at the formation of Umbrella Square and establish how its transformation from a highway into a dynamic protest site was a spontaneous but significant turn of events in the movement (see Paulsson, this volume). Furthermore, by examining the protesters' spatial appropriation of Umbrella Square and charting its evolution over time, I will analyse how the protest site maintained its openness and porosity while resisting the police, the government, and other opposing forces. The chapter will then conclude by discussing the legacy of Umbrella Square, and how it provided us with new insights and inspiration on how bottom-up, insurgent uses of urban (public) spaces can oppose commodification processes and repressive state control. I contend that Umbrella Square was an ideal example of an open and porous public space, and urbanists can thus benefit greatly from understanding and appreciating the various spatial and social characteristics of the 74-day-old protest site.

Context and background: A spontaneous occupation

The Umbrella Movement, which took place in the autumn of 2014, started off as a student strike organised by student activist groups in protest of the Chinese Government's decision to deny Hong Kong genuine universal suffrage in 2017 (Ortmann 2015; Veg 2015; Cheng and Chan 2017; Tai 2018; Tang 2021; Martínez 2019). The week-long strike and protests were held outside the Hong Kong Government Headquarters in Admiralty (Figure 1), where thousands of people

gathered peacefully and participated in open lectures, debates, and discussions every day throughout the week. In the evening of Friday 26 September, the last day of the student strike, around 100 students and political activists broke into the Government Headquarters and occupied Civic Square, an outdoor area that was once open to the public but had since been fenced off. This unplanned escalation of the student strike forced the government and police to quickly mobilise and bring in reinforcements. While the police were quick to seal off Civic Square, the crowd outside remained largely uncontained on Tim Mei Avenue. As the night went on, more and more people arrived and gathered in response to the student leaders' appeal. At around midnight, the protesters inside Civic Square were detained and arrested as police declared the assembly on Tim Mei Avenue unlawful and blocked all the pedestrian bridges.

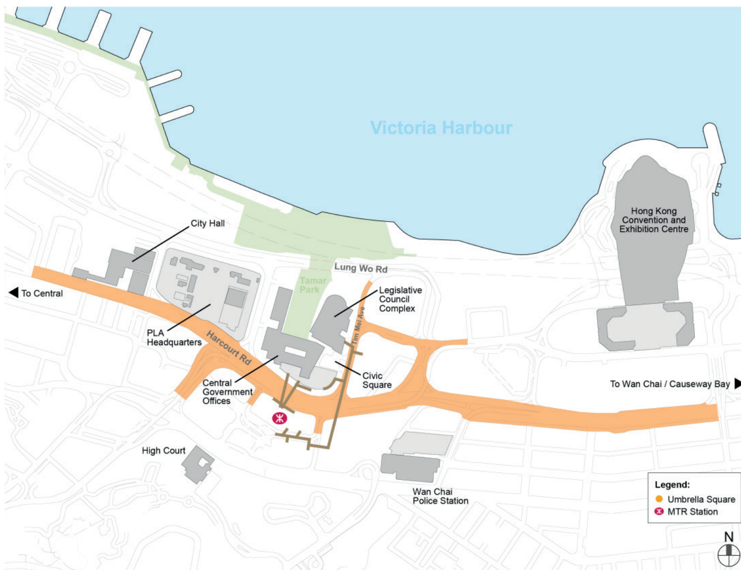

Figure 1: Map of Umbrella Square, Admiralty, Hong Kong

Instead of discouraging people from coming to the area, the actions of the police prompted even more people to arrive in Admiralty in support of the protesters. Since all the entry points to Tim Mei Avenue were blocked by police, a crowd began to form on the other side of Harcourt Road, the highway that separates the Government Headquarters from the Admiralty Mass Transit Railway (MTR) station. By Sunday afternoon, it became so crowded on the side of Harcourt Road that people began to spill over onto the highway. Traffic came to an instant standstill while hundreds and thousands of people took over the eight-lane highway next to the Government Headquarters in the administrative centre of the city. As night fell, riot police were mobilised to disperse the crowd. Faced with batons, pepper spray, tear gas, and allegedly the threat of rubber bullets, the protesters dispersed, spread out, and then regrouped. Not only did they stretch the occupation area to as far as Central and Wanchai, essentially stopping traffic on large parts of Hong Kong Island, but some protesters also began to occupy streets in other areas of Hong Kong, namely Causeway Bay, Mong Kok, and, briefly, Tsim Sha Tsui.

After a night of intense clashes, the riot police finally retreated early on Monday morning, and the protesters settled down and established a protest site on Harcourt Road by building makeshift barricades. The protesters would eventually occupy large sections of roads and streets on three different sites across Hong Kong for more than two and a half months, where at times more than 100,000 people gathered and protested, turning some of the busiest roads and highways into a car-free tent city. The scale and longevity of the occupation exceeded everyone's expectations (Ortmann 2015; Cheng and Chan 2017; Tai 2018). As documented by Benny Tai (2018), one of the founding members of Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) – the organisation that first advocated for a civil disobedience action in early

2013 – the original plan of OCLP was for its participants to briefly occupy the main streets in Central, the core business district of Hong Kong, on 1 October, the National Day of China, before willingly being arrested by the police. Instead of OCLP's carefully devised plan for an orderly and peaceful sit-in, what took place was a spontaneous, bottom-up occupation that neither the protesters nor the government had foreseen. Umbrella Square was in many ways intrinsic to the protest movement as it was not only created by the movement, but it also engendered, facilitated, and sustained the protests. In other words, there would be no Umbrella Movement without Umbrella Square, or vice versa.

An ethnographic study of a protest site

As Setha Low (2017: 2) contends, an ethnographic study of space and place can help us understand people's everyday life by integrating 'the materiality and meaning of actions and practices' on different scales. It is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate how Umbrella Square was conceived and used as a public space by using an ethnographic approach to spatial study. Data collection was largely based on participant observations. My role as a participant of the movement allowed me to wander around Umbrella Square freely and interact with other participants, volunteers, and activists. Even though this chapter is centred on Umbrella Square, participant observations were conducted on all three protest sites throughout the duration of the Umbrella Movement. Multiple site visits, including overnight stays in Umbrella Square, were made throughout the two and a half months. Observations were conducted during different times of the day and the week to document the constantly changing and evolving nature of the protest site. While the focus of the

chapter is on the everyday nature of the protest site, I was also on site for some of the more significant moments and events of the movement, including the night when activists broke into Civic Square, a number of large-scale assemblies and demonstrations, the viewing of the televised debate between student leaders and government officials, and the final night before Umbrella Square was cleared. However, I was not involved in any of the clashes between protesters and police, nor was I present on the final day when Umbrella Square was cleared. For such incidents and occurrences, I mostly relied on secondary data sources such as news reports, live video footage, and discussions on various social media. In addition to conducting participant observations, I also reviewed and analysed a wide array of documents. The documents used include journal articles and books, as well as other documentation on the Umbrella Movement and Umbrella Square such as maps and censuses of tents and barricades. Such secondary data sources provide important contextual information about the Umbrella Movement and shed light on the public perception of the occupation. Instead of discussing the political causes and implications of the Umbrella Movement, I will focus on the socio-spatial aspects of Umbrella Square and explore how the protest site functioned as a public space that was defined by openness and porosity.

From dead space to Umbrella Square

According to Sennett (2018: 590), one spatial attribute that is pertinent to our understanding of openness and our active engagement with 'the changing context of time' is the spatial distinction between borders and boundaries. Taking inspiration from natural ecologies, he suggests that the difference between borders and boundaries lies in the fact that borders

are zones where different species meet and become more active through interaction, whereas boundaries are limits where species are closed off from each other as a result of inactivity. In other words, a boundary can be seen as a wall, while the border edge condition, on the other hand, is more akin to a porous membrane. As Sennett argues, it is important to note that these are not opposite edge conditions. The opposite of a boundary is simply a connection between the two different species that allows free and uncontrolled movement and interaction. A border, in contrast, combines porosity and resistance – it is both open and shut at the same time, connecting while separating. The ideal public realm should not only be open and allow people to express themselves but also let differences and otherness meet and interact by emphasising 'membrane/borders rather than boundaries or centres' (Sennett 2018: 599).

Prior to the Umbrella Movement, Harcourt Road was part of an 'invisible wall' along the northern side of Hong Kong Island that separated the Government Headquarters from the rest of the island. The only way to get to the Government Headquarters from the surrounding area on foot was to use the two footbridges that cross the highway. Like any other road or highway, Harcourt Road was a dead space that was contingent upon movement and motion along it and thus lacked 'any independent experiential meaning of its own' (Sennett 2002: 14). More importantly, as Sennett (2018: 591) argues, highways are exemplary cases of closed boundaries as 'the sides of the highways in cities tend to become withered spaces' due to the lack of porosity. It could therefore be argued that the moment the first protester set foot onto Harcourt Road and stopped traffic, the highway was transformed from a closed boundary into an open and porous border. The protesters, using their bodies, penetrated through the 'invisible wall' and turned what was a dead space that only functioned for movement and motion, into one

of the most vibrant public spaces of the city where different people could meet and interact (Figure 2).

Despite the spontaneous and improvised nature of the Umbrella Movement, the fact that the protesters ended up occupying a major highway instead of a public square or a park was both politically and symbolically significant. By blocking and occupying a major highway in the middle of the city, the protestors were able, at least at first, to generate substantial political power by having a concrete social and economic impact on the city's everyday order. The effectiveness of political protests, as David Harvey (2012: 118) contends, is often measured 'in terms of their ability to disrupt urban economics'. The disruption and potential economic loss caused by the occupation of the highway meant that the government could not simply ignore the protesters and their demands, which was illustrated by its initial willingness to

Figure 2: Umbrella Square as a border.

meet with the student leaders. More importantly, the fact that Umbrella Square, the main protest site, was located just outside the Government Headquarters (as well as the nearby Legislative Council Complex and the People's Liberation Army headquarters in Hong Kong) was particularly symbolic as politicians and government officials were forced to encounter the protesters and the protest site on a regular basis. As Harvey (2012: 161) argues, despite the proliferation of the internet and social media, 'the collective power of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked'.

While occupying roads and highways was not a novel form of protest – the Reclaim the Streets movement, for instance, had been taking place since the mid-1990s – the Umbrella Movement was set apart by its scale and duration. In this sense, the Umbrella Movement was more akin to the large-scale protests of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement. However, unlike Tahrir Square in Cairo or Syntagma Square in Athens (Calhoun 2013; Harvey 2012), Harcourt Road had never been a place of political and historical significance or a site of contention. Instead of a public square that was designed and built for public gatherings, the highway was a non-place, which Marc Augé defines as 'a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' (Augé 1995: 77). Similarly, it was a space characterised by what Edward Relph calls *placelessness*, which refers to 'the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardised landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place' (Relph 1976: Preface). In contrast to other prominent protest sites, Umbrella Square had to be actively transformed by the protesters into a place with significance, identity, and meaning both through their own lived experience and by constantly appropriating the protest site. It was this process of transformation and ap-

propriation led by the people that gave Umbrella Square its openness and porosity that are lacking in many other public spaces in Hong Kong.

Public realm as an open system

One of the first things the protesters did when they occupied the highway was to build barricades to block cars and other vehicles on the road from entering the protest site and to demarcate the occupation territory. These makeshift barricades were initially propped up with whatever items or street furniture that protesters could find around the protest site such as litter bins, traffic cones and barriers. They were later replaced with more articulated and complex barricades, including ones that consisted of multiple iron hurdles tied together as well as structures created with bamboo scaffolding. In some cases, the barricades were even set onto the ground with cement. Crucially though, these barricades were not intended to seal off the site completely; they acted

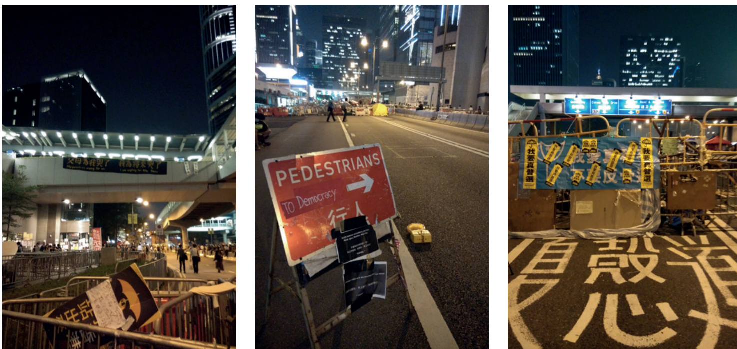

Figure 3: Various barricades on Umbrella Square that acted as porous membranes.

Figure 4: Tents on plastic pallets with personalised decorations.

more like a porous membrane rather than a closed boundary (Figure 3). Everyone could enter and leave the site as they wished, and as time went by, the barricades became almost symbolic. What was protecting Umbrella Square and keeping the protest site intact was no longer the strength of the barricades (the strongest of barricades could be demolished in no time with the right tools), but it was instead the people inside Umbrella Square and the political power they acquired by being there.

Another case in point of Umbrella Square's constant evolution and transformation over the two and a half months of its existence was the development and advancement of the protesters' sleeping arrangements. During the early days of the occupation, most of the protesters just slept on the ground or leaned against the sides of the road. They then started utilising various items such as cardboard boxes and yoga and camping mats to provide more comfort. After a few weeks, when they decided to stay for a longer period of time, the protesters began to pitch tents and sleep in sleeping bags. At one point, more than 2,000 erected tents covered

the entirety of Umbrella Square (Buckley and Wong 2014). Importantly, the protesters also learned to adapt to the unpredictable autumn weather of Hong Kong – when it started raining, standing water on the highway would seep through the bottom of the tents and drench their sleeping bags and other belongings. To tackle this water issue, the protesters came up with the idea of placing their tents on plastic pallets (Figure 4). By separating the tents from the road surface, the pallets kept the tents and everything in them dry when it was raining and insulated the protesters from the hot asphalt surface on warm and sunny days. Some protesters even personalised their tents by decorating them with artwork and giving each tent its own number and name. Not only did the protesters' personal touches create a sense of belonging towards their temporary dwellings, there were also reports claiming that mail was successfully delivered to certain tents in Umbrella Square (Barber 2014a; 2014b).

In addition to the barricades, the tents, and a centre stage where people could make public announcements and speeches, various structures and facilities were constructed by protesters across Umbrella Square. There were, among other things, gardening areas in the existing roadside planters, a fully lit and equipped study room and library, mobile phone charging stations, and makeshift shower stands, as well as storage areas for medical and other daily supplies. Additionally, numerous artworks and banners began to appear throughout the vicinity of Umbrella Square (Veg 2015; 2016). Such artworks and banners, usually made from recycled materials or anything that was found on site, not only acted as a medium through which the protesters expressed their feelings and demands; many of the creations also became important landmarks that protesters could identify and connect with. As Relph (1976) contends, places acquire meaning both through our lived experience and from the man-made landscape that gives the place its form. By st-

rengthening the sense of place, the artworks and banners played a particularly key role in transforming the highway into Umbrella Square. Furthermore, the artworks and banners also had a practical function as they became important points of spatial reference within the increasingly complex site. Easily identifiable artworks such as the Umbrella Man – a three-metre tall statue erected in the middle of Umbrella Square – were iconic landmarks that also served as meeting and gathering points for the protesters.

As the occupation continued, the various artworks and landmarks of Umbrella Square increasingly assumed symbolic meanings that often evoke emotions and collective memories among the protesters (Tang 2021). One of the most popular and well-known landmarks of Umbrella Square was the Lennon Wall, which was located along the staircase leading up to the Government Headquarters (Cheng and Chan 2017). Inspired by the John Lennon graffiti wall in Prague, the Lennon Wall in Umbrella Square was a section of the exterior wall that was plastered with sticky notes containing protesters' messages of encouragement and demands. Even after the sticky notes were taken down following the protests, that particular section of the blank wall was still often referred to as the Lennon Wall by both the media and the public (Lam et al. 2019; Wong 2015). The fact that new artworks and structures were created almost every day was also illustrative of how the entire site was constantly evolving and reinventing itself (Veg 2015; Veg 2016). Furthermore, the ways in which the highway was appropriated by the protesters were particularly remarkable as there was no real centralised leadership in terms of the organisation and maintenance of the protest site (Ortmann 2015; Cheng and Chan 2017). Despite the presence of various political and student organisations, the spatial appropriation of Umbrella Square was largely undertaken through public participation and improvisation by the protesters.

Spatial and temporal porosity

Porosity, which is key to Sennett's conception of an ideal public realm, has been used by various scholars to characterise cities and the built environment. One such example is Walter Benjamin's vivid description of Naples (Benjamin 1978). Throughout the essay, he uses porosity to describe various aspects of the city – architecture, he contends, is 'as porous as this stone' (Benjamin 1978: 165). According to Benjamin, the porosity of Naples is a result of the interpenetration of the city's courtyards, arcades, and stairways. It is essential to note, however, that the porosity in Benjamin's Naples not only describes the built environment but also pertains to movement, activity, and, more importantly, time. As Stavros Stavrides (2006; 2018) argues, porosity needs to be activated by the users of the space through crossing boundaries and inventing 'in-between spaces of encounter' (2006: 177). In other words, porosity is not simply about the

Figure 5: Makeshift staircase that bridges the highway dividers helps maintain the porosity of Umbrella Square.

interpenetration of different spaces but also how the space is occupied, used, and changed over time. It could therefore be argued that porosity is both a spatial and a temporal concept that is characterised by interpenetration and movement (Stavrides 2006; 2018; Benjamin 2005).

Very much like Naples, Umbrella Square maintained its porosity by not having clear boundaries demarcating different zones or separating activities from one another. One obstacle the protesters faced when trying to convert the highway into a protest site was the concrete highway divider that separates the opposite lanes of traffic and runs along the entirety of Umbrella Square (Figure 5). In order to overcome this physical separation, the protesters built makeshift staircases with pallets and other recycled materials to bridge the two sides of the highway. The staircases were imperative to Umbrella Square's spatial porosity as they ensured that people could move and interact freely on the site. In contrast, the protest site in Mong Kok was split into two by road dividers and metal fencing without any intermediate crossing points. This prevented the protesters from moving from one side to the other and the physical separation and lack of communication among protesters from different affiliations and factions also led to regular conflicts (Veg 2015). It could therefore be argued that the protesters' innovative solution to negate the spatial divisions within Umbrella Square was imperative to its vibrancy, stability, and longevity.

As a result of a lack of clear physical boundaries, the 'interpenetration of day and night, noise and peace' (Benjamin 1978: 172) was as profound in Umbrella Square as it was in Benjamin's Naples. There were always multiple activities, including lectures, group discussions and circles, gardening sessions, and crafting classes, taking place at the same time across the protest site. People could wander around freely and easily engage in and disengage from various activities as

they desired. Similar to Naples where living rooms and streets interpenetrate throughout the city and 'each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life' (Benjamin 1978: 171), there were also very few clear demarcations between public and private spaces within Umbrella Square. Except for the closed tents that clearly marked private spaces, the distinction between what was public and private was extremely blurred and fluid in most areas within the protest site. The ability of and freedom for people to wander between activities and to seamlessly drift from public to private and vice versa helped constitute the porosity of Umbrella Square.

Besides the movement within Umbrella Square, people were also constantly moving in and out of the many different entry points to the square. As there was no single main entrance to the protest site, the porous nature of Umbrella Square allowed people to filter in and out of the site in all directions at different times of day. On a regular day in Umbrella Square, there would be office workers coming for their lunch breaks, students going to and returning from classes at various times, as well as protesters who only spent the day or the night in the square. In addition, there would also be tourists, journalists, volunteers, and other people who went in and out of the protest site at various times throughout the day. As Andrew Benjamin (2005 :38) points out, not only do movement and mobility 'characterise porosity', they also hold edges and borders in place. It could therefore be argued that it was in part the movement and mobility of different people within and going in and out of Umbrella Square that gave the protest site its porous nature by maintaining the border condition at its edges. Just as it was the case in Benjamin's Naples, porosity, in both spatial and temporal terms, was 'the inexhaustible law of the life' that kept reappearing everywhere in Umbrella Square (Benjamin 1978: 168).

The space of appearance and mobile centrality

In addition to all the physical attributes and transformations of Umbrella Square, the protesters and their actions also played a crucial role in giving the protest site its public character. It is, therefore, important to turn our attention to the more symbolic and bodily aspects of Umbrella Square's role as a protest site. As Arendt argues, the public realm is fundamentally a space of appearance, which she refers to as 'the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicit' (Arendt 1998: 198). To put it simply, the space of appearance is where one sees and is seen. In other words, it is not a space that can be located physically but a metaphoric space that exists between bodies. Even though a physical location is essential to any political action and protest, it does not necessarily have to be in place before the politics can happen. In fact, according to Arendt, the space of appearance actually 'predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm' as it 'comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action' (Arendt 1998: 199). In other words, it is the space between bodies that allows people to appear and politics to take place (see Arvidsson & Bengtsen, this volume).

In order to analyse Umbrella Square's function as a public realm, it is imperative to establish the relation between the space of appearance and the physical space of Umbrella Square. While the Umbrella Movement, like other occupations and protest movements, has depended on the built environment and the spatial aspects of the protest site, Judith Butler (2015: 71) maintains that 'it is equally true that the collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture'. On the one hand, the materiality, the centrality, and the spatial character of Umbrella Square played an important role in faci-

litating and sustaining the protest itself. The protest would not have lasted so long without the barricades, the tents, and the other physical facilities within Umbrella Square. On the other hand, Umbrella Square owed its existence, in large part, to the assembly of protesters. More importantly, the protest site was constantly shaped and reconfigured by the actions of the protesters. The protesters' appropriation and participation contributed to the openness of Umbrella Square and maintained its porosity. All in all, it was this dialectical relationship between the material and spatial characteristics of Umbrella Square and the space of appearance between the protesters that gave the Umbrella Movement its vitality and longevity.

By creating a porous and open public space that was self-managed and self-organised through collective effort, the protesters transformed Umbrella Square into a space of democracy, 'a unifying political space to which all citizens could relate' (Sennett 1998: 40). One important attribute of a democratic space is that differences not only have to co-exist, but they should also interact and provoke. As Sennett (1998: 20) argues, 'if in the same space different persons or activities are merely concentrated, but each remains isolated and segregated, diversity loses its force'. The ideal public realm, he suggests, is one where people can 'react to, learn from, people who are unlike themselves' (Sennett 2018: 595). The openness and porosity of Umbrella Square were precisely what allowed and encouraged different people to interact with each other. While Umbrella Square was not necessarily open to all, it was by and large an inclusive space that most people, even those with opposing political views, could enter and leave freely. In fact, activists and protesters inside Umbrella Square were often confronted, sometimes even attacked, by people who were against the occupation. Furthermore, although generally characterised as anti-establishment and pro-democracy, the protesters came from

diverse backgrounds and had very different political sympathies (Ortmann 2015; Veg 2015). Despite possessing the same ultimate goals of creating a more just and democratic Hong Kong, few protesters could agree on what these goals really meant or how they should be achieved. Nonetheless, although factional differences occasionally resulted in heightened tensions and conflicts, opposing voices were seldom silenced within Umbrella Square.

As such, it could be argued that the centrality of Umbrella Square was largely characterised by the culmination of encounters and the interaction of differences that took place inside the protest site. However, this centrality was actively claimed and maintained by the people in the occupation and is, as Andy Merrifield contends, 'always movable, always relative, never fixed, always in a state of constant mobilization and negotiation, within and without any movement' (Merrifield 2012: 276). Crucially, this mobile centrality of the occupation provided the protesters and the protest movement with a kind of resistance that prevents them from ever truly being evicted. For instance, even after the protest site in Mong Kok was cleared from the streets, riot police had to be deployed in the area to prevent the streets from being occupied again. However, instead of reoccupying the streets, the protesters gathered nightly to go on a mobile protest by wandering around the area with protest banners and signs (Gan 2017). Although the scale and the physical presence of these mobile protests were a lot less substantial than the occupation itself, they nonetheless represented a platform where the protesters could meet and an outlet through which they could express their opinions and demands. Moreover, even though there were occasional clashes with the police, the fluidity and unpredictability of the mobile protests meant that the protesters were rarely fully contained.

By accepting Arendt and Butler's notion that true

space only exists between bodies, as well as Merrifield's conception of mobile centrality, it would perhaps then be possible to conceive Sennett's distinction between borders and boundaries in a very different way. Instead of a physical membrane or wall, I suggest that the borders and boundaries can also be manifested in the body, or a group of bodies. A case in point consists of the two failed attempts by the protesters to expand the occupation area by reoccupying Lung Wo Road and surrounding the Government Headquarters (Sala and Branigan 2014; Cheung et al. 2014). When they strayed beyond the barricades that demarcated the limits of Umbrella Square to (re)claim more ground, the protesters – and their bodies – became the new limits of the square. The edge thus lay in the space between the protesters and the police during the standoffs. Whether this edge functioned as a border or boundary was largely dependent on the actions and movements of the bodies. It was a boundary – a closed wall – when the protesters and police were just holding their lines without any interaction between them, but it was transformed into a porous border when either side decided to charge, which often resulted in intense interactions and activities between the two groups. Perhaps it is rather telling that the protesters did not manage to penetrate the police defence line and had to disperse and retreat back to Umbrella Square on both occasions. The lesson from such encounters is clear: when the border becomes too porous and open, the weak will always be overpowered and eventually wiped out by the strong. As Sennett (2018) suggests, resistance is as important as porosity in maintaining a border condition, and it is the combination of both that defines the ideal public realm and gave Umbrella Square its longevity.

The end of Umbrella Square: aftermath and legacy

After 74 days, the occupation in Admiralty finally came to an end on 11 December 2014, when the police, alongside bailiffs executing a court injunction, dismantled the barricades, the tents, and other structures that remained inside Umbrella Square. More than 200 protesters who stayed until the last minute were arrested one by one, the entire site was quickly cleared and cleaned up in a matter of hours, and traffic was fully restored before night fell on the same day. Without achieving any concrete political gains (Tai 2018), the Umbrella Movement ended as abruptly as it had started, and life in Hong Kong had seemingly returned to normal. However, over the two and a half months of occupation, an entire generation of Hong Kongers encountered each other and politics inside Umbrella Square. It was an encounter that could not have happened without the openness and porosity of the square, and an encounter that could not be reversed or undone. Like Tahrir or Syntagma, Umbrella Square both enabled and engendered the space of appearance for the protesters and provided a 'public with a forum for its own collective expression (Merrifield 2012: 281). What had taken place in Umbrella Square represented the political awakening of an entire generation, and, as Tai (2018: 160) aptly puts it, 'seeds of hope for democracy have been deeply planted in Hong Kong's soil'. More significantly, it also illustrated the importance of the right to participate in the production of urban spaces. The production of public space, as Mitchell (2003: 35) contends, is a crucial 'means through which the cry and demand of the right to the city is made possible'. As public spaces are increasingly commodified and restricted in Hong Kong (Chan 2023), the production and transformation of different urban spaces have become even more vital to not only the political struggles in Hong Kong – as evident in the recent Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB)

movement – but also to the everyday resistance against commodification processes and oppression (see Arvidsson and Bengtsen, this volume).

As a result of their collective experience in Umbrella Square, Hong Kongers became more aware of how the planning and design of public spaces can affect their everyday life (HKPSI, 2014). While the protesters had demonstrated how openness and porosity could be maintained through public participation in Umbrella Square, the 'struggle to appropriate the public spaces and public goods in the city for a common purpose' (Harvey 2012: 73), as Harvey notes, is an ongoing process that had to be sustained after the Umbrella Movement. Soon after the occupation had ended, there was a huge public uproar when the government planned to privatise a stretch of the harbour front in Tsim Sha Tsui (Cheung 2015). A former government planner was also heavily criticised and ridiculed for proposing to scrap a historic tramline to accommodate more cars on the road (Poon 2015). Conversely, inspired by the positive experiences gained from the Umbrella Movement, some planners, green groups, and activists have put forward a proposal to pedestrianise a main road leading through Central to create a more porous and sustainable neighbourhood (Siu 2015). Even though the pedestrianisation of streets and roads in the city may not necessarily be the solution to all its problems (Sennett 2018), it at least represented a point of departure for an important dialogue on the public realm and the right to the city. Furthermore, since the end of the occupation, there have been plenty of public space initiatives and interventions taking place in various parts of the city; grassroots events such as Park(ing) Day and other insurgent uses of public space like pop-up theatres and mobile libraries have become increasingly common across Hong Kong (HK01 2016). As such, while the Umbrella Movement may have failed in achieving its political goals, I contend that

the impact of Umbrella Square on the public's perception of public spaces is both profound and long-lasting.

Concluding discussions

According to Sennett (2018), the ideal public realm is characterised by its openness and porosity. As opposed to the static, over-determined closed system that is in harmonious equilibrium, an open system is centred on incomplete form and constant evolution. A public realm is, therefore, as much a place as it is a process. By inviting public participation and stimulating the interaction of differences, spaces generated from an open system are, as Sennett argues, inherently democratic. While some scholars have questioned the Umbrella Movement's public and collective nature due to its lack of a 'radical critique of neoliberal capitalism and the underlying public-private dualism' (Tang 2019: 458), this chapter maintains that Umbrella Square, defined by its border edge that combined porosity and resistance, was an exemplary case of open and porous public space. More importantly, the public character of the protest site was not only the consequence of its spatial organisation, it also hinged upon the actions and encounters of the protesters within it. The interpenetration of movements and activities was particularly crucial as it gave Umbrella Square its spatial and temporal porosity. In addition to the open system, Umbrella Square also epitomised an urban form that is not unlike Rahul Mehrotra's conception of the *Kinetic City*. In contrast with the permanent and monumental Static City, the Kinetic City is 'temporary in nature' as it 'constantly modifies and reinvents itself' (Mehrotra 2008: 206). As illustrated by the various ways in which the protest site was appropriated and transformed by the protesters, it could be argued that Umbrella Square was a manifestation of both the open system and the Kinetic City.

Similar to the Kinetic City, the lessons learnt from Umbrella Square should be seen as more of a tactical approach rather than a design tool. It should also be stressed that this chapter is not a call to have the roads occupied again or to build another anarchist commune elsewhere. It would be rather missing the point to simply replicate the design and construction of Umbrella Square in other public spaces. Instead, it is imperative that architects, planners, and urbanists understand and appreciate what gave Umbrella Square its open and porous characteristics and how this can be useful in the planning and designing of future public spaces. As Sennett contends, it is essential to rethink the strategy for public space design by shifting the focus away from closed systems and over-determination to openness and porosity. This is especially critical in Hong Kong, where public spaces have become increasingly exclusive and inaccessible as a result of privatisation and commodification (Chan 2020). In addition, as evidenced by the recent Anti-ELAB protests, conflicts and tensions have continued to intensify since the Umbrella Movement as the Hong Kong government became more suppressive. While issues pertaining to the advancement of democracy and justice will ultimately require political solutions, how the public realm functions will be key to the urban development of Hong Kong. It has been established that an open and porous public space provides a platform on which people can interact and express differences, so the challenge for urbanists is how openness and porosity can be designed, implemented, and maintained. Perhaps the answer, as this chapter suggests, lies in the users and inhabitants of public space.

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NOTES

1 The protest site on Causeway Bay was cleared on 15 December 2014, five days after Umbrella Square. Hence, the entire Umbrella Movement was said to have lasted for 79 days, even though Umbrella Square only existed for 74 days.

03

Vandals in motion: the "where" of graffiti in the streets.

Erik Hannerz

I dare say that the lines I trace with my feet on the pavement walking to the museum are more important than the lines I will find there hanging on the walls inside. And it pleases me enormously to see that the line I trace is never straight, never confused, but has a reason to be like this in every tiny part.

Hundertwasser (1980: 111)

Introduction

It's a Thursday night, and I'm following "Thomas" out for what he calls "a quick round". We meet outside a subway station that already bears marks of Thomas' hand and start walking down one of the side streets. Every ten meters or so, he stops, picks out one of the cans from his small plastic bag, or a pen from his jacket, and writes his tag. Big or small, on doors, facades, windows, boxes and street signs, in black and in white. I lose count rather quickly. It is an interesting walk; he is constantly a meter or two ahead of me and we don't talk that much; more so, neither of us seems to know where we are going. I ask him what he thinks about the fact that most of these tags will be erased by this time tomorrow. He just shakes his head saying that that's part of the game and a reason to keep going. At the moment, this is what graffiti is to him: he has focused on doing trains before, but his main priority now is the streets. "It's more fun this way," he says, "you really have to work hard to get any result at all, if you do fifty tags few will notice it, but if you do that a couple of times a week, every week, for a year, then people will notice it." Also, this way of writing is possible to combine with family life: he can be out writing three times a week for an hour or so each time and then go home to his partner and child and get some sleep before going to work. We part ways and I look at my phone; we have been out for 45 minutes.

Since 2014, I have followed graffiti writers in and around Stockholm and Malmö, Sweden as they discuss, prepare, and do graffiti, with the intent of investigating how they perceive and make use of urban space. During this time, when I have lectured to students and the public about graffiti, the most common questions I have been asked concern the "where" of graffiti: Why do they put tags on apartment houses, or doors? Why don't they just use the open graffiti walls? Why do they have to mark their territory like

dogs, etc.? This is also a central concern to different forms of crime prevention that seeks to push graffiti away from certain spots through guards, cameras, increased cleaning, and at times through encouraging them to use other spots such as designated open graffiti walls (Kramer 2010; Hannerz & Kimvall 2019). Previous research on graffiti (cf. Cresswell 1992; Ferrell 1996; MacDonald 2001) has partly addressed this through stressing that graffiti writers construct their subcultural identities through a combination of visibility, risk-taking, and style. Hence, the city streets, trains and tracksides become attractive through how they can be used to realize these ideals. Yet, the meaning of the places, how they are marked out, what they enable, what they have come to mean, as well as their potential differences, are essential.

A number of works on graffiti (Halsey and Young 2006; Ferrell and Weide 2010; Brigenthi 2010) as well as on other subcultural groups (Borden 2001, Kidder 2017) suggests an intimate relation between how the city is gazed and how it is used. Instead of a dichotomous relation between art and vandalism, or the young versus the older, or legal versus illegal, this means investigating a dialectic relationship between meaning and materiality, how the activity of writing, and the motion of writing, is intimately linked to a particular image of the city.

In this chapter, I will draw upon the argument made by Ferrell and Weide (2010: 48f) that graffiti writers navigate the city through an experienced knowledge of the urban landscape and that graffiti therefore "cannot be understood outside its urban context". I will expand on this by pointing to how the navigation and gaze of the city is tied to a particular image of the city, and that graffiti writers' use of the city has to be seen as plural. The empirical data draws on six years of ethnographic research with over 250 Swedish graffiti writers, in and around Stockholm and Malmö, Swe-

den. I have focused on plurality and pursuing differences as to how and where participants do graffiti, but also include the beginners, inexperienced and anomalous (Hannerz & Tutenges 2022). A vital part of the ethnographic work has been to investigate how the same participants perceive and make use of a variety of places – such as city streets, trains, trams, highway walls, tracksides, legal walls or professional work as muralists—as well as how they move when doing so (cf. Bloch 2018). Aside from fieldwork and interviews, I have also worked with a variety of maps. As part of my fieldwork on the doings of graffiti, I would, with the informed consent of my informants, start an exercise app on my phone which would then create a detailed overview of how we would move and stop during the activity. Inspired by the work of Kevin Lynch (1960) and Helena Holgersson (2011), I also asked participants draw their own maps of the city as well outline their latest venture out writing graffiti.
These data point to substantial similarities between participants in relation to different kinds of places. Trains and city streets, to name but one distinction in my data, differs significantly with respect to how participants perceive, prepare, move, and do graffiti and document their works. These patterns are also stable across different activities by the same individuals, pointing to an intimate interrelation between meaning and materiality.

In this chapter, I will approach the specifics of what Creswell (1992) has deemed the "crucial 'where' of graffiti" in relation to the city streets. I will start by discussing how the city is defined and gazed by the participants and thereafter move to how this gaze is embodied through how the city is felt, navigated and used. As is suggested by the anecdote that opens this chapter, the creativity of graffiti writing in the city will be pursued through a variety of movements, both in terms of the individual bodies and the graffiti itself. I will point to how in their gaze toward the city, as well as

in making use of it, graffiti writers seek to establish a sense of comfort and familiarity in relation to their surroundings. This creates a particular subcultural trajectory that is distinctive to the city streets. The activity of writing the city symbolically and physically recreates the very gaze through which it is read in the first place. As Emma Nilsson (2010) notes, investigating this reflexive embodiment—where the activity, as well as the acting body, takes place—involves looking beyond the particular to instead focus on how these are synthetized into a particular subcultural *terrain.* In order to arrive at how meaning is negotiated, not just in relation to space, but in how subcultural identities and activities occur *through* space (cf. Gieryn 2000: 468), we must first understand how graffiti writers perceive the city streets.

The image of the city as the center

In his work on skateboarding, Ian Borden (2001) argues that teasing out the spatial aspects of the subcultural means investigating how participants *read* the city in order to identify, categorize, and make sense of the different urban materialities and how these can be used. In research on activity-based subcultures such as graffiti and skateboarding, this reading of the city is often referred to as a "subcultural gaze" that participants develop and through which their worlds and activities are structured, experienced and made meaningful. Gazing the city is then thought of as attending to the own body, both mentally and visually, in relation to its surroundings through which participants discover and order their own world (Borden 2001; Halsey and Young 2006; Brighenti 2010). In emplacing the subcultural, graffiti writers are similar to skateboarders or traceurs in parkour, in the sense that an otherwise abstract urban space is ordered and made sense of through its possibilities regarding how

it can be used. Urban creativity is thus based on a particular perception of the material surroundings (see Paulsson, this volume).

Kevin Lynch (1960) refers to this as images of the city. Lynch's point is how people order the city through the establishment of points of references and movements. Part of my fieldwork involved asking participants to define particular spaces, outlining their boundaries, their center, and what the basis was for this definition. As I noted above, I will here focus on those definitions that outlined what I will here refer to the city as the center. The other images of the city in my data include *the linear*, the *set apart*, and *the anomalous*, and these can be roughly analogous to particular kinds of places such as walls along highways and train tracks, trains as surfaces, and semi-legal and legal walls (Hannerz 2023a; 2023b; Hannerz and Kimvall 2019).

The image of the city as center differs significantly from these other images, first and foremost as it concerns the city as a whole, rather than a specific object or stretch of objects. Even though the exact boundaries of the image of the city as center differed between participants, it is defined through an apparent emphasis of the public, in the vernacular sense of the word: as that which is physically available and visibly accessible to anyone in the city (cf. Lofland 1998:8f; see Arvidsson & Bengtsen, this volume). This was obvious in how participants, regardless of the size of their city, stressed the presence of congested yet undifferentiated flows of people: congested as it refers to a substantial mass of people, undifferentiated as this mass was conceived of as being able to move in different directions, with different motivations, at different times of the day, along different routes and at different paces. The image of the city was thus seen as a moving abstract entity, something that could be entered or exited, yet that was demarcated by the limits beyond which these congested flows are perceived of as

declining. In this example, a participant describes the link between this undifferentiated flow and visibility:

> [A great spot] is that concrete box by the square that we passed, with the blue throw-up on it, that's definitely a good spot. But I mean really this whole area, and all the streets all around it, they are great streets because people will pass by them. And in Malmö, really, everything between say [area X] and [area Y] are important spots, because Malmö, thankfully in that way, is so dense. It is not like Stockholm or something, [...] Malmö feels small and dense enough that if it's fairly central then people will see it. (see figure 1) (Go-along, 6, 2015)

Similar to the quote above, the image of the city among the participants I followed was defined by what Lynch refers to as a *node*, as in a strategic foci, the core of a particular area of which it becomes the defining symbol, here referring to a square in Malmö that is at the center of the night life area. Gregory Snyder (2009) makes the analogy between tourists and graffiti writers in that they both seek out the beat of the city, the busy restaurant, and bar areas because of the density of people. Here this is represented by a node through which flows of people pass by, thus intensifying the exposure of the individual's graffiti (Ferrell and Weide 2010). Other examples of such nodes in my data are subway- or train stations. Still, even though visibility is at the core of this image of the city, it cannot be understood without the context—or if you prefer the image or gaze of the city—within which it is made meaningful.

In my data there are a number of different definitions of visibility. In relation to train tracks and highways, these refer to what can be seen from the vehicle passing by. With regard to trains, it largely refers to an indirect visibility of documenting the activity and then distributing it through

social media or subcultural media (Hannerz 2023a; 2023b). This complicates the previous research on graffiti's stress on a single subcultural gaze and a single definition of risk and visibility. Within the image of the city as the center, visibility referred to a saturation, of people being unable to miss your name, as is hinted at in the last part of the quote above. This further means that, whereas the trains and the tracksides were clearly limited either by the object itself or by the speed or distance of the vehicle to the wall (cf de Certeau 1984: 111f), the image of the city was rather defined by its entity, its conglomeration of what Lynch refers to as *paths*.

To Lynch (1960: 47f), paths refer to routes through which the flows of people move in a variety of directions around and through the node. In the excerpt above, this is exemplified through the main streets that both defined its boundaries and those that define its center, outlining an area of roughly six square kilometers in total (see figure 1.). Visibility, as well as the image of the city, is marked by density; it is thus at the same both direct and abstract. It refers to that which is there for people to immediately see and grasp. As is implied in the excerpt above, the flows of people are at the same time seen as unregulated and spontaneous: they can stop, turn around, look in different directions, approach, or distance themselves. Consequently, visibility here does not refer not to a single street or a single surface but, as above, to "everything" within these defined flows. Saturation is thus a necessary aspect so as to achieve visibility within the city.

More so, to Lynch (1960: 47), what defines a path is how streets and roads constitute the channels along which "the observer customarily, occasionally or potentially moves", stressing an affective aspect of familiarity, where visibility is defined through one's own body and movement. As one graffiti writer told me in relation to his writing:

> What matters is exposure. In part that a lot of people will

> be able to see it at these places, but also that these places are safe, it's the places where you are, that's where you look around, it's where you walk every day [...] it's not planned, it just what you feel like, or it can be, these, that you are on the way to a particular area where you know "here I haven't been in a while, I should go here". So that's one. Still, usually, it comes down to what you feel like when you are going out. (Go-along 12, 2018)

As is noted here, the immediate visibility and direct accessibility depart from the point of view of the own body and its habits as well as the affective experience of these. The city center is here described through the habitual and familiar with the own body as the point of departure, in part through choosing paths that you are already familiar with, where you move every day, yet also as these paths, through this habitual movement, are deemed as visible and accessible in the sense that many people move along them. The systematic aspect of visibility is here implied in the urge to fill up the city, to cover those parts where you have not yet been. As in the excerpt that opened this chapter, to get up—as in establishing a subcultural name—in the streets, requires a systematic activity of going out at least a few times a week so as to cover new areas and reclaim those spots that have been cleaned. The removal of graffiti is thus included as a habitual and taken-for-granted part of doing graffiti; in order to be seen, you have to be committed and systematic in your tagging (Hannerz 2023b).

Other participants joked about tagging as a job, something that they had to systematically attend to, sort of like taking the dog out for a walk. Following graffiti writers around also showed how tagging was habitually incorporated in their daily lives; they would do a few tags on the way to work, on the way to the grocery store, or when walking home from a

friend. This is the importance of Ferrell and Weide's (2010: 51) claim that writers reimagine the city as they navigate through it. The image of the city is what is there to be taken, at all times. The reading and writing of the city are thus experienced through walking the city.

The terrain of the city as the center

In discussing the urban city, Michel de Certeau (1984: 94ff) points to the potential subversiveness of walking, of creating new sentences, new trajectories and uses of the city. Through walking, we actualize and reestablish a particular spatial order of possibilities and restraints, but at the same time, we also invent new uses, pushing boundaries, by drifting away from the ascribed way of moving: shortcuts, holes in fences, the disregard of signs interdicting passage, etc. In the excerpts above, walking is stressed as a vital part of gazing and experiencing the city, and in many ways the doings of graffiti within the image of the city as the center captures de Certeau's double entendre of obeying while at the same time disputing a spatial order. Regardless of whether I followed writers in Stockholm, Malmö or followed participants on trips to other cities around and outside of Sweden—and notwithstanding the spatial, architectural, cultural and juridical differences between these cities—there was a striking similarity in how participants gazed, used and navigated through these different cities. First of all, this involved some serious amount of walking, as is also noted by Andrea Brighenti (2010: 329), not just in doing graffiti but also so as to get a hold of a new city, or experience and recreate one's own neighborhood:

> I know of no better way than being out writing so as to learn and discover all possible areas and nooks, short cuts

> and detours, you're like entering the city and then you're attempting to get lost so as to find new areas to paint, and then you're able to navigate both on the basis of your own pieces, and pieces that you come across in the city, they become landmarks around the city through which you can see how you should walk (Go-along 5, 2015)

de Certeau's argument that walkers rewrite the city, that spaces are given new meanings and new shapes through the combination of individual footsteps that are intertwined through the paths they collectively form, is here given an affective form. Walking is said to involve reading the city, exploring and exploiting the city through a kind of drifting, above described as purposely looking to get lost. Yet at the same time, walking here establishes a particular subcultural space: how the graffiti of yours and others' become "land-marks" used to navigate and make sense of the surroundings, how it establishes a particular familiarity. My field notes are thick with this kind of description, where participants explain how they use walking, and thus also reading and writing the city, so as to order the unknown, or to reorder the known. For example, they would give me directions by saying that I should turn at a particular tag or piece, or tell others "you know by that big silver by Scoop" and the others would nod and say "ah ok" (see Chan, this volume).

This familiarity of space, of the habitual and typical, is what philosopher Anthony J. Steinbock (1995: 163) hints at in his conceptualization of the concept of terrain, namely that it refers to an affective experience, a particular kind of at-tention required by a reoccurring use of a particular milieu that we count on. Architect Emma Nilsson (2010) develops Steinbock's ideas by using parkour as an empirical example of how the subcultural is emplaced in a particular kind of place, and how participants build an accumulated experi-

ence carried as a continuous anticipation activated in, and by, particular features of the environment, through which the activity and the acting subcultural body can be realized (Nilsson 2010: 132ff; Hannerz 2023b). Within the city of their own, or one they visited, the graffiti writers I followed sought out, much like the Nilsson's traceurs in parkour, a particular kind of place they felt that they were temporarily in control of, where they could pursue the familiar but also challenge themselves, places where they would instinctively know what to do and how to do it. As Steinbock (1995: 165) notes:

> The familiarity of a terrain has [...] to do with the way things in a terrain typically behave, which in turn efficaciously sketches out a range of future comportment, prefiguring this rather than that, highlighting one practice, dimming down another.

Terrain here refers to the emplacement and embodiment of the image of the city center, yet at the same time the terrain also makes things happen in a particular way. It orders activities and expectations, and as such terrain cannot be equaled to part of a particular landscape; rather, and similar to how Bourdieu (1998) conceives of the feel for the game, the concept of terrain refers to an inscription of norms, experiences and emotions tied to a particular activity realized *through* space. Hence, a shift in place is not necessarily a shift in terrain since the norms internalized through the activity make it possible to realize and extend the terrain in new places. In walking the city streets, participants thus sought to identify and realize the terrain, where they would feel comfortable; walking the same streets that you had walked before, doing graffiti on the same objects and walls as before, while at the same time widening the saturation of the visibility of their name. Similarly, experienced writers would feel ill at ease

when unable to realize a particular terrain: a particular part of the city that did not feel right, or where there were too many people out, or too few, which usually resulted in continuing walking so as to realize the terrain somewhere else or simply returning home. More so, whereas some of my informants were able to switch, say between the terrain associated with trains and that of the city as the center, others could not really come to terms with the differences in terms of preparations, risks and the activity:

> I have done trains, but really, it's really a different thing, like all this preparations, two hours of scoping the yard, the constant stress on control, risks, guards. It's not the same. I cannot relax, it's so hectic. It is not for me, I prefer the streets. (Field notes, Stockholm 2021).

This is not the place to define the differences between the subcultural terrains of trains and the streets in graffiti; what matters is rather the feeling of familiarity and control, and the affective aspect of the activity (see Paulsson, this volume). Above, the particular activity of doing graffiti on trains is discussed through what it is not: the streets, and how this incongruence produces a feeling of being out of place. Returning to de Certeau, the pursuit of the terrain refers to the possibilities that can be explored through a particular place. The subcultural corporality in the city thus includes a particular subcultural gaze of the city, a familiarity with particular aspects of the environment that draws participants to particular aspects of the environment. As note Mark Halsey and Alison Young (2006: 278), it is through writing that the graffiti writer is connected to the city. Subcultural rules, ideals, and risks are realized through the experience of the material surroundings: they are felt and incorporated. To become part of the subcultural is thus to learn how to control your own body and the extensions of

it in, and as I have argued, through, a particular place (Hannerz 2015; see Flaherty, this volume).

Writing the city as the center

To argue that graffiti writers enact a particular image of the city is to describe and capture how they perceive of possibilities and restraints and how they use these to navigate the city. The concept of terrain points to how this image of the city is acted upon; it describes

the familiarity established between the body, the activity and the environment (Nilsson 2010:134). In short, if the image of the city describes the affective conception of space, terrain rather points to the affective experience of it (Steinbock 1995: 163).

Below (figure 1) is a map of an actual route when doing graffiti. The yellow line refers to how we moved, and the red dots mark the graffiti being made. It is the same city as was described above in relation to the boundaries of the image of the city. Hence, I have added the defined boundaries of that quote –even though this was the movement of another writer—to point to how the movement overlaps with a shared, yet particular, subcultural image of the city. This particular map describes a 90-minute outing, even though we did stop for various other reasons during that time, such as picking up beer, retreating to a remote corner in a park to let things cool off, etc. When I have collected maps from participants, either through asking them to draw maps of how they moved the last time they did graffiti, or through following them physically, the terrain covers a similar multidirectional pattern. The paths taken overlap and at times involve turning around walking in the opposite direction on a parallel street. This is an obvious difference compared to other activities within graffiti, in relation to trains

Figure 1: Map of the doings of graffiti, the inner and outer circles marking the definition of the flows of people suggested earlier.

for example, in which the maps described a rather straight trajectory to and from the activity.

The terrain of the city center, and the image of the city upon which it is based, is here affectively enacted. The incorporated and embodied memory of space refers not to a single surface but rather an abstract and direct notion of the city. Notably, Bloch (2018) has argued for the importance of place in relation to subcultural narratives; however, my point here is less the plurality of narratives surrounding a single activity and more how different terrains enable certain subcultural gazes and activities than do others. The image of the city as based on the condensed and undifferentiated flows of people, and visibility as the direct available, is enacted through the spontaneous, habitual yet spontaneous aspect of the ac-

tivity. Participants would pick spots as they came into view through the motion across the city—as in a door, a wall, a box, a bench, etc. More so, the affective aspect of the terrain, the luring and motivating, is obvious in terms of direction. Even though the participants I followed would return to some spots and streets, the route taken was not planned for in advance but developed throughout the movement. Among participants this was referred to as a "round", as "in going for a round." This is captured in the map above. The pace, direction and intensity of the activity was negotiated on the go, as part of realizing the subcultural terrain, and based on the affective evaluation of a particular place or situation.

In discussing vandalism and shoplifting, Jack Katz (1988: 54) notes how part of the thrill is experiencing a deviant air, of feeling and knowing that the transgression can very well take place, but the actual doing is left to circumstance and creativity. The act is thus already anticipated but dressed in spontaneity (Hannerz 2023a). Similarly, during these "rounds" there was an anticipated thrill in the uncertainty of being surprised by the material object, of being drawn into the activity. This embodied memory of space means that the activity can be initiated and stopped at any time. If things were perceived as precarious—a lot of people out, a car that seemed to show up at different intervals, or a passer-by staring too long—the activity would then be temporarily suspended or even aborted. If things were going fine and there was both motivation and paint the activity of these "rounds" could go on for hours with the participants choosing at each intersection where they felt like going next. The habitual aspect of graffiti in the city streets means that it requires a minimum of preparation, usually just bringing a marker or a spray can, which to these participants were just as evident to pick up when leaving the house, as was the cell phone, keys or cigarettes. This affective aspect of the terrain, the luring

and motivating, is also what guided participants when doing graffiti, in establishing sequences across buildings through the flow of the activity. The terrain and the habitual and affective activities associated with it are thus reproduced in new spaces through an undifferentiated and spontaneous use of the city—the surfaces chosen are not planned in advance but appropriated as they come in sight: it does matter if it is a door, a wall, a sign, etc. Similarly, the terrain enables different sizes and types of graffiti, as it includes an immediate analysis of time and space:

> I guess I have always belonged to that group of writers that writes spontaneously, that is I'm pretty fast in pulling out the marker, often I don't even have the time to reflect on whether it's a good moment or not, it just goes automatically, […] my friends thinks that I'm a bit wack cause I don't look around that much, I just walk and write, and walk and write, pulling up the marker or the can […] If I see a spot, if I wanna take it, I make sure no one sees me and then I take it, it's not that I see a spot and then chose to return there later, rather I see a spot and then I make sure to immediately take it and then move on. (Go-along 17, 2016)

The stress on the automatic is crucial, that is, being able to in an instant evaluate a particular spot and its possibilities and then acting upon it. But so is ownership in the conquering of new terrain by "taking it." In arguing against the assumption of the broken windows theory that offenders are reacting to dilapidated neighborhood conditions, Peter St. Jean (2007) instead stresses the offenders' proactive relation to their surroundings, that they gaze the neighborhood so as to seek out and capitalize on the possibilities certain locations offer, what he refers to as the ecological advantages: places that they can comfortably and legitimately access, and that

offer an easy get-away should the police arrive (2007: 20). When following participants out doing graffiti, they would explain that it was first when they approached a particular surface during these rounds that they would decide what to do, and thus how long time they would have to spend doing it. Tags, as described above, are made quickly within seconds (figure 2); pieces (figure 3) and throw-ups (figure 4) require more work and thus more time and depend on assessing the situation as well as what the surface enables. One of my informants remarked that this was like an instinct, that you would maybe start with a tag and this would then evolve into a throw up or quick piece, "if this felt right". Others described how they did not really know how long a piece would take to finish, but they would nevertheless feel instinctively if it was possible or not. Even though a piece in a particular spot was often planned in advance, the decision of which of the forms to use was most often, during my fieldwork in the streets, decided on the spot, based on whether things felt right, and an immediate evaluation of time and possible risks, all referring to previous experiences of the same spot, or of similar ones.

Accordingly, risks of detection were thus handled through the activity and the terrain rather than directly. The lack of direction and the constant walking and criss-crossing between streets were part of avoiding the police and witnesses, as are the swiftness of the activity and its spontaneous character, as you are then constantly moving about:

> You know, if you're just doing [tags] as you are moving when out walking, just plain simple and in a relaxed way, I think, with the energy you have is rather, as you're just out walking. You're not doing something foolish, if it looks like you're doing something foolish then maybe people react as to how you're walking or that you look rather shady [...] It's just doing as you move and then just continue walking (Go-along 16, 2016).

Figure 2: Tag by Uzi (Stockholm, 2022).

Figure 3: Piece by Uzi (Malmö, 2019).

Figure 4: Throw-ups by Uzi (Copenhagen, 2023).

The subcultural corporality here refers, not only to the knowledge and movement of the body in doing graffiti, but also the movement as a whole. Risks are not only perceived and made sense of through the own body, they are also handled through the body, ideally to the point where the individual movement in writing and in walking passes as normal (Goffman 1963; Katz 1988). This was a constant factor when doing fieldwork, participants disciplining their bodies so as to blend in and go about their doings unnoticed: constantly moving about, making short stops, hiding the writing with their bodies, acting as if they are drunk if they are out on a weekend night, pretending to be talking on the phone, pissing, or waiting for a bus. The gendered and racialized aspects of this passing as normal are obvious here, as not all bodies are able to pass as normal at all times (Motts and Roberts 2014; Naegler and Salman 2016; Hannerz 2017; Fransberg 2021), yet different bodies enacted a similar gaze yet from different experiences. Female graffiti writers, for example, stressed that they played up their femininity so as to discourage passers-by from drawing unnecessary conclusions "Nobody sees me cause I don't look like a graffiti writer, I am just a girl." Further, a number of the excerpts above are from female participants. As notes Nilsson (2010), terrain refers to incorporated embedded social memories of previous emplacements.

Rewriting the image of the city

The concept of terrain describes realizing a particular activity, and as such, a particular corporality through a particular kind of space. Yet, in so doing, the terrain mimics and rewrites the very image of the city on which it is based. The systematic aspect of the activity of covering such an abstract notion of place paves the way for the spontaneous aspect in

terms of the movement and choice of spots for doing graffiti. Still, this also has the consequence that, in contrast to graffiti on trains where the object is emphasized, the terrain of the city as the center does not focus on a particular object or form of graffiti but rather, as notes Brighenti (2010), the continuous sequences of surfaces that these objects constitute. Ferrell and Weide (2010) note that the reimagination of the city as a series of spatial opportunities in their study meant that participants would seek out the durable and avoid that which will be immediately painted over. It might be due to differences in terms of cleaning, but the participants I followed in Sweden rarely commented on this, especially when tagging. Rather, their activities showed little concern as to where they wrote and on what kind of surface. In short, they did not see the trees for the forest. As in the opening excerpt, when asked afterwards whether some of these spots would not be cleaned and removed within hours, participants would shrug their shoulders arguing that it was worth it anyway; someone would see it, and the cleaners would not be able to remove all the tags along a particular street at the same time. Instead, being out tagging was often described as a kind of flow where they would tag one spot and then continue directly from there to a new spot next to it, and then another, thus extending the writing so that the single tags were ceaselessly extended by a swift motion between each new spot (cf. Kidder 2011).

Brighenti (2010: 329) describes how there is a perpetual aspect to tagging in contrast to other forms of graffiti, as the single tags and surfaces are not perceived as separated or separating, but rather as symbolic representations of a whole. I would add to this by arguing that what matters here is first and foremost the terrain. As noted above while following participants when doing graffiti, the form chosen depended on a perceived flow and opportunity, participants mixing tags, throw-ups and quick pieces during the same

"round". Still, as is Brighenti's point, every single bit of graffiti added to the previous bits, and every round of graffiti added to and continued previous rounds, thus creating a dialectic relationship between the activities, the artefacts, the individual bodies and the subcultural structures of meaning that validate these relations; the sequences of tags in the activity are extended to interconnected sequences or series that run through the city.

The interdependency between the image of the city, as the direct and physically visible, and the terrain, has the consequence that each new surface and form of graffiti is given its meaning by what you have previously done. Your name, and thus your subcultural identity, gains its meaning through density, through these interconnected series that are constantly extended in time and space, condensed, cleaned away, lost and reclaimed, ideally so that the length and density of these series covers the plurality of alternative routes when moving within this defined public so that your name cannot be avoided. In many ways, this is similar to how graffiti as a whole is perceived by participants. Through writing you become your tag; other participants will refer to you through your tag; and your pieces and throw ups just as your tags add up to this whole. Accordingly, the terrain mimics and rewrites the image of the city as defined by the congested and undifferentiated public flow.

The emplacement of graffiti constructs nodes and intensifies paths, which when connected establish a subcultural whole. Consequently, visibility is being defined, executed and validated through the very motion through which it is perceived. This is also why Brighenti (2010) hits the nail on its head in arguing that writers, in relation to the city streets, are first and foremost "walkers", as a photo or a film, just a single tag, cannot capture this definition of visibility. Just as the image of the city as the public flows, it is only by moving through the city that you can experience and validate these series.

A number of studies on graffiti have noted the essential role of documentation within graffiti, as well as the role of subcultural media in publishing these (Austin 2001; Jacobson 2015; see Hannerz & Kimvall, this volume). Still, the representation of the subcultural individual within the terrain of the city—the experienced overall impact of the series of tags by the same individual —is not only hard to capture through a photograph, or film, it was rarely documented at all by the graffiti writers. This sets graffiti in the streets apart from graffiti on trains, for example (Hannerz 2023c). During both fieldwork and interviews, including going through individual writers' photo collections, this was clear: what was being documented in relation to this terrain were single pieces in certain places. The vast majority of graffiti produced within the terrain of the streets in forms of thousands of tags and throw-ups and quick pieces were rarely documented, in part due to the sheer quantity of graffiti, but also as the singular is given its meaning through the whole. Instead, similar to the activity, the systematic aspect of covering and saturating different parts of the city, of extending the series of tags in both time and space, can only be directly experienced and validated through walking the city.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have argued that in order to understand the *where* of graffiti in the streets, we have to investigate not only the affective conception of space but also the affective experience of it. The first of these I have referred to as the image of the city as the center, which emphasized the public in the general and accessible. The latter I have referred to as a terrain, which describes the familiarity established between the body, the activity and the environment (Nilsson 2010: 134). I have shown how the interrelationship

between meaning and materiality establishes a motion that first of all is systematic and repetitive with an intense stress on the doings, an almost ceaseless motion of doing graffiti in a variety of forms through a variety of tools and colors that ameliorate the inclusion of every possible urban object: white on dark surfaces, and black on lighter; markers for smaller surfaces and spray paint for bigger. Second, I have pointed to how this motion is marked by a lack of a clear trajectory; rather, it is deeply affective; there is no predefined route or end, neither are the spots for writing singled out prior to the activity, since their appropriation becomes part of, or rather becomes, the motion itself. In my data this distinguishes tagging in the city streets from other forms of terrains, such as, for example, the train tracks and highways where activities are planned to a larger extent. Third, the combination of these two aspects of the motion through the city is that the affective experience of space mimics and rewrites the affective conception of space. Each moment of writing becomes part of a larger project through which participants establish their own paths and nodes through their writing over time. The temporal aspect of this motion, the halt of writing, merely means a temporary break from the activity; it will be picked up and continued another day, either in the same place or somewhere else. Fourth, I have argued the stress on walking also involves an indirect approach to risk, of always being on the move, meaning that should you be detected by an outsider and the police arrive minutes later, you will already be somewhere else, but also that the series created through space, and extended both geographically and temporally, rather effectively counters attempts to remove graffiti from the streets.

Accordingly, I have pointed to how the relation between the image of the city and the associated terrain is deeply meaningful to participants, that it constitutes an emplacement of graffiti within the accessible, within the

everyday spaces of the city that are everywhere around you. Rafael Schacter (2014: 149) refers to this emplacement of graffiti in the public as activities within “normalized spaces of the everyday” meaning that that place and action are interwoven to the point that it becomes habitual, but also permissive. Graffiti in the city streets differs from graffiti in other places, such as on trains or along tracksides, as its subcultural gaze and the terrain distinguishes it from other activities and terrains in graffiti: the activity is unconstrained in terms of location and the chosen objects, producing a subcultural gaze—the attention, both mentally and visually, to the details of urban space (Borden 2001)—and a terrain defined by a continuous motion through the city streets. This way, graffiti is, and should be, where you and everyone else are.

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04

Prolonged graffiti articulation in late 1980's and 1990's Lithuania:

old-school writers' interpretations of graffiti form, content and space

Veronika Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė

Introduction

In this chapter I present a case of the dissemination and development of illegal graffiti writing, as a specific form of urban creativity in Lithuania from the late Soviet period to 2000. My aim is to reconstruct the history of the early graffiti scene, based on the memories of Lithuanian old-school writers. The data was collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 23 people who got involved in graffiti writing in the aforementioned period and later[1]. The analysis is supplemented with additional sources including interviews with early graffiti writers published in subcultural and other media, as well as the collective accounts of first generation graffiti writers and b-boys in social networks intended for graffiti reminiscences, where memories, photos, and video recordings on early period graffiti from the Baltic States and other regions of then-USSR are actively shared.

I have organized the interview data into the following main themes, which recur in the old-school writers' narratives about graffiti development in Lithuania in the 1980s and 1990s: first, the dissemination of information about graffiti; second, the available means of writing; third, local interpretations of the tag, throw-up, and piece (TTP) standards; and fourth, Lithuanian writers' rather conservative perception of space.

In many respects, the development of the early Lithuanian graffiti scene is similar to that of other European cases in terms of the challenges posed by the problems of paint quality and shortage, adaptation of DIY technologies, the constant lack of information and, correspondingly, peculiar interpretations of graffiti canons, the catalytic impact of graffiti "missionaries", and the spatial conservatism of the early writers, as well as their concentration on local neighbourhoods rather than "going all city". Those features are quite typical for early graffiti development in other regions of Europe and around the world (Novak 2017; Tsamantakis,

Pangalos 2016; Bordin 2013; Schmieding 2011; Manco et al. 2005). However, the case of Lithuania is exceptional due to a considerably extended early period caused by the specific economic and social conditions of the post-communist transition.

The European regions situated on the western side of the Iron Curtain soon adapted to the increased demand for aerosol paint and graffiti-related media production. However, in late Soviet societies, economic issues meant that the problems of paint quality and availability were not resolved. Following the 1990s, Lithuania and other former Soviet countries plunged into a deep recession and aerosol paint became a luxury. Other goods and practices vitally important for mastering graffiti – such as trips abroad – were not widely available until the late 1990s. As a result, in Lithuania's case, the period of primary graffiti articulation lasted not for several years but for over a decade, until the very end of the 1990s.

The history of early graffiti in Lithuania reveals another side-story about the transition period of a post-communist state as well as the significant changes during the 1990s in national politics, economy, and everyday life – a period when many cultural and social boundaries were shifted, and the society was eventually redistributed into the winners and losers of the new order (Norkus 2012). Twenty five or so years after these historical events, having established a certain emotional distance, an intensified demand for collective reflection emerged, not only in the local sociological and historical studies, but in contemporary art as well.[2] Graffiti development in the context of this intense post-communist transition is fascinating as a testimony of this time, summarising the ambivalent experiences of the 1990s (i.e., anti-nostalgic writers' attitudes towards the period of constant shortage and frustration which, at the same time, was marked with almost unrestricted artistic freedom).

This prolonged development of Lithuanian graffiti in the late 1980s and 1990s enabled the slowly maturing graffiti scene to progress more rapidly following the year 2000. At that time, economic restrictions were eased, yet no effective graffiti control system had been established. As a result, the quantity, quality, and diversity of graffiti inscriptions grew immensely in Lithuanian cities (especially Vilnius) until 2010. Simultaneously, local graffiti writers and street artists engaged in successful cooperations with graffiti communities all over Europe and beyond. The most prominent examples of internationally recognized representatives of the Lithuanian scene include street artist Ernest Zacharevic/Zach, now established in Penang, Malaysia, and the graffiti writer Sput/Skel (TPG, KGS), who was described as "one of a surprisingly small number of overseas writers who has had an impact on the London graffiti scene" (Forsyth 2009: 96). After 2000, foreign graffiti writers and street artists visiting Lithuania became a common phenomenon, and the relatively peripheral scenes of the Baltic States gradually started emerging on the global graffiti map– both locally in their territory and through the activity of the Baltic writers in other European and world scenes[3].

Mid-1980s: The very beginning of graffiti in the late Soviet era

Even though class division did not officially exist in Soviet society, social stratification was shaped by the structure of political nomenclature and professional employment that either limited or expanded the possibilities for certain population groups to consume "exceptional goods" in conditions of mass deficit. Being a representative of a subculture in the late Soviet period meant the employment of Western goods and stylistic adaptation of images to criticise the Soviet sys-

tem. In the USSR, subcultures were associated with the ambition of the middle class youth to consume Western (pop) culture as well as its generated images of pacified rebellion (Kraniauskas 2012: 176). Since Western audio recordings and imported elements of style (e.g., jeans) circulated in the black market and cost a fortune, an economically and/or socially privileged situation facilitated active involvement in subcultural movements. The economic costs of subcultural participation could also be reduced through social capital, for example, by participating in an effective networking and economy of favors system as well as the communal sharing of information and other limited resources.[4]

In 1985, when the USSR launched the Perestroika reforms, certain cultural and economic restrictions were lifted and the activities of subcultural and various other independent youth groups intensified. The same period saw a boom in the promotion of breakdance, which was allowed and even fostered by the official state structures as "sports activities for youth" (Polsky 2018). In an atmosphere fuelled by unexpected freedom, with a still active long-standing black market system offering Western cultural production, it was only a matter of time until the first cultural products related to hip-hop and graffiti emerged in the black market. Interestingly, the first popular hip-hop and graffiti media to circulate in the USSR was not one of the classic New York based graffiti films or books – it was an illegally recorded video tape of the BBC documentary "A Street History: Hip-Hop Documentary" (1984).[5]

The film, the personality of a fourteen year-old b-boy Vadim *Meikšāns*/Krys[6] who had seen it, and the specific local context of Riga, formed a truly explosive combination, leading to the emergence of graffiti culture in Latvia, the Baltic States and the entire USSR. This is symbolised by the first piece produced in Riga by Krys in 1985. In the context of other USSR cities, Riga stood out for its one essential

advantage for the effective spread of graffiti – the household chemistry factory *LatvBytChim*. This was the only plant in the entire USSR that manufactured aerosol nitro enamel paints for metal surfaces. Therefore, the supply of affordable spray paint in Latvia and the Baltic region was far greater than other parts of the USSR.

From 1986, "inter-union" breakdance festivals were held several times a year. This network uniting the b-boys and b-girls from various USSR republics became the social medium where sparse theoretical and practical information about graffiti circulated. With pirated VHS tapes of rap videos and fundamental films – *Wild Style, Style Wars, Beat Street, Breakin', Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* – basic information about graffiti gradually reached all parts of the USSR. During this early development stage of the graffiti scene, Latvian b-boys Krys, Malysh and Picasso (Petre 2019: 22) were the most accomplished graffiti writers actively involved in information gathering, skill development, and the dissemination of graffiti culture in the Soviet breakdance network. The community of local writers took form in Lithuania several years later (around 1987–1989) and was less active than their Latvian colleagues.

In the early 1990s, the wave of interest in breakdance subsided; huge political, economic and social changes in the recently independent Lithuania[7] forced most of the representatives of the developing scene to take up adult responsibilities that were not compatible with active writing. That is why only a handful of the first generation writers continued their interest in graffiti in independent Lithuania. In contrast to Latvia, where the expertise of the first b-boy writers enabled them to carry on graffiti-related activities throughout the complicated 1990s, the first graffiti wave in Lithuania did not develop any more prominent articulations of form, content or a stable subcultural community.

1990:s The second coming of graffiti in Lithuania

When breakdance lost its popularity in the 1990s, the dissemination of graffiti lost its social medium. Subcultural knowledge developed slowly, in a disorganised manner, in small, isolated groups of enthusiasts. Following a standstill in the early 1990s, graffiti practice was revived in the cities of Lithuania in around 1993–1994 (Kazakevičius 2004). At this stage, trips abroad and direct contact with more developed graffiti traditions in Western Europe served as the main source of information about graffiti as well as a powerful impetus to take an interest in or try to imitate graffiti forms (not always knowing their exact content or meaning). In the 1990s, Germany, the UK, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands were among the most frequently mentioned countries for such inspiring journeys. Naturally, the aim of travelling was not to purposefully learn more about graffiti culture; graffiti manifested itself more unexpectedly – while visiting relatives, on sightseeing tours, and, sometimes, trying to earn some illegal money. The photos of graffiti inscriptions made during such trips later served as the source of information and educational material about the phenomenon for newly emerging small local graffiti communities.

Following this initial inspiration, graffiti-related information was later sought after in all possible ways. In the era before the internet, these were usually fragments from mainstream media, especially cable TV (e.g. MTV, SAT1, Deutsche Welle), where information about graffiti was fragmentarily presented in rap videos and news programmes as an exotic curiosity or as a product of pop culture and the entertainment industry:

> When we returned from Prague, I had made only some three or four photos of graffiti to save film. And I was so

> amazed by those letters, I tried writing something by myself, in sketchbooks, at home. Then, there was that commercial on MTV that I remember really well. I don't recall what was being advertised, but the commercial showed certain contours being drawn with aerosol paint. Well, those were two seconds at most, but they are still in front of my eyes; I can still see those contour lines being drawn. [...] Basically, all that we had at that time were photos and certain bits from television. (Inf_23)

Hip-hop documentary material from the 1980s and graffiti feature films were essential sources of knowledge for the first b-boy writers. However, for the writers of the 1990s these films were known as classics but were not necessarily seen. They were normally watched only *after* getting familiar with graffiti culture – sometimes well beyond 2000 – and never constituted a primary source of information for the second generation of Lithuanian writers. Meanwhile, *Subway Art* by Chalfant and Cooper, *Spraycan Art* by Chalfant and Prigoff, as well as other books documenting graffiti, were acknowledged by most of the writers of the 1990s as a significant source of knowledge on various graffiti forms, styles, content and history (see Hannerz & Kimvall, this volume). These books often changed hands while learning how to write, and gradually became a sort of collective property of the entire graffiti community:

> "Subway Art" – do you know the book? Well, it's a sort of... a graffiti bible. Somebody went to great pains to get it for me. When I gave the book to somebody from a younger generation, it came back to me in bits and pieces; pages had been thumbed and fragile. (Inf_17)

In terms of style, the New York graffiti tradition served as an important reference point for early Lithuanian writers;

however, more significant trends – especially in the 1990s – came from Germany. The German style was adopted from direct and obvious encounters with live German graffiti culture, through German and Polish hip-hop magazines[8] and also through the DIY graffiti documentaries that were highly popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, distributed in the form of illegally recorded video tapes and (later) CDs.[9] In the 1990s, the initial articulation of both the classic New York graffiti style and its European interpretation occurred through the imitation of these available sources of information:

> Sometime in 1996–1997, I received several magazines from Germany. I remember there was even a book about German graffiti enclosed as a present. I guess it was one of the biggest sources of inspiration for us; you know, you could list through the pages, look at scores of pictures. We tried to copy them to learn those lines, to master that German technique a bit, to grasp it. [...] I saw the film "Wild Style" when I was in Germany too. But when you see such beautiful German pieces and murals live – the old works and styles no longer have that effect, that impact on you. (Inf_23)

"Graffiti missionaries" played an especially important role in the formation of local graffiti styles in the 1990s. These were the people with better-developed graffiti writing skills and more extensive subcultural experience who usually came from abroad willing to share their knowledge, skills, and expertise. As with other developing scenes, the participation of "graffiti missionaries" was essential for graffiti dissemination and for establishing connections between the local and global graffiti communities (Bordin 2013: 316). In the context of the 1980s generation, this role fell on Latvian graffiti writers from Riga who came to breakdance festivals

and stayed in contact with local b-boys. In the 1990s, the Lithuanian Americans – i.e., the children and grandchildren of those who fled to the West during World War II and the postwar period, who visited Lithuania after it regained its independence – took over this role. Having established contacts with local writers, they acted as graffiti mentors:

> I had long wanted to paint in Tėvynė,[10] especially before any other Lithuanian American writers could. [...] There was some stuff around but most of it was very primitive, local styles weren't highly developed yet and was a reason why I was sharing hip-hop culture out there. To kind of help cats see the best sides of hip-hop so they don't get distracted by the MTV garbage and gangster shit which isn't hip-hop at all. (Inf_22)

> We got acquainted with a Lithuanian from Chicago, who had come here to study, and he brought with himself that feeling of real graffiti. His sketches were just amazing... I mean, they contained some letters, some characters, some biblical text in English. And you could clearly see that there was a story evolving around those letters. Even if it was quite simple, it was really powerful. Just a couple of colours, the technique, certain objects, some clouds or something like that. So, his style had a really great impact on us. (Inf_12)

One of the first graffiti pieces in Vilnius was produced in 1993 by the graffiti "missionary" K984, a Lithuanian American writer from Los Angeles. His second unauthorised piece survived in the Old Town of Vilnius for nearly 20 years (1998–2018) and served as an important reference point in terms of style and technique in an otherwise unexciting local graffiti landscape (Figure 1):

> K984 had set that insane, highly individual, highly unique tone. He was so different. So powerful. He was original, unprecedented; so alive and so real. And I'm telling you, when I saw him, it was really something. And if his piece survived for so many years, it means that others also felt that. (Inf_13)

An episode from 1996, when the writers from France, Yann Lazou/Lazoo and Olivier Fontana/Megaton, visited Vilnius and produced several commissioned murals, is also firmly imprinted in the memory of the 1990s graffiti writers (Kazakevičius 2004). A fairly large group of local graffiti enthusiasts observed them working on a mural dedicated to the commemoration of Frank Zappa (Figure 2). The possibility to observe artists working (or at least to have a chance to study their blackbooks) was like participating in a real-time graffiti workshop. Subsequently, the pieces the "missionar-

Figure 1: K984 piece, Vilnius, 1998.

ies" left behind in public places of Vilnius became centres of attraction for the developing local graffiti community. They served as an important source of information, making it possible to observe better quality graffiti locally without having to travel abroad. Simultaneously, towards the end of the 1990s, the Lithuanian graffiti scene became more open to writers from various social backgrounds.

Issues regarding paint and other graffiti supplies

Before the collapse of the USSR, the Latvian chemistry factory *LatvBytChim* had been producing only five colours of aerosol paint. The paint quality was poor; there were no replaceable caps, default nozzles were narrow, small, and highly inconvenient for long-term writing:

Figure 2: Frank Zappa memorial mural in Vilnius, by French graffiti artists Lazoo and Megaton, Vilnius, 1996.

> Now, it's relatively easy to produce a simple throw-up, to replace a cap. Five minutes and you're done. In those days, well… You were standing with such shitty caps, jeez… Paint would get absorbed without actually filling… You had to do the work at least a couple of times. For one day, for the second day… It was such a… (Inf_17)

> The colour choice was just ridiculous. Red, blue yellow, [green]. The situation with the black colour was tragic; it was impossible to get. You just couldn't buy it anywhere. (Inf_14)

DIY technologies to obtain new colours and shades were the only way out of this technically restraining situation. Caps were replaced by adapting various nozzles from other household aerosol products. Spray width was also corrected by adding a syringe needle to a nozzle to achieve the "skinny cap" effect. Such improvised technologies were employed widely until the late 1990s, when affordable aerosol paint as well as other graffiti supplies finally appeared on the market. Similar DIY technologies are mentioned in many early graffiti development stories, especially when paint manufacturers were unable to meet the needs of writers (Cooper & Chalfant 1984: 33. See also Tsamantakis & Pangalos 2016: 29; 129 for DIY technologies amongst old-school Greek writers).

Despite the limited accessibility of spray paint and its poor quality, the writers of the 1980s (at least in Lithuania) were not inclined to experiment with alternative means, compared to, for example, Brazil, where latex paint was prevalent at the time (Manco et al. 2005: 33). The identity of the late Soviet subcultural graffiti in Lithuania was mainly associated with aerosol and efforts to reiterate the writing principles seen in graffiti films and rap videos; there was no experimenting with other techniques, perhaps as a means

of ensuring that this new graffiti tradition clearly stood out from memorial or defamatory folk graffiti, political graffiti, punk, heavy metal, football fan and other subcultural inscriptions that had become widespread in public urban spaces in the late Soviet period, especially after the launch of Perestroika (Butautas, 2020: 115).

In the 1990s, following the declarations of independence of the Baltic States and the gradual collapse of the USSR, the factory *LatvBytChim* stopped its production and supply. The resulting severe shortage of locally produced paint was resolved in either of the following ways. Writers either brought spray paint from abroad (in all of the cases mentioned in the interviews – from Germany), or alternative techniques were employed, such as the use of enamel paint and brushes, striving to achieve the authentic shape of graffiti letters as much as possible (Figure 3).

The aforementioned solutions to the paint shortage problem remained viable until approximately 2000, when, due to economic growth, sufficient supplies of quality affordable aerosol paint became available. Although various foreign spray paint brands emerged sometime in the mid 1990s, all informants mentioned their "exorbitant" and "outrageous" prices and non-equivalent quality. Thus, graffiti writing with locally acquired spray paint (as well as with self-imported German spray paint) soon turned into a very costly hobby affordable only for members of the higher social class or older writers with a more stable income.

The practice of "racking" (i.e., stealing), which could have made the social starting position for all graffiti writers more equal, was not widespread in 1990s Lithuania. Aerosol paints sold in household stores and gas stations were strictly guarded and were unavailable for self-service shopping because of their scarcity, high price, and exclusivity. In the late 1990s, the only way of acquiring quality paint without having to pay for it was through participation in emerging le-

Figure 3: "No Fear", the piece by Eku (NWS), painted with brushes and enamel paint; Vilnius (Naujoji Vilnia), 1997.

gal graffiti jams, and through social campaigns, where, when used in moderation, some paint could be saved for personal projects.

This constant deficiency in paint, along with the highly limited dissemination of information, constituted one of the key reasons for the extremely slow development of Lithuanian graffiti in the 1990s. It took a long time for writers to collect the required amount of paint as well as the desired set of colours for a decent piece, which meant that writing almost never occurred spontaneously. Generally, it was a scrupulously planned and calculated event. Large, coloured pieces produced by local writers were quite rare until the late 1990s. Most of the ideas that could not be implemented on walls due to the aforementioned reasons were transferred to neatly kept blackbooks. However, just like other quality graffiti supplies, these were also extremely

hard to come by:

> We all dreamt of making albums, buying them, we looked for them everywhere. It was impossible to get blackbooks of good quality paper. But anyway we were very good at colouring the ones that we had with felt pens. We'd buy those ordinary felt pens; fill them up with some cologne to have the wash effect, to avoid the stripes, to blend the colours. We'd add some contours and shading with a ball-point pen. We had mastered this technique in blackbooks. Of course, there were no such possibilities on walls at that time. (Inf_12)

The creativity encouraged by the lack of alternatives, as well as DIY technologies of paint and other graffiti supplies persisted throughout the 1990s and beyond, when experimenting with homemade ink and refillable markers became popular. Subsequently, DIY techniques arising from deprivation were replaced with DIY methods inspired by ideological, cost minimisation, experimentation and various other reasons.

Interpretations of graffiti form and content

In the late Soviet period, graffiti writers from the Baltic States purposefully did not experiment trying to invent any alternative graffiti writing (or painting) forms. As with paint usage, they sought to follow certain classic graffiti canons by imitating what they had seen in available graffiti films and videos. However, due to a chronic lack of information, such interpretations of graffiti standards sometimes acquired unexpected and uncanonical forms. As the first generation of Lithuanian writers reflected during the interviews, only the

very idea of their inscriptions had "come" from the 1980s breakdance films; yet the way these had been implemented was an improvisation that often had little in common with New York graffiti writing and style (Figure 4).

The first Baltic writers of the late Soviet period had a relatively clear understanding about the piece and the tag as key graffiti forms, whereas the throw-up was the least frequently employed form and became more widespread only in the late 1990s. In the early graffiti development stage, a tag was perceived more as a writer's signature originating from the nickname used before their engagement in graffiti activities. The tag was not constructed as a pseudonym specifically intended for graffiti writing or as a sign of subcultural identity. In Lithuania, tags were not massively produced in the

Figure 4: "Hip-Hop" by Ryč!, Kaunas, late 1980s.

1990s – at that time a piece was regarded as the highest form in the graffiti hierarchy.

The wave of tagging reached Vilnius only towards the 2000s. Indeed, the writers of the 1980s and 1990s tended to make a clear distinction between their rather conservative graffiti approach and the subsequent "new fashion" of the 2000s with its practice of mass city bombing and the "going all city" imperative:

> Speaking about tagging, since we never had many paint even the tags seemed to us as something unreal. Something that roused a lot of emotions… Only much later, sometime in 1998–1999, we started saying, "Oh, that's *just* a tag, that's not real graffiti" [mockingly]. In the 1990s, there was no culture of tagging as we see it in 2000, when the entire city was flooded with tags. Still, all those who had been writing [in the 1990s] wanted their inscriptions to be complete, cool, and colourful. There were very few of tags. Only later did that trend emerge, you know, to be seen by the city and the understanding that "the more I write, the more I will get noticed". This was the fashion of the 2000s. In the 1990s, we had our tag – we had our signature – but walking around the city leaving as many imprints as possible was never a priority. Our priority was pieces, the large works. (Inf_23)

Moreover, graffiti before and after the year 2000 differed in its style and colours. Before the year 2000, colourful, complicated large-scale inscriptions were valued, whereas after the year 2000, quick monochrome or bicolour works became prevalent with a predominantly black and chrome colour range. Similar graffiti development patterns were observed in Latvia. According to Anita Sedliņa, from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, Latvian writers preferred "more colourful and aesthetic" graffiti forms, multicoloured pieces and

murals. Only around 2000, small and quick graffiti forms – tags and throw-ups – became widespread as new generation writers chose "quantity over quality" in their works (Sedliņa 2007).

Up until the late 1990s, the content of large-scale graffiti inscriptions – pieces – was not usually linked with any subcultural names. Instead, various "cool sounding" English words (such as "Art," "Free," "Dreams," "Peace," "Relax," and so on) were written (Figure 5). The early graffiti of the 1990s was, in a way, developing in the context of popular culture rather than subculture. The surviving inscriptions of the 1990s in more isolated residential metropolitan areas also show naïve compositions with the symbols of NBA, MTV, "Chicago Bulls," "Coca Cola," and various other brands balancing on the stylistic brink of folk and subcultural graffiti.

Another tendency in graffiti content was unquestionably associated with hip-hop culture, when inscriptions reflected "everything that is related with rap" (Inf_14), that is, the names of performers and bands (Run-DMC, LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, etc.), and concepts of hip-hop culture perceived as a complex package of DJing, MCing, graffiti and breakdance ("Rap," "Hip-Hop," "Break," "King," etc.) (Figure 6).

The link between graffiti and hip-hop was strongest in the first generation of Lithuanian writers that had emerged from the breakdance environment. In the 1990s, the association between hip-hop and graffiti remained strong. The association, however, was not absolute since many writers were more inclined towards rave, club culture, and other subcultural youth groups in terms of music or did not affiliate with any style community. After the 1990s, hip-hop was always "somewhere near" graffiti, but it did not necessarily become an obligatory interest of writers. As the graffiti ethnographer Gregory Snyder observed in the New York graffiti community and as the geographer Stefano Bloch put it in his autoethnographic testimonies from the West Coast

Figure 5: "Relax", Palanga, around 1997.

Figure 6: “Hip-hop” by Ploogas, Kaunas, 1995.

of the US in the 1990s, the graffiti subculture did not function as a style community, writers were not bound together by common elements of appearance or by aesthetic preferences. As such, the diversity of writers’ musical tastes could be extremely broad (Snyder 2009; Bloch 2019). This tendency for a diversity of tastes was also attested to by Lithuanian writers:

> Graffiti is mostly known through rap culture and, basically, is advertised alongside rap in different media. But some people I know were far from enthusiastic with rap. Well, that very Birdy was a punk and not a rapper. There were people who, seemingly, had absolutely nothing in common with rap culture and they looked like ordinary people, but they just got engaged in writing. Take my mentor, for example. He introduced me to graffiti, to drum and

> bass, and to breakbeat. Of course, there are those to whom rap and graffiti are basically the same. But definitely not to everyone. (Inf_19)

By the mid 1990s, Lithuanian writers also had a certain knowledge and understanding of the crew concept. However, they interpreted this in a peculiar way. For example, some adopted a crew name but only "for themselves," without circulating it in graffiti inscriptions. The first graffiti crews, in the traditional sense, took shape only around 1997–2000 (Kazakevičius 2004). They were KGB,[11] PVL, ANE, CINP, BRA, NWS in Vilnius; FAT CRU, TB2 in Klaipėda, KWTM in Kaunas. At that time, writers with sufficient experience formalised their peer circles and started using not only personal but also crew pseudonyms, identifying themselves as members of a specific graffiti crew rather than as a scattered group of graffiti enthusiasts. The practice of subcultural graffiti was becoming more and more articulate and canonical. The space perception model of graffiti writers was also undergoing significant changes with the arrival of a new generation, new sources of information and economic possibilities at the turn of the millennium.

The conservative graffiti perception of space

From the viewpoint of conservative space perception, graffiti inscriptions are mostly considered as accidental chaotic scribblings lacking meaning or internal logic. However, each graffiti genre has strictly defined rules, and graffiti subculture itself is highly structured – both admission to the writers community and a further graffiti career path are closely related to meeting specific requirements, such as mastering the skills of writing and acquiring a set of specific competences

(Velikonja 2020: 12; Snyder 2009; Macdonald 2001: 63). Apart from aesthetic, social and bodily competencies, a fully-fledged graffiti writer needs to gain spatial competence, which means having a well trained eye, seeing the best possible graffiti spots, knowing how to reach them, and having the ability to navigate the great variety of urban paths and spaces that are usually left unknown and not experienced by those who adopt a conservative perception of space (Ferrell & Weide 2010: 49; see Hannerz, this volume).

As has already been mentioned, the first generation of Lithuanian writers from the breakdance background had a relatively clear understanding about how graffiti functioned – which holds also in terms of space. They sought for their works to be seen widely, achieving visibility through mass repetition of their inscriptions or through the impression effect generated by unusual, unexpected spot choices, e.g., highly central locations or high spots. In this early period, Latvian writers succeeded in implementing this task in the Baltic region. They produced graffiti at heights, even on Soviet trains as well as in one specific graffiti spot in Riga which slightly resembled the American urban subway atmosphere, i.e., Mazā Krasta / Maskavas street tram tunnel (Petre 2019: 22; Sedliņa 2007). The level of mastering tags, throw-ups and pieces amongst the first generation of Lithuanian graffiti was not as accomplished as later generations, but they still worked hard for visibility and variety in their spots.

However, the Lithuanian graffiti communities of the 1990s had rather different attitudes and quite parochial choices of spots. The "all city" subcultural imperative had not been well articulated, so graffiti inscriptions were mainly focused on local neighborhoods. Even the first crews of the late 1990s were often described by other writers according to their neighbourhood of origin and their peak activity:

> Somehow it was more important for us to fill *our* spaces. Our local neighborhood community was most important for me and my crew; we tried to do our best for them. Also the crew members could be the local people from our neighbourhood only. (Inf_12)

> We wanted to have as many pieces in *our* neighbourhood as possible. Not to go somewhere else; not just to decorate something for others. We wanted to make *our* neighbourhood more beautiful. When actually graffiti is, well, it's a somewhat reverse thing by nature; you know, when you need to make your name known ubiquitously. And, say, if those trains bearing your name could be seen everywhere around New York, so we had a reverse process here: "We need to decorate *our* neighbourhood. Others will take care of their neighbourhoods, whereas we'll look after ours." That was our attitude at that time. (Inf_23)

Leaving one's own neighbourhood – most often for the city centre – was a rather unusual phenomenon due to the young age of writers (most of whom were too young to drive cars at that time), and the shortage of paint. Further, a complicated crime situation in the 1990s encouraged the localisation of graffiti writers in their "own" safe neighbourhoods, as "local gangs" were often described by the interviewees as a much greater source of threat than the police:

> We somehow always spent time in our centre. Because there were various gangs in those other neighbourhoods, where you could be roughed up… you know, really badly. Well, how can I put it? There were three of us (not a very big crew, really). And we often worked just the two of us. So, we simply tried to avoid the risk… (Inf_17)
>
> Let's not forget that those were the gloomy nineties with thriving banditry and the cult of power. We had the

> Daktaras criminal group[12] active, racketeering, raping and so on. We basically lived in this fight or flight situation and such social environment was really challenging. That's why we, nonconformists, held on firmly to each other. (Inf_11)

The writers of the 1990s had been familiar with the idea of "going all city" as a spatial goal of graffiti practice. However, it seemed alien to them; the logic behind it was not exactly clear and it did not conform to their possibilities at that time. The next generation, which became more active in the late 1990s–2000, declared very clearly that their local neighbourhood was only the first step of graffiti activity, and that after this, "you have to make your presence felt in other neighbourhoods, in the city centre, in the entire city, in as many clearly visible spaces as possible" (Inf_1). Around 2000, new means were employed and more diverse locations were exploited – a fact that came as a great surprise to the old-school writers:

> Of course, then we didn't think in the sense that, you know, young people think now; the ones who write on roof edges… You know, for me it is a completely different universe what they are doing these days. (Inf_17)

In the 1990s, graffiti inscriptions were rarely produced on trains or at heights in Lithuania. Spatial taboos were also clearly and universally defined. For example, writing on the places of worship of any religious communities, individual houses or other property (such as personal cars) was not tolerated so as not to cause damage to a specific individual. Writers chose to avoid aggressive spatial confrontations and preferred to mark the "neutral" surfaces of collective property such as communal housing, electrical substations, fences, objects inside school or kindergarten territories, spaces under bridges and viaducts, and, naturally, neglected places (see

Arvidsson & Bengtsen, this volume). The bridges across the Neris River in the central part of Vilnius – a safe and visible "no man's land" in a highly urban area – were one of those rare representative graffiti spaces drawing 1990s writers from different neighbourhoods to the city centre (see Chan, this volume). Thus, a paradoxically *conservative* perception of space was characteristic of this graffiti generation compared both to their predecessors from the 1980s and to their subsequent successors who established a much more diverse and aggressive perception of space in their graffiti practice.

"The dark ages of graffiti" paving the way to "The golden age"

Lithuanian graffiti writers portray the 1990s as a decade of excruciatingly slow evolution due to information and technological deprivation, leading to peculiar interpretations of graffiti form, content and spatial standards. Only a handful of writers were proud of their achievements and the inscriptions they produced during that period. For most of them, however, this was a disappointing period "when we had no paint and didn't know how write properly" (Inf_12). The differences between the local scene and foreign encounters, as well as the graffiti produced by "graffiti missionaries," were experienced as not only inspiring but also frustrating:

> I was in Germany, and I saw how things were done there. Then I came back to write graffiti here and I see this *huge* difference; I am still *so* far from those German standards, I need *so* much more practice, I need to progress… But what can I do? How?.. Where can I find the resources for paint in order to progress *that* much?.. (Inf_23)

Yet the evaluation of the 1990s (just like in other spheres of Lithuanian culture currently involved in active reflection on this controversial period) was not entirely negative. It had some space for ambivalence. Despite the fatigue from "inability and shortage," writers also had some positive reflections on early graffiti development as a time marked by relative freedom. Writers associated the late 1980s and 1990s with their avant-garde status, and the privilege of having been the first ones to create and interpret the new subcultural movement without the imposition of institutional control.

In the 1990s, Lithuanian graffiti was usually presented in the mainstream media as something exotic, as "a youth fashion" rather than as systematic vandalism. Illegal writing was regarded as a fairly insignificant form of misconduct, and no systematic control measures were applied. Therefore, the 1990s were associated with the freedom to engage in graffiti practice without attracting the constant attention of the authorities:

> What could be the worst-case scenario? We'd have to repaint the wall? Or to pay some fine? It wasn't as strict as it is now. We could breathe relatively freely. (Inf_23)

The slow and moderate incubation of graffiti in 1990s Lithuania meant that mass rejection or moral panic campaigns were not provoked, thus enabling a local graffiti scene focused on quality and quantity, which started around 2000 and lasted for an entire decade. With an improving national economic situation, the graffiti development period defined by permanent deficiency and inability to meet universal subcultural standards ended. Eventually, fully-fledged subcultural graffiti communities with established hierarchies, mentorship institutions, and widespread international collaboration developed. Consequently, the quantity of graffiti

inscriptions in the urban space as well as the quality of style, spatial and other competences increased. The 2000–2010 period is regarded as the "golden age" of almost unrestricted graffiti writing in Lithuania (and especially in its capital Vilnius) by most of the informants. This "golden age" was only interrupted a decade later when the first anti-graffiti media campaign was launched in 2010. This was largely a response to graffiti and street art inscriptions flooding the spaces of central Vilnius and especially its Old Town. But that is yet another story.

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"Once upon a time in USSR" Facebook and Instagram accounts dedicated to former USSR old-school graffiti writers' reminiscences:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/576171835909974/

https://www.instagram.com/once_upon_a_time_in_ussr

NOTES

1 23 graffiti writers were interviewed between 2010 and 2020. The interviews lasted from 48 min. to 2 hours 44 min. All the names, subcultural pseudonyms and any other possibly identifying details of the informants are anonymized, they are referred to using the codes with a serial number of their interview.

2 MO Museum of the Modern Art in Vilnius dedicated its most successful exhibition to date to artistic and analytic reflections on the Lithuanian 1990s. The exhibition "The Origin of Species: 1990s DNA" (2019 10 05–2020 03 01) was visited by more than 140,000 people in Vilnius alone, and later toured to other Lithuanian cities. Reflections on the 1990s also take up a great part of contemporary Lithuanian literary fiction and non-fiction from approximately 2016 onwards.

3 For example, the case of the 2000s Estonian graffiti scene was featured in Nicholas Ganz's book *Graffiti World. Street Art from Five Continents* amongst a few other cases from East-Central Europe (Ganz 2004: 128; 152).

4 For more on the Soviet economy of favors see: Ledeneva, Alena V. 1998. *Russia's Economy of Favours. Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5 Also known by the title "Beat This: A Hip-Hop History."

6 Krys (Крыс) – a rat.

7 Lithuania declared its re-established independence on March 11, 1990.

8 German music magazines "Bravo" and "Popcorn" (and their Polish editions) were mentioned in the interviews, as well as Polish hip-hop magazine "Ślizg." Lithuanian hip-hop magazines featuring graffiti scenes were not published until mid-2000s, when "Top Hip-Hop," "Dub Dub Magazine," "G-vė" appeared.

9 Referred to as "German train films" in the interviews (*We basically watched newer German train films, the ones where they were running, cutting fences with special scissors for metal, and doing the trains at night.* – Inf_10), these kinds of DIY graffiti documentaries were actually made all over Europe – in Poland, France, Sweden, etc. A few examples of the trend could be films such as "AREA 08" (Sweden, 1998) or "Dirty Handz – Destruction of Paris City" (France, 1999).

10 "The Homeland" in Lithuanian.

11 "Kids Go Bombing."

12 One of the biggest and most influential organized criminal groups from Kaunas, Lithuania, active since 1978 and named after its leader's surname.

05

Free parties, sexuality, creativity and drugs: dancing within the urban world

Filippa Flaherty

Introduction

In the winter of 2019, I sat together with Joseph in an empty industrial building on the outskirts of Malmö. Joseph was arranging a *free party* in the building later that night, and I was there doing fieldwork while he and the rest of the crew prepared. Joseph was a senior figure within the rave culture, having arranged many parties over the last ten years in Malmö and other cities around the world. I asked him if anything about arranging parties in and around Malmö had changed over the last few years. He answered quickly: "You know, today Malmö is more limited, it's harder to arrange a rave. Before people didn't really care and there were more abandoned buildings and public areas that were empty. Today, they want the city to look more in a specific way, and there's clean ups and stuff, you know, like authorities putting pressure on people. It's for sure harder today, but we just find new places, you have to be creative in that sense." I asked how they made it happen, even as conditions changed. He stared out in the room, smiled and responded: "As long as we want freedom, we will make it happen, we will always find a way."

Like many subcultures, notions of freedom and creativity play an important role within the free party culture, and adapting to new situations within the city is a part of subcultural development. A free party is an illegal rave, which features electronic music and is 'free' from the legal restrictions that can be found at licensed clubs. Keeler (2019) describes the free party environment as an autonomous zone where participants create the social norms of the party. As Joseph argues above, ravers have "to be creative", and find new ways and "new places" to live out their creativity and find freedom. The culture's use of the city is central and free party culture displays its subcultural creativity through expanding on and challenging dominant interpretations

of how the city should be used. For individuals in the free party subculture, the goal of achieving freedom requires creativity. Through arranging free parties in industrial buildings, in parks, in forests, at the beach or under bridges within the city, the subculture defies the authorities' desires for how the city should be used. The free party culture uses the city in unsanctioned ways, resisting dominant understandings of respectable behavior. As Joseph argues above, through these uses, free partiers aim to find freedom.

Today, Malmö, like many other cities, is experiencing gentrification (Hedin et al. 2012). There has been a change in how neighborhoods are used and for whom they exist. On the south side of the city lies an industrial area which has been a center for free parties and illegal clubs in the city in recent decades. Even though some free parties still occur in this particular part of Malmö, authorities have cracked down on illegal activities in the area, leading to fewer free parties occurring here (SVT 2020). Yet, this does not mean that the subculture has disappeared. Instead, free partiers have been forced to find new ways to arrange raves and new places to meet. Thornton (1995: 244) describes ravers as "creative participants in the formation of club cultures". In this chapter, I demonstrate how these creative participants construct and perform freedom, through examining dancing, sexuality, creativity, and drug use. I show how the notion of freedom is essential for understanding these activities, and illustrate how constructions of freedom are central for distinguishing between non-subcultural legal nightclubs and subcultural free parties. Primarily, I argue that the most important distinction process between the free party and the city's mainstream society revolves around an understanding of respectability. The subcultural participants argue that they represent a culture of respectability in relation to how they perform dancing, creativity, drug consumption, sexuality and gender. They construct this respectability around a notion of freedom.

Method

The data this chapter is based upon was collected as part of a larger ethnographic study (Nilsson 2019; 2021). During a three-year period, I conducted fieldwork within the free party movement in Europe, attending free parties and following and interviewing rave participants. The data for this chapter is based specifically on fieldwork from the culture in the city of Malmö and its surrounding areas. In addition to ethnographic observations, I conducted 15 interviews with subcultural participants of different genders, who self-identified as subcultural (Hannerz 2015: 7) and who attend and / or organize free parties. The participants were sampled through purposeful sampling (Patton 2002: 230), where I actively sought participants of different ages, with different levels of subcultural establishment and within different subcultural groups. The participants range in age from 18 to 40 years old.

Freedom through dancing

Dancing is one of the most important parts of club culture. Angela McRobbie suggests that dancing offers possibilities for "creative self-expressive forms" (McRobbie 1991: xvi) and specifically argues that it "occupies a special place in feminine culture" due to its abilities to transport women away from the difficulties of their everyday life (McRobbie 1991: 200). It is a leisure activity which, according to McRobbie, "awakens a strongly emotional response on the part of the girl" (McRobbie 1991: 201). Although this statement can be true for all genders, it is an interesting note on the meaning of club culture. Club culture has often been studied as a ground for sexuality where researchers have tended to divide masculinity and femininity into a normative, oppositional model (McRobbie 1991). Dancing has been classed as a

feminine activity, while activities like courting, conducting soundchecks, arranging lighting, or performing music have been viewed as the purview of the male participants (Chamber 1985). Historically, these studies have seldom reflected "on the involvement of both girls and boys in dancing and in the various club cultures" (McRobbie 1991: 198). However, dancing does not necessarily need to be viewed as a means to achieve sexual relations. Rather, it can be viewed as an act focused on the individual (Measham 2001). Symbolically, it is interesting to study what dancing achieves, rather than what it is. Dancing is an activity where participants can sense a strong collective connection with other ravers, even though it is still viewed as an individual act. As one participant expressed:

> I can't really explain it, it's like I'm dancing for myself, but then you also feel the others in the room, it's like a collective force, we're all in this together, but we're not really dancing together, we would never have a dancing ring or anything like, you know the ones you can spot at the legal clubs. But I'm definitely dancing for myself, getting drawn into the music. It's a wonderful feeling, you get a high out of it… I feel free. It's not like I'm dancing for a guy or anything like that. That's what they do at the legal clubs… there the dancing floor is like a mating ground. (Bianca)

For Bianca, dancing symbolizes an individual activity of freedom which is affected and shared by the collective, turning it into a "collective force". These sentiments were echoed by another participant, who stated:

> You know, for someone who never went to a rave, they look at you and think that you are crazy, going to a party dancing dressed like that. They might think of legal clubs, thinking that I'm super oppressed or sexualized cause I'm

> dressed like this. Like I'm dancing for the guys, you know? [laughing]. But that is never the case, no one ever thinks of us like that at a rave, only people from the outside. They don't understand. (Rachel)

As can be seen from these quotes, the female ravers I followed expressed that free parties, and the dancing floor in particular, are a space where they can feel free and dance for themselves. Conversely, my participants viewed Malmö's legal clubs as places where people dance to attract partners and become objectified. The ravers see this as the only purpose of dancing at the commercialized clubs. In those environments, they suggest that girls are supposed to "dance for the guys." At a free party, on the other hand, you dance for yourself, and get "drawn into the music", achieving a "wonderful feeling" described as getting high.

In line with Sarah Thornton's (1995) study of ravers, the participants of my study argue that while dancing at a legal club happens collectively, it occurs in a classless way. The dancing rings on the dance floor are viewed as something inferior to the more individual dancing style which takes place at free parties. Nonetheless, the participants still argue that they are dancing together. The participants suggest that they create "a collective force", but that this force does not turn the dancefloor into a "mating ground." At free parties, sexuality is expressed, but the participants argue that sexuality is expressed differently than at legal clubs. Participants who are dressed in a 'sexual' way from a normative perspective do not perceive themselves as "oppressed or sexualized" and suggest that other subcultural participants do not view them that way either. Rather, the perception of the ravers is that only those who "don't understand" and do not belong to the subculture have such sexualizing and objectifying views.

Constructing differences

A central argument in the statements of the ravers is that people outside of the culture do not understand the culture since they are not free. The ravers suggest that non-subcultural individuals see them as sexualized while they, on the other hand, have broken free from normative perspectives of gender and sexuality. Non-subcultural people are therefore unable to experience the same feeling of freedom that the subculture grants its participants. This process of distinguishing the subcultural from the non-subcultural is a recurring theme within subcultural theory. A variety of scholars, including Patrick Williams (2011), Erik Hannerz (2015), Nancy MacDonald (2001), Sarah Thornton (1995) and Howard S. Becker (1963) amongst others emphasize this as a recurring feature amongst subcultural participants. The participants of my study argue that there is a difference between the world of free parties and legal clubs. They argue that free parties offer experiences which are different from those the legal clubs of the city offer. These processes of distinguishing their culture from the culture of mainstream clubs reaffirm the group's collective identity (Bourdieu 1993: 301). Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 269) argues that a group's norms about taste and values are always set in relation to outside groups. In the subcultural group of free parties, this happens in relation to the constructed culture of the legal clubs. This categorization of the non-subcultural, in the form of the legal clubs and their dancing, music, and the sexualization and objectification allegedly taking place there, is a way for the subcultural group to claim a higher symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993). Here, the symbolic capital serves as a status-marker, allowing subcultural participants to distinguish themselves from the non-subcultural individuals. Dancing, along with sexuality, creativity, and drug consumption, are all part of this distinguishing process, which is always related to the subcultural construction of freedom.

As we proceed, I will discuss the aspects of sexuality and gender further and how this links to the subcultural notion of freedom.

The construction of respectable sexuality

In relation to dance and objectification, questions arise about how sexuality is carried out and expressed. Different expressions of sexuality can occur, but it is important that they occur in the right way. Once again, the non-subcultural becomes the representation for how sexuality is not *suppo-sed* to be carried out, as described by one participant:

> People at legal clubs, they're not there to have a nice time, to listen to music, to have fun and dance. People at legal clubs are there because, you know, they want to get laid. (John)

According to John, attendees at legal clubs have one goal on a party night, and that is sex. Similarly, Sarah argues that legal club attendees are not interested in the music:

> At legal clubs, well, you're standing there dancing, but people are not even interested in the music at all, it's always like a meat market and especially closer to the closing hours. And people there, they're just so drunk and sleazy. (Sarah)

As can be seen from the quotes above, and throughout the rest of my data, the practical meaning of dancing as sexu-alized versus dancing as a means to achieve and represent freedom, becomes clear when people who attend legal clubs are marked as "drunk and sleazy" with only one purpose, "to

get laid". The legal clubs are described as a "meat market" where open sexualization and objectification take place. Here, my participants once again suggest that they have a higher symbolic capital than attendees at legal night clubs because they do not behave in the same way. There are also strong indications of moral arguments, where this kind of objectification and sexual expression is viewed as morally deficient while the behavior of ravers is viewed as more respectable and acceptable. For instance, during a rave I followed a participant, Wera, throughout the night. At one point, Wera came back from the forest behind the dance floor. She was smiling, and told me with euphoria that she had met a really wonderful girl. She explained that their connection "was out of this world" and how wonderful it was to be able to have a deeper conversation with someone at a party for once. "You know" she told me, "at the normal clubs this would never happen, you don't connect with people in the same way, here we all share something, people are more interested in you as a human, we care about each other." I wondered why she thought that was the case. "Well", Wera answered "for one, we're another kind of people, we're not here to fool around and to get laid, well, we did fool around" she said while laughing, and quickly added, "but it's in another way." She was smiling. I asked her how it is different and she responded: "we do it in a more classy way, it's not like you're hitting someone up on the dancefloor, kissing them in front of everyone, we have some kind of respect for each other." This claim clearly demonstrates how the subcultural participants mark out lines of boundaries between themselves and members of the mainstream. The ravers construct themselves as respectable and morally superior compared to the culture of the mainstream.

On another occasion, I had been wandering around alone for a while doing fieldwork. I looked at the time and realized that night had turned into day, and that it was time

to head home. I wanted to say goodbye to the company I had arrived with, and started to search for them. Unfortunately, I got lost searching through the big factory building, and found myself in a new section of the rave. I entered a room I previously had missed during the night, a room hidden through a series of corridors behind the main dance floor. In the middle of the room, there were multiple run down sofas. At the sofa closest to the door, people were sitting down, inhaling laughing gas and drinking alcohol. On the sofas placed further into the room, I could see naked individuals taking part in some kind of sexual act. I felt like I just saw something I was not supposed to see, so I quickly left the room and the sexual interactions taking place there. The non-sexual nature of the free party culture was obviously challenged by my observations. What I had just observed surprised me and made me slightly uncomfortable, since it was so unexpected. These observations show that the sexual distinctions which the rave culture constructs between itself and mainstream culture grants individuals the opportunity to express sexuality in a free way. Here, the distinctions towards the outer are important. However, there are still internal distinctions within the culture where the claim of free sexuality is limited. For instance, the sexual activities I witnessed were somewhat hidden, and did not happen openly, which shows that the sexual freedom within the culture comes with limitations.

My observations from the field show that sexuality, and sexual activities, obviously can occur at free parties, but it is only supposed to occur in specific, more 'respectable' ways. The participants are implying that people at legal clubs lack respect for other attendees, but at a free party they all have "some kind of respect for each other", as Wera puts it. To openly hit on someone is viewed as classless and indecent. However, if one moves away from the dance floor and takes part in a sexual interaction a few meters from

the dance floor, this is viewed as acceptable behavior. For the subcultural participants, open displays of sexualization and intoxication are seen as something negative, less cultured, and less respectable. Beverly Skeggs (2004) argues that working-class culture is represented as, among other things, excessive, vulgar, and without shame. Within the culture of free parties, the non-subcultural becomes the representation of these prejudices about the working-class. These prejudices about the non-subcultural are filled with unfree, judgemental and normative projections, which ironically, are edged by the same kind of qualities which ravers claim to have escaped from.

In Skeggs' work, she shows how working-class women, in an attempt to acquire cultural capital, invest in a caring femininity to claim respectability (Skeggs 1997: 161f). Although the free party culture mostly consists of middle-class men and women in their twenties, I argue here that the subculture tries to claim cultural and symbolic capital through establishing a narrative of caring. As Wera states above: "here we all share something, people are more interested in you as a human, we care about each other." This notion of a collective caring for each other stems from the 1960s hippie culture where peace, love, unity and respect were central. The motto of PLUR (peace, love, unity, respect) was adopted by the free party culture during the acid house era (Collin 1997) and still plays an important part of the subcultural identity. Foremost, the notion of care is used when constructing boundaries between the subcultural and the non subcultural. Moving on, we shall further explore these aspects of subcultural boundary work (Hannerz 2015).

Maintaining respectable order

> I would guess that the guy was around 25 years old. I had seen him dancing around on the dancefloor, dancing close to multiple girls. He danced closer and in a more sexualized way than you usually notice at raves. There were sexual undertones in his dancing, and he was trying to grab at least one girl. The organizers threw him out shortly after. (Fieldnotes)

As the above excerpt from my fieldnotes shows, I have witnessed situations where participants at free parties are thrown out of the party, particularly when they reenact the objectification and sexual behavior which legal clubs are thought to consist of. When sexual objectification occurs openly, it is vital for the culture to penalize such behavior. The strongest penalty at a rave is to be thrown out, an act which clearly demonstrates and regulates inappropriate behavior. This kind of direct sanction violates the freedom of the thrown out participants, but at the same time, occurs in the name of freedom. For the organizers, as well as other participants, it is important to signal that they comply with the motto of the free party culture, and that they act when social norms are violated. They do this through subcultural boundary work (Hannerz 2015). Through distancing themselves from the non-caring and unfree sexual behavior that is allegedly taking place in legal clubs, the construction of the subculture's identity takes place and becomes a form of the subculture's symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986: 17). The elitism of the subculture (Thornton 1995: 5) also permeates these phenomena, claiming that they are different and better than the non-subcultural. Through distancing themselves from such behavior, and expressing sexuality in another more 'hidden' way, a collective elite identity marked by freedom can be contained. That most of the participants come

from a middle-class background (Thornton 1995) probably also grants possibilities for the subculture to express another, alternative way of sexuality (Skeggs 1997: 91) without being viewed as unrespectable:

> Some girls were dancing almost completely naked, still there seemed to be nothing sexual over it. Rather it just felt totally liberating. (Fieldnotes)

The notion of nudity as being 'non sexual' in a club setting might seem unlikely. However, given that the subculture has established an identity where participants do not partake in sexuality and objectification in the same 'unfree' way as the non-subcultural (Thornton 1995: 164), the subculture allows participants to perform sexuality and gender in this way. In this sense, the participants are enacting an ideal where gender is constructed as unimportant. Instead, their subcultural participation, and the freedom which this identity is constructed around, becomes the central aspect of their identity. In this context, sexuality and performance of femininity become a form of subcultural capital constructed around a notion of freedom (Thornton 1995). As Skeggs argues, femininity, or sexuality, can only be capitalized on as cultural capital if it is symbolically legitimized (Skeggs 2004: 24). Within the free party scene, subcultural and symbolic capital consist of performances where sexualization and objectification are constructed as being absent. It certainly occurs, but only in specific 'respectable' ways. If you were to objectify anyone dancing at a free party, you would be viewed as someone who lacks the symbolic capital of the subculture and as someone who simply does not belong. As one participant put it:

> I would never openly flirt and hook up with a girl at these parties. That's just not gonna happen. I mean, you've been

> taught from the beginning that that's just not something you do at a rave. People are here to enjoy themselves, connect with friends, appreciate the art installation, the event, yeah I mean the culture. The first impression I got from a free party, has kind of just stuck with me, I wouldn't hit on someone like that. (Patrick)

So far I have outlined how free party participants view and negotiate different kinds of sexual expressions and interactions. I have shown that sexuality and sexual expression are linked to the subculture's notion of taste and freedom. For the participants, their take on sexual expression is the 'correct', and 'respectable' way to socialize and this requires liberation and freedom from the perceived norms of the mainstream which they argue can be found at legal commercialized clubs. I will now explore how the notion of freedom, taste and respectability is visible in the subcultures construction of creativity.

Constructing a culture of creativity

Together with a group of people, I had been invited to a rave in Malmö. We were walking in the cold winter night, reaching the outskirts of the city, while searching for the location. The residential area of the city was only ten minutes behind us by foot, but one of the girls in the group started to talk about how nice it was to leave the city behind "because now we are entering a new world", she stated. I asked what she meant. To my mind, we were obviously still in the city center, and although this was more of an industrial area, describing it as 'another world' seemed excessive. She looked at me with a cunning smile, and explained that I would soon understand as she pointed at an industrial building explaining that this was the location. As we got closer

we noticed a queue in front of the entrance. We entered the building and were led through a long hall filled with music. Eventually, we reached a dance floor and this area was really a world of its own. We were thrown right into multiple art installations which had embraced the theme of this particular free party, "Arabian Nights". Projectors were shifting colors to the beat of the music while displaying psychedelic flying carpets and big blinking eyes on the walls surrounding the room. The atmosphere in the room became overwhelming, and it was hard to capture all the details. The girl looked at me with the same cunning smile and asked "now, do you understand what I mean?" I could only agree with her statement, because this place really felt like another world.

The metaphor of "entering a new world" serves to describe how free party participants construct the rave as something completely different from the reality that exists outside of the culture. For them, entering a free party means constructing a new world within the city (Borden 2001), and using the city in different, creative ways to experience something they feel the city's legal clubs cannot offer (see Chan, this volume).

Again, constructing another world can only be done through distinguishing themselves and their culture from the constructed culture at legal night clubs, as Sarah exemplifies in the following quote.

> At a rave, the music is central, I mean you don't attend if you're not into electronic music and stuff. That is the thing, everyone has that in common, and everyone has another appreciation for the music and everything the DJs are doing, everything that lies behind the sound quality and the light quality...you don't find at legal clubs, and you know, everyone attends legal clubs...anyone can attend a legal club, it's just not the same. We are more into art. This

> is an art form. (Sarah)

Sarah argues that people attending raves have a genuine shared interest and that the quality is higher. This view is shared by Philip:

> Most of the time, the illegal clubs have different sound systems than the legal clubs, and it becomes a totally different thing. I feel like if I hear that the sound is bad and off, that really ruins so much. (Philip)

The legal clubs in the city are constructed as a place where the music is not central, and where the sound systems "are bad and off." The free parties, on the other hand, are constructed as a culture where the music and the art itself are the central aspects and where people "are more into art." Ravers are described as people who share a common interest and "another appreciation for the music and everything the DJs are doing." For the participants, ravers share another kind of knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for everything "that lies behind the sound quality and the light quality", which is something "you don't find at legal clubs". This positive definition of ravers is built upon a distance towards the legal club culture which is described as inferior. Legal clubs are defined as places where "anyone can attend" which makes it different and less exclusive than the free parties. In that regard, the subcultural participants are implying that they have another, superior social capital (Bourdieu 1984) than attendees at legal clubs. This social capital consists of the contacts and connections that are necessary to gain access to free parties. This stands in contrast to the legal clubs where "anyone" has access and can attend. The subcultural participants draw a distinction between themselves and legal club attendees by implying that they share some-

thing which is superior. This is exemplified in the following exchange with a participant:

> Unni: Nowadays, if I attend legal clubs, I really notice how guys are just so annoying. I'm just there to have fun, but it isn't fun when people are acting like that. I mean it is just so obvious, everywhere, I mean everyone is acting like that. It seems to be the only reason why people go out.
>
> Filippa: So it's not like that at a rave?
>
> Unni: No, not at all, people are attending raves for other reasons.
>
> Filippa: What reasons?
>
> Unni: If you go to a free party, the atmosphere is completely different. It is cozy, soft and really nice. It is not stiff and snobbish...when going to a rave you're there for the music, to dance, to enjoy yourself. I mean, the legal clubs are mostly not that fucking fun at all. The atmosphere is not the same at all. At a rave, the music definitely plays a bigger part, people are more interested in that than at legal clubs. I mean, as a raver, we're genuinely interested and many of us make music ourselves, we have a big interest in it and are not only there to party and fuck.

The collective belief within the subculture constructs an affinity amongst the individuals in the free party environment. In order to participate in this affinity, it is necessary to share the values and the tastes of the group (Thornton 1995). The subcultural is distinguished from the non-subcultural through emphasizing that their "atmosphere is completely different." Free parties are not "stiff and snobbish" like the legal clubs, but are rather "cozy, soft and really nice", which

implies that they are more liberated. It is impossible to have fun at legal clubs, they are instead places characterized by a culture where you cannot "enjoy yourself." Through this process of distinction, the subcultural participants claim their lifestyle, taste, and values as superior. The free parties are characterized by freedom, while the legal nightclubs are characterized by their inability to be free. This process offers them a distinct "sense of [their] place but also a sense of the other's place" (Bourdieu 1990: 131). Through easily identifying participants of the city's legal clubs in a homogeneous way, consisting of guys who are "so annoying", who just are there "to party and fuck", they strengthen their identity (Bourdieu 1993: 258).

Marking out distinctions

In marking out what distinguishes the subculture from other cultures, what other cultures lack, and what their culture is opposed to, the participants construct a difference and a distance between them and the 'others' in relation to freedom, sexuality, creativity and respectability. This is vital for their subcultural identity. As Bourdieu (1990: 132) states: "nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies." These classifications, and this construction of the subcultural and the non-subcultural, are clear in relation to how creativity is negotiated. As described by one participant:

> The music is central, I mean you don't really go there if you don't like electronica and so on, I mean that's kind of the thing...we all have something in common, we are all interested and we appreciate the music, the art, the sound, the lighting and everything the DJs are doing and all the work you know is behind it all...the quality with the sound and the lighting, the art installations, the whole

> arrangement…there's a lot of creativity going on and people do it themselves, I mean you don't find that at legal clubs. (Rose)

Rose defines the commercialized legal clubs as places where no creativity or do-it-yourself-elements exist. On the other hand, the subculture is described as a place where there is an abundance of such elements (Haenfler 2006). Here, creativity and a DIY-spirit are linked to the notion of dedicated people who "have something in common" and who are "all interested" and "appreciate the music, the art, the sound…" This interest in and understanding of the subcultural is exemplified through the statement that "there's a lot of creativity going on and people do it themselves" which is something "you don't find…at the legal clubs." Again, the legal clubs are the negative contrast to the shared values of the subcultural. For the free party culture, to be creative is to do it yourself, to be free, to have a specific interest and taste in music, art, sound- and lightning systems. It is about creating spaces through "all the work" that goes into arranging a free party.

These discussions of dancing, sexuality, and creativity have shown how the culture of free parties distances itself from the non-subcultural culture of legal night clubs. The distinctions presented so far have consisted mainly of how ravers construct themselves as genuinely free, caring, creative and passionate participants who share a genuine interest in music, taste and art. In contrast, the legal clubs of the city are marked by their inability to provide the same experience given that they are lacking the same degree of freedom, respectability, knowledge and taste. I will now examine these aspects in relation to drug consumption.

Constructing a world of freedom and drugs

> Clara: So the atmosphere is much more relaxed, you know it's freer. You don't feel monitored, it's like you're entering a new, separate world. People are acting in another way, they're not as wasted.
>
> Erin: Yeah, you know you can be yourself, I mean you can pop some dancing shoes [ecstasy] if you feel like doing that, but you can also skip it, I mean no one cares…there's like a freedom in that.
>
> Oscar: If you're at a legal club, yeah well then you have to take your Molly [ecstasy] or draw a line [cocaine] on the sly in the bathroom or something, and it's like that all the time [at the legal clubs], there's people watching you constantly, and I don't know, it's just not comfortable and relaxed… but at a rave, you can do it if you want too, or not do it, it's not like people care. You can act like you want, you can be who you want to be.
>
> Sarah: Yes I mean if you feel monitored then people are not as relaxed and delightful but then they're sneaking around if they want to do something, it's just not the same thing, the atmosphere and the control fucks it up.

The participants' experiences of the bad atmosphere at legal clubs is often explained in reference to the heavy drinking and authoritarian control in these places. These aspects symbolize a restricted and unfree culture. Alcohol is certainly consumed to some extent within the free party culture, but the participants argue that the atmosphere is different. Also, free parties are more associated with other aspects, as previously discussed, such as a shared interest in creativity,

music, art, dancing, caring for each other and de-objectification. These aspects are all linked to the culture's notion of freedom. Illegal drugs are a big part of the subcultural identity, although the drugs themselves are not the important part. Rather, as exemplified in the group interview above, the most central aspect of it is the freedom to be able to consume illegal drugs or to choose not to. The most fundamental aspect of the subcultural identity is that you can "be who you want to be." As previously noted, this description applies to how participants view dancing as an act of freedom where they can be themselves or dance for themselves. Likewise, when describing sexual expressions and interactions, these are explained as an act of freedom dependent upon deeper connections, understanding and caring for one another, following the motto of PLUR. Either way, all of these descriptions are found in a narrative of freedom. This freedom is not possible to obtain in a legal club setting, according to the ravers, since people there do not share the same deep connection, interests and taste, and since the legal club setting is characterized by a control which "fucks it up" (see Arvidsson and Bengtsen, this volume).

Maintaining freedom and order

At a free party, one can "pop some dancing shoes", which is described as an act of freedom. Just as the motto of PLUR is understood as a mark of distinction from the non-subcultural, the ability to consume illegal drugs is also a possibility to distinguish the subcultural from the non-subcultural. In this experience of freedom, the participants argue that they share something special, which non-subcultural groups miss out on. The non-subcultural individuals are unable to obtain the same kind of experience of freedom since these clubs are marked out by controls and the associated limitations, while

the subcultural environment is marked by a freedom which enables people to be their ‘authentic’ selves. However, as previously noted, the subculture also consists of control and authoritarian monitoring. Kicking out participants who violate codes of conduct, such as objectifying and sexualizing other participants, requires a certain amount of control and monitoring. This kind of control and the associated limitations are seen as acceptable due to participants’ perceived caring relation to one another. Likewise, the control and monitoring of drug use is also explained from the notion that the members of the subculture care about their fellow participants:

> Adam: When you organize you feel responsible, or I actually feel responsible for everyone even though I am not organizing. If you see someone who feels bad, maybe they’re having a bad trip, I will make sure to take care of them. I never experienced that no one attended to someone who’s feeling bad, that’s not our thing, that’s why we’re different.
>
> Filippa: Why do you think that you feel responsible and why are ravers different?
>
> Adam: We’re like a family, we’re actually caring about everyone. I’ve been in this for a long time now, if I would see someone new or anyone really, experiencing a bad trip or someone bothering them, like something sexual, I would totally react. You want people to leave with a good experience. And also it would suck if the police or someone came and shut it down. I mean, I’ve called the ambulance one time for a guy, he was tripping badly. But we did it smoothly and the party could continue after the ambulance left. But of course, the important thing is that people enjoy themselves, feel good and leave with a good experience, that’s why people come and it’s fucking hard

to get that in the world today.

Given that drugs are being consumed and given that people are gathered, situations can arise where participants have a bad experience. As Adam notes, the participants feel a responsibility for each other and the aspect of caring becomes an important part of distancing themselves from the non-subcultural. Within the culture they are “like a family” where they are “actually caring about everyone.” Although they are not mentioned, it is implied that this is not the case at legal clubs. There is also the aspect of keeping the authorities out and trying to control the situation themselves in a “smooth” way so that “the party” can continue. Adam describes how he called an ambulance once due to a participant “tripping badly.” During fieldwork, I have also witnessed how free party organizers sometimes have arranged for civil medical staff to be present. Although this might be seen as a caring, loving aspect of the culture, it is also about intervening in situations before they can potentially escalate. In that way, the risk of the free party being shut down by authorities is reduced.

Foremost, this kind of control and monitoring is important for the subculture’s identity and meaning. This is the case whether it occurs in relation to intervening when disrespectful behavior occurs or in relation to attending to participants who need help after consuming drugs. As Adam notes, “the important thing is that people enjoy themselves, feel good and leave with a good experience, that’s why people come and it’s fucking hard to get that in the world today.” Here, Adam claims that free parties fill a particular need. The free parties are constructed as a different world in which individuals can experience happiness. These euphoric aspects are a part of the culture’s construction of freedom. This is then presented as the foremost meaning of the culture’s existence. However, in order to obtain happiness and the

freedom which is constructed as necessary, limitations and control are also needed and are acceptable as long as such actions are negotiated and justified through the norms of the culture.

Even though the participants describe themselves as sharing similar interests and being like-minded with strong senses of caring for each other, they still argue that the culture is heterogeneous. Free parties are constructed as a culture which grants individuals the opportunity to be their 'authentic' free self. This appears to be a contradiction. However, it is a very effective way of constructing boundary work towards the non-subcultural, just as boundaries are created in relation to creativity, sexuality, and respectability. The non-subcultural is always assumed to be homogeneous, while the free party culture represents diversity. This negotiation becomes an important part of the subcultural identity work and creates meaning. Likewise, drugs can play an important part in 'subcultural freedom'. The subcultural language used when talking about drugs helps the ravers to "create groups with words" (Bourdieu 1990: 139). Slang phrases such as "pop some dancing shoes" are central to the process of subcultural formation, and connotes a type of cultural capital for the participant. The use of such slang shows an understanding of and association with the culture, and becomes an important assertion for the construction of participants' subcultural identity (Bourdieu 1991: 94).

The subcultural milieu grants participants the freedom to consume both legal and illegal drugs. The freedom of choice is the central aspect in relation to drugs. However, *how* one consumes drugs is also important, just as *how* one dances or expresses sexuality. While legal clubs are described as consisting of people who only want to get laid, drunk and act sleazy, the participants at a free party argue that they become intoxicated in another way. As described by one participant:

> You know, it's much freer with us, people can be who they want to be, but yeah of course you can't be an idiot or act sleazy or something like that, if you want to be like that then you can go to a dance band festival instead and listen to Arvingarna or something like that. (Carl)

Carl, and other participants, draw a line between being who you want to be and acting like an idiot or a sleaze. That kind of behavior is more suited for someone less cultivated and respectable. In Carl's account, dance band music symbolizes a classless environment where people cannot behave and have a low degree of respectability. The illustration portrays the non-subcultural and its participants as inferior (Thornton 1995: 5) while describing the free party culture as hip and free. This account also clearly describes the hierarchical order the subculture constructs towards mainstream cultures (Thornton 1995: 11f). According to Bourdieu, these subcultural distinctions towards other cultures are a means for the participants to show their social class affiliation (Bourdieu 1993: 263ff, 298ff, 302). Carl chooses to specifically distance himself from dance bands. I interpret this as a marker of social class. In a Swedish context, dance bands are often associated with the working-class' taste, and have a relatively low status of respectability even within the mainstream. Dance bands are also often associated with rural contexts, rather than urban environments. Dance bands are not considered as particularly 'hip' or 'artistic'. Thus, raising dance bands as the opposite pole to the free party culture, becomes both an effective and credible social performance of an 'aristocratic distinction', or a cultural hierarchy (Bourdieu 1991: 94).

Constructing respectability as the disrespected

In this chapter I have shown how the subculture of free parties constructs an identity through a notion of freedom. This construction cannot be made without constructing mainstream clubs as unfree and limited. I argue that the subculture consists of a freedom which is constructed through their own notions of 'respectable' performances in relation to dancing, sexuality, creativity, and drug consumption. All of these performances lay bare the culture's social construction of symbolic and social capital. As Skeggs notes, respectability is "one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class", and something "to desire, to prove and to achieve" (Skeggs 1997: 1). Just as working-class women are constructed as being 'rough', 'excessive', 'out of control', 'vulgar' and 'lacking discipline' (Skeggs 1997: 99f), the subculture constructs the non-subcultural as a culture marked by such elements and traits in relation to creativity (or lack of creativity), dancing, sexuality, and drug consumption. While the 'mainstream' society might view the culture of free parties as a 'destructive' culture through linking it to consumption of illegal drugs and long, hard nights of partying at illegal premises, the subculture itself constructs the mainstream city in the same way. For the subculture, the legal clubs – sanctioned by the authorities in our cities – become the representation of a destructive culture. Attendees at legal clubs resort to heavy 'binge' drinking in order to stand the bad music, the dance floor consists of bad dancing, and the sexualized, objectifying atmosphere is unfree and marked by control, restrictions and an unfriendliness. When sexual interactions occur, these are constructed as careless, sexist, disrespectful and unloving. When drug use occurs, it is limited and hidden, resulting in an atmosphere where people cannot be their authentic free self. The legal clubs represent everything that stands in opposition to what is perceived from a subcul-

tural perspective as legitimate symbolic and social capital. While the mainstream has therefore lost respectability, the subcultural participants obtain theirs by arguing that their actions are culturally and socially superior, even though the subculture's existence is viewed as unsanctioned and illegal by mainstream society.

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06

Graffiti as critical edgework: trains, risks and mobile engagements with railbound infrastructure in Stockholm

Alexander Paulsson

Introduction

The history of graffiti is as much about tags, throw-ups and style as it is about various technologies, including metro trains, layups, rail yards and other subway system infrastructures. In this chapter, I seek to explore how metro systems are experienced and acted-upon by graffiti-writers, and how their knowledge about the metro system becomes an integral part of their mobile practices. The close connection between graffiti writing and metro systems was probably first thoroughly described by Castleman (1982) in his seminal book *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Although the lengthy interview excerpts in that book primarily covered the emerging subculture of graffiti, including the youngsters' vivid descriptions of style and knowledge about other writers' style, Castleman also described the graffiti writers' experiences and knowledges of trains, timetables and subway infrastructures and how they moved about in layups and in stations.

Building upon this observation, this chapter traces how knowledge about metro systems, and the large infrastructural technologies sustaining them and which they inevitably are a part of, are key to the mobile practices of graffiti writers who paint trains. Gaining know-how about stations, layups and train cars becomes crucial for tagging and doing throw-ups and whole-cars and so on. Whereas such mobile practices border on the illegal, graffiti is ostensibly built around voluntary risk-taking. Because the risk of getting caught is always present when painting on trains, or in the metro system or its auxiliary infrastructure, graffiti writers take on a voluntary risk. Additionally, they expose themselves to physical risks by being in a dangerous, potentially lethal, infrastructural environment. Power stations, high-voltage networks and the electrified third-rail in the metro system all mean that graffiti writers may possibly inflict serious injuries on themselves. Thus, having knowledge

of the metro system's infrastructure is crucial when moving in and around it.

For the majority of subway commuters, most of the infrastructure is invisible. It is only when the infrastructure fails or malfunctions that it emerges and appears as technologies which must be managed (Star Leigh 1999) or repaired (Graham and Thrift 2007). At the same time, infrastructure is more than a complex sociotechnical system in need of regular maintenance. Infrastructure also exposes relations between the state and society as it offers a lens through which citizenship can be understood (Rowland and Passoth 2015). Who has access to infrastructure, who funds new infrastructure, and what are the distributional implications of a long-lasting lack of maintenance and upkeep (Lemanski 2020; Woolgar and Cooper 1999)? Infrastructure also exposes how our daily lives are intertwined in relations with non-human life, for example as animals habitually cross human-built roads and inhabit our subterranean metro systems (Barua 2021) (see Arvidsson & Bengtsen, this volume)

For railway and subway technicians, railbound infrastructures consist of a number of different interconnected systems that are handled and cared for separately. Often maintenance and operations are unbundled and subsequently handled by different organizations, much in line with neoliberal ideas about competition and marketized specialization (Birch and Siemiatycki 2016). For people living in the proximity of, or just next to, a heavy-trunk railway, the railbound infrastructure is occasionally framed as a monolithic barrier, or as a gateway to other places. Turning to other "users" of railbound infrastructure, these systems attract a number of different subcultures, ranging from trainspotters to graffiti writers. Common to many of them is that both the railway tracks and the rolling stock operate as a surface, on which their own messages and hopes are projected.

Moving beyond discussions about railbound infra-

structure and subcultural politics, this chapter adds new insights on graffiti as a mobile practice by exploring the voluntary risk-taking – or edgework – involved in navigating the risky and potentially lethal subterranean infrastructure of layups, depots and metro stations. Podcasts, blogs and writing about graffiti have been drawn upon to trace how graffiti practices are entwined with the emergence, consolidation, and application of infrastructural know-how. As such, Lyng's (1990; 2005; 2015) writings on edgework are here a source of inspiration, together with literature on the social studies of infrastructure.

Revisiting voluntary risk-taking

Our time is a time of risk and hyper-reflection on risk. According to Beck (1992), risk and risk-awareness are a characteristic feature of modernity. Lyng, on the other hand, believes that many people are attracted to risk and that they take on voluntary risks because this provides excitement in everyday life. Occasionally, such voluntary risk-taking also includes criminal activities, and, as the risk of getting caught is part of the excitement, voluntary risk-taking is multifaceted and imbued with many meanings. Lyng (1990: 855-858) uses the term *edgework* to describe a type of voluntary risk-taking which involves and is built around the negotiation of cultural and physical boundaries. While edgework specifically negotiates the boundaries between order/chaos and form/formlessness, the implications of those negotiations are coupled to limit-conditions, like consciousness/unconsciousness and life/death (see also Milovanovic 2005). Transgressing these limit-conditions may have severe effects. Edgework is often a leisure activity and is found, for example, in skydiving, BASE jumping, downhill mountain-biking, but also stock trading and other activities that

challenge cultural and physical boundaries. Graffiti has been added to the list of activities studied as a form of edgework. The first to do so was probably Ferrell (1993: 1996) in his study of graffiti writers in Denver. While edgework is mentioned as a way of understanding graffiti as a socio-cultural expression of resistance in Ferrell's work, it is not a major theme in his analysis. More recently, Andersen and Krogstad (2019) explored feelings of arousal and anxiety in a study of older graffiti writers in Oslo (see Jacobson, this volume). Edgework is a key element in their analysis, especially as they try to put graffiti in dialogue with research on the sociology of emotions.

However, connections to social studies of technology and infrastructures are relatively rare. This might be linked to the fact that edgeworkers may be ambivalent towards technology and infrastructure. While edgework enthusiasts are often dependent on a particular technology or infrastructure, they do not want to leave their fate to something that they cannot control – for the ability to control a boundary-situation is central to edgework. Having a sense of control gives the edgeworker mental strength, allowing them to endure difficult tasks whilst negotiating boundaries without crossing them. Should an accident occur, this is seen by other edgeworkers as a proof that the unlucky edgeworker was not only unlucky, but rather incompetent and also unfit to be an edgeworker in the first place.

In some sense, graffiti involves two types of voluntary risk-taking. First, graffiti writers who paint trains and tunnels navigate in and around the potentially lethal infrastructures of rail and subway systems. This requires a type of tacit knowledge that goes into so-called missions, that is, when a crew of writers organize larger nocturnal paintings, usually in layups. Such missions are based on previous experiences in the crew as well as extensive desk-research, often involving detailed examinations of digital maps, like

Google maps. Furthermore, it involves embodied knowledge, as graffiti painting in subway or commuter layups means writers often use their bodies in ways that force themselves to the limits of their abilities (Ramakrishnan et al 2020). Second, graffiti writers balance on the boundary between staying in one place to paint, and rapidly escaping as cops and security guards close in. This balancing requires some experience and the shared knowledge of the crew on how-to-not-get-caught.

Graffiti writers learn how to master these two boundary-situations. But there is a gendered dimension to this as well, which has been recognized in the study of graffiti (Hannerz 2017). Indeed, it is this illusion of control in a "situation that verges on total chaos" that makes edgework gendered (Lyng 1990: 871). As males are habitually trained to face and master risks, Lyng (1990: 873) suggests that "edgework may attract more males than females". Whether or not this is the case may be debatable. Nevertheless, men tend to overestimate their own abilities to manage risks while at the same time underestimating the risks involved (see Flaherty, this volume).

In more recent years, Lyng has highlighted the role of the body and the bodily experiences and unique self-reflection that is made possible by, and created through, edgework (see Lyng 2004; 2015). When approaching the limit of what the body or psyche can handle, the edgeworker gets to know herself or himself in new ways. A new form of hermeneutic self-reflection is made possible when boundary-situations emerge and are renegotiated "on the edge". Although Lyng does not explicitly reflect upon this, the body and the bodily experiences he mentions undeniably involve physical motion and movements, which in turn involve embodied interactions with forms of technology or infrastructure.

More fundamentally, perhaps, is the observation that edgework creates its own reality. Edgework, writes Lyng

(2015: 454), is "valued because it transports edgeworkers to an alternative reality, a place of new possibilities for existential experience and self-interpretation". While being engaged in activities that push the edgeworker's mental and physical limits, this alternative reality becomes a space for self-reflection and learning. Despite such possibilities for self-reflection and learning, it is difficult for the edgeworker to describe his or her experience, not least to non-edgeworkers, as the experience is largely understood to be ineffable.

Because so much of edgework orbits around the body, bodily experiences and indirectly also mental strength, Lyng suggests that edgework enthusiasts "maintain that language simply cannot capture the essence of edgework and therefore see it as a waste of time to attempt to describe the experience" (Lyng 1990: 861). This is a challenge for those of us who want to study edgework and, as outsiders, want to gain an inside-view of the voluntary risk-taking associated with edgework. For those who have studied edgework, ethnographic methods are popular, not least go-along interviews (e.g. Andersen and Krogstad 2019), as this makes it possible to expose the researcher to the same boundary-situations as the edgeworker and thus make it easier for the researcher to interpret what the edgeworker is experiencing (cf. Kusenbach 2003, and Hannerz, this volume). Even though ethnography and go-along interviews are suitable for understand graffiti painting as edgework, I would maintain that it is possible to explore edgework through other types of methods and materials.

Podcasts as method

By listening to conversations between graffiti writers, I have traced the edgework that is involved in the painting of trains and subway cars and the knowledge that is embedded in the

negotiation and renegotiation of the boundary-situations in which graffiti writers find themselves. These conversations have taken place in a podcast, called *Andra sidan spåret* [Eng: *Other side of the track*), where graffiti writers are invited to talk to the two hosts. Each conversation usually follows the same structure. First, they talk about how the graffiti writer first came into contact with graffiti and how he or she (though mostly he) was socialized into the subculture, but also what consequences this has had for social relationships, including family and friends. Second, the conversation turns to painting. The graffiti writer's style is explored and a considerable amount of time is spent discussing how their style has developed over the years and how it has been adapted to local circumstances. Third, another recurring element throughout the podcast is the illegal aspect of graffiti painting and how this has affected the writer, or how the writer has managed to escape the military-like security guards in Stockholm: the infamous CSG.

Previous studies have used this kind of material to explore how middle-aged men create and recreate sub-cultural memory. Jacobson (2020: 14) suggests that "through podcasts graffiti writers construct shared beginnings and thus horizons within a mnemonic community." It is in these discussions that graffiti is recollected as an "active, youthful and subversive practice that at the same time is productive for individual development" (Jacobson 2020: 14). While, as with Jacobson's research, there is indeed much self-reflection about the emergence of graffiti as a distinct subculture, most discussions orbit around past and recent subcultural practices, and memories and recollected experiences of such practices (see Jacobson, this volume).

In total, there are 31 conversations in the material, which amounts to over 40 hours of recordings. While listening to these conversations, significant passages were transcribed verbatim, and notes were taken, throughout.

Approximately two thirds of the conversations were about the graffiti subculture in Stockholm and of these, a third were about graffiti in, on or around commuter trains and the subway systems and its infrastructures. It is this latter category of conversations that I focus on in this chapter. Again, as pointed out by Jacobson (2020), the discussions in these kinds of podcasts are ostensibly about past experiences and recollected memories, and must be contextualized as such.

Since the podcast hosts are graffiti writers themselves, these are conversations between insiders, living within the subculture. Colloquial terms and other expressions, common signs of identity and a deep-seated sense of place, emerge in the discussions. While the conversations follow a certain structure, they are informal and jump back and forth between various topics, before continuing. This provides a possible insight into writers' remembered experiences of graffiti as edgework in Stockholm. While conducting go-along interviews or field observations would obviously offer a direct experience of edgework, even this kind of 'first-hand' material involves story-telling and narratives about past experiences, which are vital to the continuous co-construction of the subculture.

Stockholm, a cold December night in 2002

> One December night during the cold winter of 2002, Arsle, Cort and Sad painted a wholecar in Alby. It was going to be featured in a movie, so they had to make an effort. They had chosen to paint in the layup inside the tunnel at Alby's subway-station. A layup is an unmanned parking space for subway trains. These small train parking spaces that are scattered throughout the metro system are tradi-

> tionally workplaces for graffiti painters. This has always been the case, that is, ever since train writing was invented in New York in the early seventies. The word layup has been inherited from there, and tenderly cared for, as it has spread in the vocabulary of graffiti writers all over the world, so also in Stockholm. (Andersson 2005: 11, own translation)

This is the opening scene in "While Svensson ate plankstek", one of the most comprehensive historiographies of graffiti writing in Stockholm during the period 1984 to 2004. It is no coincidence that trains and layups occupy a key position in this narrative. The graffiti writers' movements in and around layups require both knowledge about the infrastructure and involve some voluntary-risk-taking. Andersson continue his narrative by reporting that the layup close to Alby's subway-station was discovered by some writers when they were sneaking into the tunnels in order to get to the station after it had closed for passenger traffic for the day. The word about this layup quickly spread among writers. Many wholecars were painted there.

The New York subway has an iconic status in the history of graffiti. Pieces on the New York subway cars have been documented through thousands of photographs, many of which also have become iconic. In Stockholm, graffiti was not strongly associated with the subway system when the subculture took off in 1984 (Andersson 2005: 57). Beat Street, a mainstream movie about breakdance and hip hop culture, was shown in the cinemas during August 1984. Style Wars, an independent documentary, was shown on the 21st of September 1984 on SVT, the national broadcaster, and then things started to move (Andersson 2005: 79, see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume). It took a while for trains to occupy a nodal position in the graffiti scene in Stockholm, but the first photography of a throw-up on a train has been

dated to the 13th of August 1984 (Andersson 2005: 58)

Just like New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Sweden experienced an economic downturn in the first half of the 1990s. At that time, the metro in Stockholm had not been built on or extended for about 15 years (Paulsson 2020). Investments froze and during this time, leading politicians also proclaimed that the metro "was completed". No new stations, no new lines and no new trains were planned. As the economy swung upwards again in the late 1990's, graffiti had already found its way into the railbound public transport systems in Stockholm. SL, the public transport company in Stockholm, together with the leading Social Democratic politicians, reacted by launching a zero-tolerance policy in 1995 (Kimvall 2012). Compliance followed an almost military discipline, but, then in 2014, an alliance between the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party decided to scrap the policy (Urban Development 2016). Although sweeping, this is the background against which the narrative to follow, of graffiti as edgework, should be understood. This background picture should not be confused with an attempt to explain the development of the subculture, rather it provides a context within which edgework may be understood.

Painting trains

Graffiti writers are extremely knowledgeable, almost obsessively so, about the subway system and the rolling stock. Knowledge about work tunnels, maintenance plans, work schedules and layups are valued highly by graffiti writers. Some writers in Stockholm even have keys to enter the subway stations after they have closed for the day. Even though trains are highly valued as a surface, this was not always the case, as I suggested above. Munk, a graffiti writer from the so-called red subway line in Stockholm explains that in the

past, during the 1990s, no distinction was made between painting on a train, a rock-wall or a tunnel (Andra sidan spåret 2018a).

Now the trains have achieved a status of their own. In some sense, trains have become a fetish, that is, a technological artifact attributed to human characteristics. "I do not get the same satisfaction when I go to Rågsved [a spot for legal paintings] or something similar", Munk suggests. Doing a hall of fame, that is, a wall where many writers paint murals and pieces is fun with friends, but there is "nothing that beats painting a train." Both Munk and Brase talk about how they get "kicks" from painting trains (Andra sidan spåret 2018a).

This is echoed by other graffiti writers. Beat and Chico explain that trains feel "real". Trains are trains. It is as simple as that. Beat and Chico have respect for trains and for those who paint trains (Andra sidan spåret 2018f). Exil, another writer, paint the so-called red-line style, just like Munk (Andra sidan spåret 2018e). Each style is associated with subway lines and its branches in Stockholm. While discussing how she came in touch with graffiti, Exil says that she took the ride line to high-school in the city center each morning, and this is how she became exposed to that style of painting.

Just as when Lyng discusses the emotions that are brought to life by edgework, Munk describes how adrenaline and emotional intoxication spiral through the body during train-writing. Unlike Munk, Brase has not painted a lot of trains, but he also says that he "is a sucker for adrenaline and they have been chasing these kicks all their lives really in one way or another." About a year ago, both Munk and Brase started writing again after a break of about ten years. However, the adrenaline rush was not as massive as they had hoped for (Andra sidan spåret 2018a).

Other writers also gravitate towards the notion of "kicks". Ligisd (Andra sidan spåret 2019f), who has been

around for a long-time, jokes when he moves over to the topic of kicks. While others may get their kicks from bungee jumps, he and his crew get kicks while out "scoping" and being chased by security guards. And it is a completely different experience. Brase also mentions that he admires the writers who scope yards and layups and discover good but hard-to-find places and locations. "You probably feel a bit like James Bond in one way or another when you do that", he explains. However, while discussing how a graffiti crew operates when on a "mission", he clarifies that it in reality it takes group work to accomplish this (Andra sidan spåret 2018a).

Desk, travel and locations

According to Docuyanan (2000), taggers value quantity over quality. This is noticeable in several of the conversations. Nerg (Andra sidan spåret 2019c) says that he now mainly bomb trains as this can be done quite quickly, as it does not require as much planning. When the graffiti writers plan larger train paintings with several people involved, a crew for example, it becomes a "mission", as discussed earlier. They decide in advance who will do what and when. Someone paints contours and then someone else does the fill-ins. Another person looks for security guards. Often, they take turns. As a rule of thumb, they tend to decide in advance how long they will be in one location. This can range from five to fifteen minutes.

All comprehensive paintings require preparation and desk research. Otur, for instance, says he does some basic research before heading out and painting, and this allows him to spend more time on the paintings. But this does not apply to everyone. His crew-mate Glöm likes the spontaneity of painting trains. He explains that the mood should influence

the painting, so the painting should therefore be done in a flow. The first letter may be written in a moment of anticipation, the second in a moment of anxiety, and the last when you are completely lost and almost out of your mind. This could be understood in relation to Lyng and his notion that the transgression of the bodily limits is significant to edgework. These changes in the mood have to influence the painting, Glöm explains, with reference to his style and how this is shaped by speed and feelings of excitement and anxiety (Andra sidan spåret 2018b).

Finding a good location is difficult. According to Glöm, the challenge is to look for locations along the branches in the metro and commuter train network. The tracks often end somewhere out in the woods. Then it's important to find out where that is. By painting out there, Glöm explains, he and his crew are able to show that graffiti also reaches beyond the fringes of the city and its suburbs, into the forests. Otur also suggest that looking for locations is an important part of graffiti (Andra sidan spåret 2018b). While scoping has been part and parcel of graffiti culture since the late 1970's, or the mid-1980's in Stockholm, satellite images, for example on Google Maps, is nowadays a frequently used tool for finding locations, not least on the periphery of the commuter train network and in hard-to-reach places in the city center. Stockholm is not only engulfed by forests; it is also located on a group of islands and on a peninsula. This means that there are many bridges and other elevated infrastructures, which move water, road traffic and trains through the city.

Gouge offers some insight on how to find hard-to-reach locations in Stockholm. He used to swim around in central Stockholm, under bridges, with a wetsuit on, looking for good locations – and for fame. As these are hidden places, not many others see them obviously, but the upside is that the paintings or the murals there will remain for a long

time. Subsequently, over time, many people will, indeed, see them. Being creative when it comes to finding locations is therefore key, Gouge emphasizes. Only going for the locations everyone else is going for is pointless, he explains. Again, there are several connections to Lyng's work here. Edgeworkers temporarily push their bodies to create lasting artworks in these hard-to-reach places. Unlike on trains, these places and locations on transportation infrastructure generally hold the paintings for a longer time. The longevity of these artworks, coupled with the recognition gained from accomplishing this feat, contributes to the pedagogical narratives through which the subculture is collectively enacted (Jacobson 2020).

Not to paint trains, a lack of movement

Stockholm experienced an economic downturn in the 1990's. Housing prices fell and unemployment skyrocketed. The conservative party Moderaterna took over City Hall in 1991 after a long period of Social Democratic rule. Investments in public transport were at an all-time low during the 1990's in Stockholm. Gouge painted trains during this period, out at the layups and the stations in the metro in Stockholm. The stations had almost no boarding passengers during the day-time, so it was easy to paint unseen (Andra sidan spåret 2018c). In 1995, the incoming Social Democratic majority in City Hall implemented a zero-tolerance policy towards graffiti, which the conservative party later also endorsed when taking power (Kimvall 2012). This was based on the so-called broken-windows theory: if Stockholm legalized graffiti on certain walls, this would send a message that graffiti is socially and politically accepted, which would risk graffiti spreading to non-legal walls. This was the basic

idea and its policy lasted between 1995–2014, when the incoming coalition of Social Democrats and Greens decided to abolish it.

Gouge nowadays paints neither trains nor stations. He values family and time with his children. But he has a black book, in which he has included all of his earlier paintings. In it he has also jotted down detailed descriptions of how he got to different locations in and around Stockholm and how to sneak into layups and railway yards. Reflecting on this, he now laughs at these detailed descriptions (Andra sidan spåret 2018c). Another value emerging from these conversations is the hierarchical differentiation between painting mobile or immobile objects. Painting mobile objects is valued higher than immobile objects. While trains and rolling stocks are highly valued, the layups, sound-barriers and supporting infrastructure are less valued. Anyone can jump over a fence and paint a piece, says the graffiti crew RDK. But it is more exciting to paint trains. "Not everyone can [paint a train] properly" (Andra sidan spåret 2018d). RDK's style is based on fast and quick paintings and their whole style is adapted to painting mobile objects. Now that one of the members of RDK lives a "svennelife" [like the average Joneses], graffiti has become a way to get kicks and emotional arousal in a heavily routinized everyday life, much resembling how edgeworkers are described by Lyng.

Indeed, murals or pieces on immobile surfaces are not as exciting as painting trains, RDK says. Since trains are riskier and more difficult to paint, the adrenalin kick is higher, and this drives their style, they adds. Without mentioning the risk-mobility interface, the voluntary risk-taking involved in painting trains is a key trope in the writers' reflections. But there are other views as well. Gouge, for example, wanted to develop his painting-style a while back. But the risk of getting caught, or getting entangled in the excitement around painting trains, was then no longer

valued by him. Subsequently, he decided to paint walls, infrastructure, and other immobile objects instead. His age contributes to this. Now that he is older and has a family, he feels that the mystery has disappeared. He does not know how to get the same feeling again, he explains, but while hanging out with younger writers, he sometimes gets to feel a little bit of their enthusiasm. And hanging out with writers from other backgrounds can also arouse the same feelings (Andra sidan spåret 2018c). Although none of the writers explicitly mentioned this, much of their reflections on graffiti as a subcultural practice orbit around movement, or the lack thereof, in and around infrastructural systems (see Hannerz, this volume). The allure of trains is inexorably linked to their movements. By writing on a train, it inevitably means that they will gain visibility beyond the subcultural group of graffiti writers. The sheer number of passengers in the subways and in the commuter train system implies a mindboggling number of potential viewers.

In the 1990's, however, things were different. With the zero-tolerance policy in operation, trains were removed from traffic as soon as graffiti was spotted on them. This policy was meant to turn passengers against the graffiti writers (Kimvall 2012). Via the loudspeakers and on message boards, passengers were informed that trains had been taken out of operation due to graffiti removal. During these years, pieces on trains did not translate into visibility. Instead, writers figured out that paintings on immobile surfaces meant greater visibility, but only if painted in strategic places or locations. Again, such strategic places literally meant along the railway tracks, on immobile surfaces – for example, on sound-barrier walls, on the bridges and tunnel-openings – and so partly on the very infrastructure enabling the movement of the rolling stock. In the podcast, several of the graffiti writers recollect their memories and discuss how they used to trace newly painted pieces along the tracks when they were younger,

commuting to their high schools in the city center. This, they explain, is how they learned the styles along the metro lines.[1]

Mobile identities and controlling mobility

The mobility/immobility distinction is problematized by a few of the writers. Like several other writers, Rass1 (Andra sidan spåret 2019a) does not describe himself as a either a train or wall writer, but only as a graffiti writer. That said, he does reflect on what is so special about painting trains. Like many others, he notes that the kick you get from being in control is enormous. But it is the knowledge about the infrastructure, including the design of the layups and what is going on while painting, that gives you a sense of control, Rass1 adds. This echoes Lyng's notion of edgework, as edgeworkers must learn how to master boundary-situations and thrive from doing so. Without looking, Rass1 claims to know what was happening in his surroundings. Referring back to his most active years painting in layups, Rass 1 enthusiastically says that:

> The control you get from learning a hook or learning a 'yard' - that feeling of control is hard to beat.

He emphasizes that both emotional kicks and writing styles are important. "Painting trains is one of the best [things] that exists", Rass1 explains, before moving on to discussing the community that is the graffiti subculture.

The tools – not least the spray-can – and the infrastructure are intertwined in the embodied and mobile practices of graffiti writing. Speaking about tools, Glöm and Otur from the WLC-crew mention that stolen spray-cans

do not come with the same demands to paint something mind-blowing and long-lasting as do purchased spray-cans, which lend themselves to higher demands, both on what and where they paint. Stealing – or "racking" as they term it in the Swedish subculture – was not a moment of arousal that they appreciated when they were younger. The control they are looking for, both point out, resides in the act of painting, not in stealing spray-cans. Subsequently, nowadays, they no longer steal spray-cans. Further, they report that because spray-cans are so much more easily accessible today, some of their original charm has dissipated (Andra sidan spåret 2018b; see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė this volume).

Unsurprisingly, the illegal and criminalized elements in the graffiti culture reappear on several occasions when the writers discuss their mobile engagements. When media reported on legal processes against graffiti writers in Stockholm, a journalist from the Swedish national broadcaster SVT approached an anonymous graffiti writer in the outskirts of Stockholm and asked if he would like to legalize painting on commuter trains and walls. The anonymous writer answered:

> "No, no then it loses its charm. There will be no sport. Then part of it disappears". (Claesson, 2019).

Translating this into an engagement with infrastructure and the mobile/immobile interface, legal walls neither involve the same voluntary risk-taking as articulated in edgework, nor involve the nocturnal trespassing movements inherent to graffiti "missions". Both of these characteristics are included in Campos' (2012) conceptualization of graffiti writers as superheroes. By transgressing the boundaries of legal/illegal, voluntary/involuntary risk-taking graffiti writing involves an extra thrill, but it also glorifies the writers' own

role in the development of the sub-culture, much like superheroes.

While many writers reflect upon the legal/illegal distinction, this distinction also pertains to the other distinction I have emphasized here, the mobile/immobile distinction. Painting legally does not require movement. It is simply about going there and painting, says Skil (Andra sidan spåret 2019d). Of course, there is movement involved in legal painting as well. But it is a different kind of movement. When a crew is out on a "mission", the pathways and the movements are built on secluded knowledge, passed on from writer to writer, or from crew to crew, and involving many degrees of voluntary risk-taking. Legal paintings do not involve voluntary risk-taking, at least not to the same degree as painting trains. Legal paintings are ostensibly paintings without any of the mobility that comes with edgework. That said, legal paintings require a certain amount of control in the painting itself, to get the style right. But the corporeality and the ability to control one's body are not as present in legal paintings as in illegal ones, according to the accounts of the graffiti writers. As with Lyng's conceptualization of edgework, there is an element of being able to control the situation and to balance the boundary between getting caught by the security guards, or succeeding in escaping them. But again, without a "mission" there is not much mobility to talk about.

Some of the graffiti writers also state that they have developed "a sixth sense" when they are out on a "mission". They can detect if there are security guards on the way. It's a feeling, many of them suggest. But this feeling is bound up in movement, or in being able to swiftly move from visibility to invisibility in and about the railbound infrastructural systems. Once again, the legal/illegal distinction emerges here in relation to mobility/immobility. Legal paintings are not characterized by the same intensity, energy and mobili-

ty, partly as these paintings may take a much longer time to finish. Several of the writers mentioned this.

Legal paintings are characterized by immobility. After all, there's no need to be on the move, or being able to quickly escape, as the security guards won't show up. An important part of graffiti is then missing, writer Skil explains. This is also the reason why painting on a canvas gets boring, he says. Several writers talked about how security guards chased them in different places in subterranean Stockholm and how they managed to escape. But they also acknowledge the risk-taking involved in engaging with the infrastructure, and note that some graffiti writers in Stockholm have been severely injured while moving around in the tunnels in the metro-system. Andersson (2005: 316f) mentions some of these stories. One died from being hit by a train, another was disabled from the waist down. Even though they are honored by other writers, many also say that they find excuses for continuing with their voluntary risk-taking, as is often the case with edgeworkers.

Concluding discussion

The narrative accounts above demonstrate graffiti writers' fascination with railbound infrastructure. Both the rolling-stock and their subterranean movements in and around the infrastructure expose the mobile practices of graffiti writers in Stockholm. While valuing mobility over immobility, graffiti writers balance a few key boundary-situations. As Lyng has suggested, the ability to master a boundary-situation is central to any edgeworker. For graffiti writers, being able to master the art of painting a train involves a large degree of control, which gives them a sense of mental strength. But with these boundary-situations comes the voluntary risk-taking.

As discussed earlier, the graffiti writers engage in two types of voluntary risk-taking. While their engagement with the potentially lethal infrastructures of railbound systems was not reflected upon at length, this is evident when writers discuss the balancing act between painting trains and escaping the security guards. The mobile practices of these edgeworkers are not only gendered, as males dominate the subculture (Macdonald 2001), but their engagement with the potentially lethal infrastructure also lingers on the legal/illegal boundary. As I have argued, this boundary is embodied in the mobile practices of the writers, as both painting trains and moving around in the infrastructural systems are illegal practices. While it is indeed illegal to move around in and through the infrastructural systems, the skillful art of mastering this voluntary risk-taking is part of the edgework of the graffiti writers.

Lyng has suggested that the bodily experiences of edgeworkers provide unique opportunities for self-reflection (see Lyng 2004; 2015). Approaching the limits of what the body may handle, the edgeworker learns how her or she works and what their body is physically capable of. When a boundary-situation emerges, the world is renegotiated and the edgeworker is moved into an alternative reality. Following Lyng, graffiti writing could be considered a voluntary form of risk taking and therefore also operates as an escape from external obligations or rules, imposed by parents, institutions, or society. As edgework is primarily carried out in leisure time (or in the case of graffiti, during the night-time when the metro-system is closed to the public), it could be understood as a critical practice (Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2021) or a form of resistance against a heavily routinized everyday life, shaped, as this life tends to be, by both bureaucratic processes and material constraints (see Flaherty, this volume).

Since trains are potentially dangerous, both physical-

ly (e.g. the high voltage transmission in the third rail) and socially (getting caught by security guards), painting trains is perhaps the most distinct form of implicit resistance or critical mobile practice, insofar as the graffiti writers value trains and the missions that come with painting trains more than any other surface. Being up all night and scoping yards and layups is not only a way to escape the everyday life, it is also an elevated art form as it gives the edgeworkers what they call "kicks". As edgework orbits around the ability to gain control in boundary-situations, an associated adrenaline rush and emotional arousal comes from being able to control such situations (e.g. Andersen 2018; Andersen and Krogstad 2019). This nocturnal and subterranean corporeal mobility could be understood as a form of critical edgework, which requires, as it were, much planning and control. Mobile practices and artistic expressions are tightly linked. For it is through their movements and their planned engagement with the railbound infrastructure that the edgeworkers' creativity – or their style and artistry - emerges.

While I have showed how graffiti-edgeworkers seek to balance boundary-situations while being on the move, studies of graffiti writing as a subcultural practice have not paid much attention to the relational aspects of infrastructure and the mobile practices that are shaping and are shaped by graffiti writing. Locations are chosen based on the mobility of people passing by on trains, or trains are chosen as they showcase the paintings throughout the metro system. Indeed, all of these movements involve interactions with infrastructure and an engagement with the metro system as a large-scale interconnected technological system. Know-how about this system and the experience of engaging with its infrastructure is imprinted in the style and the creative flow of writers. In a sense, graffiti stands apart from much other edgework because it is inextricably linked to this large-scale technological system, both in terms of the creative expres-

sions and styles and in voluntary risk-taking. Unlike other forms of edgework, such as BASE jumping or motorcycle riding, graffiti, as a mobile practice, is inherently subversive and marginal, but therefore also carries a form of critical potentially. This is why I conceptualize graffiti as *critical edgework*.

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NOTES

1 Another form of mobility of graffiti writing is subcultural media, including magazines and fanzines. Paintings are spread via these underground media outlets and also nowadays on different social media platforms. But this kind of mobility of images is beyond the scope of this chapter.

07

Remembering old school graffiti: subcultural photography, masculinity, and aging

Malcolm Jacobson

History is far too important a matter to be left to the historians!

Chesneaux (1978)

Introduction

In front of a wall covered with graffiti, five teenage boys make gestures and wave with spray cans. They all make funny faces; one looks exhilarated, one scowls, another makes a corny face. One has his mouth open shouting, but there is no sound–this is a still image–it is the first photo I encounter when I enter a Facebook group on Swedish graffiti from the 1980s and early 1990s. The photograph is credited to a graffiti writer from Gothenburg, Sweden. He took this photo of his friends in 1988. Now, more than thirty years later, the image sets a tone of youth and playfulness for an online archive in the making, where graffiti writers jointly collect their old photos.

We use personal photographs from childhood and youth to reflect on and understand our life courses and social identity. As time passes, it is not only those depicted who may consider these photographs to be important documents. Historians weave photographs that once had individual emotional meaning into historical narratives that help us understand a wider social and cultural evolution as well as make sense of the present. Through photographs, we experience a presence of the past that is unique compared to other forms of memory (Barthes, 1981: 85). But the thing made present in mind is not the same as it was in the past; its meaning is constructed from where we are presently situated (Boehm, 2012: 17; Zerubavel, 1996).

Photographs are not objective representations of what has been, as each person who examines a photo reads it differently (Barthes, 1981; Rose, 2003). At the same time, photographs are like other memories. Their cultural meanings are not subjective but grounded in social communities, be it a nation or a subculture (Alexander, 2008, 2020; Halbwachs, 1992; Zerubavel, 1996). Sharing memories can result in experiencing oneself as part of a group (Halbwachs, 1992: 38). A photograph of a soldier with a flag causes us to imagine

nations and wars (cf. Durkheim, 1995: 222), but the meaning of this photo will differ depending on our experiences and social identity. Individuals and groups dispute interpretations of the past, and historical narratives are continuously rewritten. We live in a visual culture where social practices are shaped by images that are circulated through digital social media, permeating most aspects of social life (Rose, 2016). Photographs carry collective emotions and meanings and can function as "secular icons" that represent a group (Binder, 2012:101). The interface of Facebook can facilitate reconnections within groups such as school classes and relatives, but also subcultural groups.

Subcultures are associated with youth (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). But as participants age, subcultural practices change. Subcultural memories allow participants to construct subcultural identity and collective solidarity by linking who they were to who they are. For example, subcultural do-it-yourself publishing is a means of doing memory work that has transformed along with technological development. Digital social media have increased the possibilities for subcultural practitioners to construct their own narratives (Hodkinson, 2007; MacDowall, 2019; Jacobson, 2020; see Hannerz & Kimvall, this volume).

The interdependence of subcultural aging and photographic memories has not yet been investigated. The purpose of this chapter is to try to understand how photographic memory work can construct social identity as subcultural practitioners age. The empirical case consists of collective practices centered around photographs of graffiti made in Sweden between mid 1980s to early 1990s. I study how middle-aged male graffiti writers collect and share photos in a practice of crowdsourcing that utilizes Facebook and results in a printed book. My analysis is guided by three questions:

How do photographs enable connections between aging graffiti writers?
How are subcultural memories used to construct a shared past?
How are materialities used to express and experience a shared past?

Subcultural identities and boundaries

Groups are not fixed and stable entities; they are based on feelings of collective solidarity between several individuals who identify themselves as part of a group (Jenkins, 2008). Symbolic things, myths, memories and narratives can construct emotions that strengthen collective solidarity (Durkheim, 1995; Halbwachs, 1992). Groups are "mnemonic communities" within which social identities are constructed through memory work and social interaction (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996). Subcultural identity and collective solidarity are produced through symbolic performances of being different in relation to non-subcultural lifestyles (Thornton, 1995). This is done through subcultural meaning-making that constructs symbolic boundaries between subcultural groups and non-subcultural individuals and institutions (Hannerz, 2015; see Flaherty, this volume). For example, graffiti writers perform being different when they use rust stop paint intended for automobiles to paint images on subway cars intended for commuting.

A cultural sociological perspective establishes that subcultural practices are not primarily the results of structural positions or a solution to material inequalities (Hannerz, 2015). Social groups are rather constructed through cultural meanings that have relative autonomy vis-à-vis social structure (Alexander, 2020: 406; Alexander & Smith, 2003:12; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Subcultural practices

have been equated with youth culture, but many group members retain their interests as they age (Bennett, 2018; Hodkinson, 2013, 2016; Monto et al., 2012; Way, 2021). Graffiti and many other subcultures have transformed from youth cultures into inter-generational cultures (Kimvall, 2015). Adult responsibilities such as family and work life have influenced the way subcultural practices are performed (Hodkinson, 2012; see Paulsson, this volume).

Practitioners of subcultural graffiti call themselves "writers," as their practice is centered around writing and painting the letters of their taken graffiti names. These "tags" are written as signatures in one color and painted as "pieces" with big colorful letters (Snyder, 2009). Writers primarily seek recognition from other writers and see their work as distinct from other forms of urban creativity such as street art (Bengtsen, 2014; Kimvall, 2019, see Arvidsson & Bengtsen, this volume); explicit political messages are not central. In mass media and politics, graffiti has both been described as destructive and been celebrated as a vital youth expression and compelling art form (Austin, 2001; Ferrell, 1993; Kimvall, 2014; Kramer, 2010). Most writers are male, and graffiti has been analyzed as a resource for masculine identity construction built on conflict, risk, danger, machismo, and crime (Macdonald, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018; Monto et al., 2012). As such, writing can be approached as a practice of male "homophily" (McPherson et al., 2001). However, there are significant numbers of female writers engaged in the same practices as male writers (Pabón-Colón, 2018; Fransberg, 2021). But as in many other social practices, men are taken for granted as an "unmarked" category (Zerubavel, 2018). The meaning of gender and its influence on subcultural practice as practitioners age is an underexplored topic (Hodkinson, 2013: 20).

Subcultural media, such as fanzines, are crucial to subcultural identity and cohesion (Duncombe, 1997; Hod-

kinson, 2007; Thornton, 1995). Photography is integrated into the practice of painting graffiti (Abarca, 2018; Austin, 2001; Jacobson, 2015, see Hannerz & Kimvall, this volume). Taking a photo of your new piece is a ritual used to mark the fact that the piece is finished. New information-sharing techniques influence how aging subcultural participants communicate (Debies-Carl, 2015), and digital platforms directly shape both the content and modes of subcultural practice (Haenfler, 2014; Maloney, 2013; Simões & Campos, 2017; Williams, 2006). In the 2020s, most works of graffiti are displayed by circulating photos online rather than by seeing pieces in the setting where they were created (MacDowall, 2019). Through "crowdsourcing" museums rely on non-professionals to voluntarily collect, organize, and describe legitimate cultural heritage resources (Ridge, 2014). In this chapter, we will see that subcultural participants jointly do the same thing with photographs and texts that are yet to be recognized as valuable by a wider audience.

When we look at an image, we immediately imagine its context; we fill out what is outside its frame in time and space. For example, when we see a portrait of our great grandparents, we may imagine their life conditions. Photos rest on the agreement that they depict with certainty what has been (Barthes, 1981). In reality, however, they are selected and organized within curated collections (Harrison, 2004, 26; Jacobs, 1981: 104). Photos can be read and interpreted in many ways (Bate, 2013, 49; Rose, 2016: 142). Visual meanings of images are constructed within social practices and have social effects. The materiality of an image influences how we experience it and what it means for us (Alexander, 2008). Different "sites of audiencing" influence how images are interpreted and by whom, some examples being: family albums (Rose, 2003; Rose, 2016), photo books (Bate, 2013), and online circulation (Hoskins, 2017). A photo can materialize a community and, like the totem of a tribe,

create intense emotional experiences (Binder, 2012), such a photo has "iconic power" (Alexander & Bartmanski, 2012). It influences social action and can construct and strengthen social bonds. When we do things with photos, photos do things with us.

Methods

In October 2014, a 35 year old graffiti writer posted four photos of Swedish graffiti from the 1980s in a Facebook group that he had just created. The number of members, photos, and comments increased rapidly. Members were enthusiastic about this new meeting place and agreed it was important to secure and share photos and memories of their teenage years writing graffiti. By February 2021, they had jointly posted over four thousand photos and the number of members had reached 1600, predominantly men. Almost no women were actively engaged. The activities in the Facebook group also sparked the printing of a non-profit book – from here on *The Book* – that was printed in one thousand copies.

I have been a member of the Facebook group since 2015, initially without any intention of approaching it as a sociologist. In 2019, I became interested in conducting this study, so certain ethical dilemmas arose. There are low thresholds to becoming a member of the group and accessing the content; the group can be categorized as semi-public (boyd, 2011; Sveningsson Elm, 2009). Still, there is a difference between being a member and being a researcher, and when conducting research on a semi-public online group one should consider that the group was not constructed for research purposes; particular caution must be used so as not to harm participants and their integrity (Franzke et al., 2020; Buchanan & Zimmer, 2021; Löfdahl, 2014/2017).

As a qualitative researcher, I agree with Dwyer and Buckle (2009) that there is no complete binary between being an insider and being an outsider. I am myself somewhere in-between, as I wrote graffiti in the 1980s and 1990s and then transitioned to being a photographer and publisher of books about graffiti (Jacobson, 2015). Many participants of the Facebook group knew who I was and were accustomed to my participation in graffiti culture as an observer. I reflected upon whether I could cause participants any harm when my role changed from being a photographer and producer of media targeted to graffiti writers into an analyst of subcultural practices for academic research purposes.

I contacted the group administrators and they approved my request to participate in the group as a researcher. My in-between position facilitated acquiring trust from group members and their consent to participate. All participants who have shared their content with me for research purposes have consented through private messages. Their responses were always positive and they showed interest in my research.

In order to protect the identity of the participants, I have pseudonymized their tags and names. I have edited quotes lightly without altering the content's meaning: I have, for example, removed certain words that would otherwise be searchable. I have also taken caution not to name the actual Facebook group or the title of the book that was produced. It was important to consider that several informants have broken the law when writing graffiti; this makes it particularly important to ensure that they are not identifiable. Violations such as vandalism, trespassing, or theft discussed in the Facebook group are not represented in enough detail to plausibly connect specific events to individuals. With that said, my purpose is not to analyze violations of criminal law of the past but rather to understand how stories of growing up are collectively constructed in the present.

I approached the Facebook group with the aim of seeing the virtual world through the eyes of the participants (Lund, 2013: 190; Hine, 2015: 85) and of avoiding looking at them from the outside (Greene, 2014). My in-between position facilitated this. But being a researcher in itself creates a certain distance to the research field, even if one has been an engaged participant (Caliandro, 2014; Sylvander, 2020: 61-64, 79). In-depth understanding can be created by being between sameness and difference (cf. Hodkinson, 2005; Merton, 1972; Taylor, 2011). I appreciate the way Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 60) formulate the position of a qualitative researcher: "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference." I reflected on the ways that my previous knowledge of graffiti risked taking certain things for granted such as subcultural language and context. But the way that this group worked with crowdsourcing and the ways they utilized a digital platform was new to me; this enabled me to see aspects of graffiti that I was not familiar with, such as how practices of remembering created collective solidarity.

Online life takes many shapes and is constantly shifting, requiring the researcher to adjust to the particularities of a specific research context along the way (Hine, 2015; Karpf, 2012). One example is how I followed the social practice of collecting images in an online community and the images' subsequent transformation into print on paper, and how this resulted in face-to-face meetings. I have not analytically separated online and offline practices, but rather studied how they are entangled; hence, I do not consider online life to be less "real" and authentic than offline life (Hine, 2015; Lane, 2018; Sylvander, 2020).

The empirical material I gathered for this study consists of photos, text-based comments and discussions, fieldnotes, and interviews. During 2019 and 2020, I condu-

cted around three hundred hours of online ethnography in the Facebook group. From the group, I sampled photos and followed discussions. I focused mainly on material that were crucial to answering my research questions, such as specific discussions of memories from youth.

The book that came out of this group is primarily visual; it includes several hundred photos with captions, a foreword, and forty short quotes from graffiti writers who were active during the 1980s and 1990s. I was invited to the release party, where writers engaged in face-to-face interaction, illuminating how online social practices influence offline life and vice versa (Lane, 2018; Robinson & Schulz, 2009). During the release party for *The Book*, I performed three hours of ethnography focusing on how writers interacted around *The Book*. To get additional perspectives, I recorded five hours of interviews with eight writers who were particularly engaged in the project. This included the person who initiated the Facebook group and was one of the editors of *The Book*, one additional book editor, and individuals who had contributed with many photos and comments. To provide context, I also included five hours of subcultural podcasts (seven episodes) where graffiti writers' relations to photographs and memory were central topics.

The photos analyzed depict graffiti pieces and individuals painting graffiti. They were analyzed by drawing on Rose's (2016) critical visual methods, analyzing the social role of images. I have been inspired by Rose's way of analyzing social interactions around images as well as the cultural meanings embedded in the images as such. I employed an abductive methodology, shifting back and forth between the production of empirical material and analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012): this means that I went back and forth between inductive and deductive approaches as I worked openly towards developing the research question and selecting theories that facilitated multidimensional sociological

answers. During this process, I used a thematic analysis, in which I constructed codes along the way to successively analyze themes and patterns, such as the presence of the past and the absent youth (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Subcultural memory work

My analysis is structured around three key themes. First, in the theme "Connecting photos and writers," I analyze how crowdsourcing constructs the meaning and value of photographs and how this results in connections between writers. In the second theme, "Representing absence," I investigate how the past is made meaningful in the present. In the last theme, "Materializing a shared past," I analyze how memories are experienced through different materialities.

Connecting photos and writers

In the following quote from the Facebook group, a writer wants to give away a bag of photos. The quote offers an insight into how the value of photos changes as they are circulated.

> Sven: Anyone who cares for a bag of graff photos from 88 to 95, holla! Or they'll go in the garbage. [...]
> Michael: Yes, please [...]
> Johan: Too bad didn't see this before!! Fo sure you're itchn' for old photos [...]
> Jussi: Who gets 'm could scan? Or I can scan them before the person gets them. [...]
> Per: Stop! Hey, no graffiti in the garbage

The quote reflects the arbitrariness of what is to be preserved and remembered and what will be discarded and forgotten. Sven, who has the photos, no longer considers them worth keeping, but for others they have great value; they say, no graffiti photos should be considered "garbage." Jussi offers to scan them, which means they can be shared within a broader circle.

Also in other posts, the increased value of graffiti photos is constructed by saving them. A request in the Facebook group illustrates this: "Now go to the garage/basement/attic and dig out the shoebox/black book and do some scanning!" Another writer answers that he will join the effort: "I gotta go up in the attic and dig for some images!" In these posts, photos are discussed as neglected and forgotten in "shoeboxes," "basements," and "attics."

Through the Facebook discussion and its affirmative comments, the photos are symbolically constructed as both valuable and forgotten. This enables writers to join in on the mission to save them. Enthusiastic comments express that the past evokes intense positive emotions, as in the following texts: "Incredibly fun to see new and old stuff from the past! Magic" or "Many memories come back when you see all these photos!" When graffiti photos from the 1980s and early 1990s are crowdsourced, they are presented as "magic" treasures from a previous time to be "dug" up. The 1980s were the time when subway graffiti in the New York tradition was diffused outside the United States. In Sweden and many other countries, the pioneering writers who picked up the torch have iconic status (see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume).

The quotes above show that the cultural meanings of photos are constructed in several interdependent ways: When the photos are referred to as "old," their meaning and function are transformed. In the 1980s and 1990s, the role of these photos was to reproduce particular graffiti pieces.

Then, the temporal distance between the execution of a piece and reviewing it through photographic reproduction was short, sometimes only hours. The photos had an integrated role vis-à-vis graffiti practice (see Hannerz & Kimvall, this volume). When it comes to the photos crowdsourced through the Facebook group, however, the temporal distance between piece and photo has increased to between three and four decades, and their function is transformed from contemporary representations into materialized bearers of a shared past.

In the Facebook group, the term "old school" is constructed through a timeframe, a boundary through which the group administrators have defined what should be remembered in this group:

> Welcome to this group for sharing photos and memories of old school graffiti from Sweden. [...] In order to apply a timeframe, the years 1980-1992 are what count [...] Posts that fall outside those boundaries will be deleted immediately.

According to these group rules, a few selected years "count," indicating that delimitation of the old school is not universally agreed upon. A member who asks an administrator to extend the timeframe is dismissed.

> Admin: I think 1980–1992 is a good timeframe. I know some don't agree, but sometimes you got to have a rule. [...]
> Johnny: 83–92, sure, sweet years, but can you break the rule if you manage to find things from 93-99?
> Admin: No, I'm sorry. I've made exceptions, but no more.

In the discussion above, there is an agreement to start in the early 1980s, here expressed as the "sweet years," but where the "old school" ends is disputed. Discussions about wheth-

er these years are a "good timeframe" reveal that the "old school" is an arbitrary concept. The constructed timeframe determines what should be saved and shared in this group. As Halbwachs (1992:222) writes, distinct figures, dates, and periods can be particularly significant in collective memories. Within the timeframe that defines the old school here, the selected photos are united under a common label, while everything outside the boundary is discarded. A memory community privileges memories that unite the group, and its beginning is constructed from a present perspective and constructs a lineage similar to that of a family (Zerubavel, 1996). This is also an example of how a few individuals, the administrators, can influence and shape the meaning and content of collective memories.

Connecting writers

Bringing photos together can also bring individuals together. When the Facebook group is initiated, many responses are enthusiastic, which is reflected in posts such as: "Damn, this group is the best thing that's happened to Internet" and "Best FB group evvvah." New members are greeted with appreciation, in posts like: "Great that you're joining us, Peter!" Such cheerful affirmations can be understood as expressions of the collective effervescence that can construct social solidarity.

Graffiti is a practice of name writing; when the writers were young boys, they knew each other by their *taken* subcultural names, their tags. But on Facebook, it is common to use *given* names. Through the different use of names, we can see that the online community of aging Swedish graffiti writers has previously only partially been *a* group. This is a rather new community built on reconnections and new connections. One member who goes under the username of his given name, writes:

> Hi my graff name is Steam, when I moved to London, I put a box with photos of my friends and pieces in my dad's basement. Unfortunately, some dope fiend thought it was a treasure and stole it. [...] I have no photos from that time so if you have something please share with me

As we see, the writer needs to identify himself to other participants to position himself within the subcultural community. In the past, their social connections were established through tags written on the walls of houses and in subway cars. Through seeing each other's tags and pieces, the writers identify each other while they are made anonymous to non-writers (Campos, 2013; Macdonald, 2001). During unsanctioned graffiti writing, using pen names reduces the risk of being arrested. The pseudonyms can construct cohesion between the writers who recognize each other, and a boundary toward non-writers who cannot identify the practitioners. But when writers meet online and post photos and messages on digital "walls," the use of given names instead makes many of them anonymous to each other, hence they must establish new connections by presenting themselves to each other. The constellation of writers that remembers graffiti is not the same as the one that wrote graffiti in the 1980s and 1990s. The writer Crap shares an anecdote about meeting another writer during the project: "I recognized his tags, knew who he was and such. But I had never met him before." The project includes participants who were writing graffiti in different parts of Sweden during different years; some have never previously met, like the writer Botn shares:

> I have gotten to know many through [working with] the [ensuing] book [...] In the beginning you admired them a lot, before you met them for the first time, [...] it's not anything extraordinary like that anymore.

Here, Botn says that there was a hierarchy between writers in the 1980s or "in the beginning." Then he testifies that the hierarchy has been leveled during work with *The Book*, mentioning that now knowing his old heroes is "not anything extraordinary [...] anymore." Similarly, the writer West reveals how he met Bic for the first time during the release party for *The Book*; they are both in their 50s:

> It was the first time I met him. [...] When I grew up, I thought he was a heavyweight writer. So, it was pretty cool to talk with him. [...] That's a role model, but then when you notice he's just a man like me, then it like gets played down [...] But it's still cool to meet [him] since he's made such an impression on me [...] I'll never forget his stuff.

Writers assert that new connections are made during this practice of subcultural memory work. Differences in hierarchy that were great in the 1980s and 1990s have diminished considerably a few decades later. The quotes above also show how different media shape the interaction between aging writers. Facebook sparks reconstruction of a scattered community, and this eventually leads to offline activities like book publishing and meeting face to face.

An additional aspect of secrecy around graffiti pseudonyms is that revealing who you are to non-writers is sensitive. A group member who participates with his given name occasionally comments on his pieces and activities, referring to himself in the third person as the writer Crust. When I ask him why he doesn't reveal that he made these paintings 35 years ago, he says he cannot rule out that colleagues from work might join this semi-public group: "My colleagues and bosses may have negative views of graffiti, to reveal that I painted could give me problems because I work in a governmental institution." The writer Dual, on the other hand, revealed his graffiti interest to his employers, but it was not

without some hesitation. When he finally *came out* as a writer, he only received positive reactions. These are examples of how the secrecy and stigma associated with graffiti can be at play decades after writers refrain from writing illegal graffiti. However, this dilemma is rarely explicitly reflected in the Facebook group discussions; they rather focus on positive experiences of graffiti.

Constructing similarity and difference

Graffiti is not always friendly; it is also hierarchical and competitive. Macdonald's (2001: 1) study on how graffiti writers construct masculine identities starts like this:

> The fight kicks off in the usual way. Outside a bar on a Saturday night, a minor insult is offered and met and a scuffle ensues. Two men battle it out in the name of honor, and it's not long before the fight steps up in pace and starts to weave its way steadily down the street.

This fight never actually happened. Macdonald uses it as a metaphor for graffiti to describe the "challenge and male bravado" that is its "fuel," like in any other fight between men. But when the writers I study meet face-to-face during the release party for *The Book*, such a metaphor cannot be made. In this crowdsourcing project, previous conflicts and differences are played down.

In my fieldnotes from the release party, there is a moment where a pair of men with greying hair and beards sit close together browsing through *The Book*. I watch how the book captures them, as they turn the pages their faces shift back and forth between serious consideration and joyful smiles. I am surprised that they behave as if they were old friends, because they never wrote graffiti together. West later confirms that he felt it was easy to connect:

> Yes, if you were there then [in the 1980s] you kinda know what type of person it is, what he did and such [...]. You know, it gets like a base [...] we're all writers, that's where we come from.

This moment points to how crowdsourced photographs can create moments of collective solidarity. But it also captures a boundary toward those who do not share the symbolic meaning of old school graffiti. I note that between the writers on each side of the table, sit the girlfriend of one of the writer's and two boys in their late teens, one of them is the son of one of the writers. While the middle-aged men are mesmerized by the book, the others around the table are disengaged, they listen in with blank faces while occasionally swiping on their cellphones. The difference in engagement is an expression of a boundary between the subcultural and its outside. The book triggers emotions and constructs connections between aging writers; it is as if the writers are moved to another temporal dimension while the people around them cannot travel along.

Within this project, aspects of non-subcultural life are forgotten. During the release party, at the desk where I buy *The Book,* I meet a respected writer from the 1980s whom I haven't seen for years. We greet each other with the regular "what's up?" and then I ask him what is happening in his life otherwise. Immediately I feel that the question is out of line; this friendly, open man withdraws into himself: "Nothing much, just work," he quietly responds. I realize that this is an evening for celebrating graffiti history, period. The conversation lose momentum. Distinctions are made through memory work (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996), and subcultural identity and authenticity are constructed by emphasizing internal similarities and by raising boundaries to the non-subcultural (Hannerz, 2015; Jenkins, 2008; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; see Flaherty, this volume).

Representing absence

Through the photos, the past is made present (Barthes, 1981: 85; Boehm, 2012). What is absent is called forth and made present in several ways. I will analyze four central aspects of this absence: absent friends, absent environment, absent practice and absent youth.

Representing absent friends

First, the construction of a shared past does not only include those who are engaged in present memory work. When photos of pieces are posted in the Facebook group, a reoccurring topic is what happened to friends who are no longer part of the community. A common inquiry is to confirm who has passed away, as in the following conversation in the Facebook group.

> Steve: About the rumors that Scam is gone, is it true also for Task, anybody that knows?
> Peter: Yes, unfortunately, Task is gone.
> Steve: Thanks for the confirmation.
> Jimmy: Didn't go well for Task .... if it is the same dude I painted with a couple of times [...]
> Jonas: We went to the same class for nine years. He was legit. I remember when he did [the piece on this photo]. He was sleeping through school in those days. R.I.P.

Here, writers jointly consider who is absent from the subcultural community now, when it is being (re)constructed online. Tributes to absent friends strengthen bonds between those who are still here and alive. Crowdsourcing photographs functions in a way similar to compiling a family album. Photos make individuals who are distant in time or space appear present. Through a family album those who are absent are brought close; in the album a scattered family

is always together (Rose, 2003). The way writers (re)connect with those who are absent constructs a "bloodline" that can unite the group (Jacobs, 1981: 104).

Representing absent environment

Most of the crowdsourced photos represent pieces that have been absent ever since the paint was removed from the surface on which they were painted. These pieces are made present through old photos, but also through recollections of the environment of the past, as the writer Sigma says:

> [When] you see photos of [the paintings] you remember them or often you remember [the ones] who made them. [...] You reflect on how it looked then, how progress happened and what we see today, how much [graffiti] is left and how much is gone.

This can be read as nostalgia and an expression of loss, but the most common mood when recollecting graffiti is joy, as reflected in the following statement by the writer Swift:

> You know, there are so important memories, so it's amazing, stories, almost like myths, fairy tales, [...] small stuff about how it was in the 80s, [...] that's wonderful! [...] And it doesn't stop, the more people you get to know the more you get to hear about the old times. [...] You get warm [inside]. [...] [When] I hear about how it went about. Then time stops, you just sit and listen.

The quote reflects the positive emotions produced by stories. Crap agrees about the central role of stories, but stresses that they are more than entertaining "fairy tales." They relate to how you position yourself and "navigate" in the world:

> It's [through] that you grew up, we're storytelling people, we're humans, that's how we navigate. So, stories ain't something quirky [...] it has a function in relation to something and when you get that it's not some kind of fairy tale.

Photos make the friends, environment, and youth of the past present, and in this way, cultural meanings of a shared past are constructed. A common discussion in the Facebook group concerns helping each other recollect where early pieces were located and what they looked like.

> Björn Jansson: ”I was thinking when I put the kids to bed, that the piece I'm thinking about was probably three letters, light, white or silver almost”.
> Kostas Nikolaou: ”Could be a big old Roc, or similar, with a character? [Painted] about [19]84–[19]85. It was pretty high up [on the wall] compared to later pieces. I don't exactly remember”.
> Richard Ekblad: ”Are you talking about the walls by Trollesundsvägen? Around Högdalen? I remember a lot of good stuff from when I was like 8–10 [years old], my grandma lived in Tyresö and for some reason my dad always drove through Högdalen.”
> Björn Jansson: ”That's the place Richard. It was good down there.”

This conversation illustrates how participants collaborate in an effort to recollect and reconstruct the urban environment of their youth and their interaction within it. As Halbwachs (1992: 203) argues, collective solidarity is built through images of places where a group has lived. By collectively compiling fragments of graffiti pieces and environments, writers construct images of a past that they share. Here, a photographic picture is not even necessary for "seeing" the past; a mental image suffices. This shows how images are building

blocks for construction of a shared past, and that the "full picture," so to speak, is imaginary. This discussion illustrates that memories are not solid inscriptions of the past in individual minds, but are instead constructed in present collective processes (Halbwachs, 1992; Zerubavel, 1996).

Representing absent practice

A third dimension of what is made present is the subcultural practice of masculine youth. When the Facebook group reaches one thousand members, a discussion starts on how to celebrate. Several writers suggest a face-to-face meeting, and the discussion turns to how this can be done now when they are no longer young boys. Several suggest illegal painting, some of them with obvious irony, indicating that this is not what most of them regularly do at this age. Roger declines the offer to paint without permission, while commenting that this may make him appear old and dusty in the eyes of the others. The quote below shows that he finds it most unlikely that their fitness at this age would suffice to outrun the police:

> Well, that I/we (some others in the group) would stand and paint illegally again would be a sight for the Gods, good action for the heart maybe. But if we [got] chased it would be [the] slowest and the shortest race. We (I mean some of us) would have to do some intense training to get in shape. P.S. Jukka, don't [take] it personally. LOL

This discussion reflects that illegal painting and youth are still central to the cultural meaning of graffiti. It is implicitly stated that graffiti is about writing without permission and running from the police. In the past, collective solidarity between writers was constructed in a concrete manner through illegal painting. But here they state that aging prevents them from illegal painting; instead they engage in sub-

cultural practice through online recollection of when they were young boys (Jacobson, 2020). The idea that they would engage in the same activities as when they were young is presented as ridiculous.

In *The Book*, all texts written by the men are about when they were boys, like in this quote where the writer Bold refers to other writers as “brothers”:

> That time is so important to me – I met many like-minded people: searching and desperate to find something else. I rebelled against everyone who didn’t want to look beyond their little suburban bubble. My best friends from [19[85–[19]92 have become family, like brothers from another mother.

Subcultural authenticity is constructed through memories of being young, rebellious boys painting illegal graffiti, an activity that is associated with masculinity (Macdonald, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018). The writer Bold remembers that they established a strong connection during “that time” with other boys described as “brothers.” His narrative states that performance of being different made them feel collective solidarity as they “rebelled” against the mainstream “bubble” (Hannerz, 2015; Thornton, 1995). Now, their youth is gone, and subcultural identity is instead achieved through recollections.

Representing absent masculine bodies

One aspect of absent practice is the absence of young bodies, as expressed above by the inability to run fast and as seen during the book release with all the greying hair. But photos make younger versions of the writers present and show them interacting with the environment as it looked in the past. In *The Book*, there are many photos of this kind, for example a photo of an adolescent male writer who proudly

poses in front of his tag in a Stockholm subway car with a marker between his teeth.

Several writers point out that photos showing the young writers can have an even stronger ability to make the past present than photos showing the actual pieces. In a podcast, graffiti writer West comments on such photographs as bearers of memories: "The pieces aren't that interesting, the best photos are of people." When writer Stone reflects on how another photo in *The Book* connects him with the past, he expresses the importance of the environment but also of fashion:

> Look at this photo, like the environment and the people, how they are laying there [in the grass] and studying the piece and the process [of the painting] writers. It is always fun to see action photos [from when people paint], but this was also a document of that time. I mean, look at the clothes, look at the haircuts, like the BMX-bike there.

A common type of photo in *The Book* is of writers posing in front of their work.All of the bodies depicted are male: teenage writers painting on walls and trains, spray can collections in their bedrooms, and markers inside train cars.

In western societies, images typically show men who act and women as objects to gaze upon (Rose, 2016: 33). In the finished book, this is true for the boys, but girls don't appear at all except in a few paintings depicting females, often in a sexualized manner. Out of the 500 photos in *The Book*, I can only find one representing graffiti made by a girl. Something that the photos do show, but that is rarely made explicit throughout the book project, is that the remembered friendship bonds are between men. In this project, men are an "unmarked" and taken-for-granted category (Zerubavel, 2018), and it is a practice of male homophily (McPherson et al., 2001).

Materializing a shared past

Online connections of photos sparked the second phase in this crowdsourcing process: the transformation of them into the printed book. Less than a year after the Facebook group started, the writer Dual announces that:

> Me and the group admin [...] have decided to [...] make a book. It would just be stupid not to document this properly with both images and stories about that time/pieces/spots/events.

This post communicates that materialization of photographs in digital form has its shortcomings, and that it would be "stupid" not to transform the photos into another materiality. Dual argues that a book would be a more "proper" way to "document" and preserve the crowdsourced photos. The word "proper" has both symbolic and concrete implications. The planned book is contextualized alongside previous iconic graffiti books that inspired the writers as youths: "Imagine a third bible, squeezed in between Subway Art and Spraycan Art," a member posts.

Four years later, the book is finished. It is impressive: eight by 12 inches and weighing in at almost four pounds. You need both hands to hold it steady. The fabric of the cloth cover stimulates the responsiveness of my fingers. The title is embossed with bold capital letters in shiny silver. Swift tells me about how the materiality of the book enabled him to share his devotion to graffiti, and to feel pride about and reconcile with stigma of being a writer:

> I invited my mom who never kinda got what I've been up to, 'cause [my graffiti writing has] mostly been a problem in her life. [...] But when she saw this hardcover book with these chrome letters she went: "Oh Lord, what's this?" I went: "This is a reward for you too mom." Cause it

> was a hardcover book, for her you know it made it [into] something she can show her friends, [...] now it was like her son had been acknowledged, for her. It was big for me, to see her looking in my book.

The materiality of things can create intense emotional experiences, as they carry collective representations like shared memories that are "sacred" to a group (Alexander, 2008; Durkheim, 1995; Halbwachs, 1992). Even before opening *The Book*, its material surface and weight symbolically communicate that Swedish old school graffiti is precious. A hardcover book bears the symbolic meaning of good taste and legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1984); the very design of the finished book makes an argument for recognizing this subcultural practice as a cultural heritage. Tangible things are imbued with cultural meaning; as "secular icons" they can materialize communities, playing a role similar to that of totems in pre-modern societies (Binder, 2012; Durkheim, 1995). Swift continues, saying that "to be part" of the book evokes strong emotions:

> I'm touched by this book, think it's a grand document of the times. [When I first got it] I didn't open it. I had it lying around a week. [...] Because it was so sensitive, and I didn't have time to browse through it carefully. [...] I'm proud of that time. [...] [The book] evoked very beautiful memories. [...] It's solemn, and I can browse that book like a hundred more times. I'm grateful. Fun to be part of such a grand thing.

When photos are "circulated" and transformed into different "technological modalities" with different characteristics, their visual meanings, effects and social roles change (Rose, 2016: 25). Photos are experienced by other senses than sight when we hold a book, sit close together discussing its con-

tent, and listening to each other's responses and memories. The social bonds that this experience can construct are invisible, but photo prints and books can ground these feelings in a tangible form that we can hold (Alexander, 2020). The invisible social "glue" that transcends individuals of a community can engender intense emotions, which Durkheim (1995) labelled "collective effervescence." These emotions are both the results of social cohesion and can construct social bonds and shared identities.

The materiality of *The Book* offers another way of experiencing photos than viewing them on Facebook. One of *The Book*'s editors, shares his view on tangible photos and books:

> I think it's a completely different feel [...] compared to when you see it digitally, to have [the photos] in physical form is like so much more precious than seeing it online where it's just like in the feed somewhere [...] it's quite sweet to have something on the bookshelf [...]. And in this smartphone society, [...] it's not like I don't like that, but sometimes it's sweet to leave all the sitting and scrolling on Instagram, on graffiti and such. Then I can bring out a book and browse a bit, then put it back and continue looking another time. This feel of holding it [is spectacular].

Books embody symbolic meaning because they are tangible things you can hold, allowing you to experience and possess cultural meanings in a concrete manner (Alexander, 2008). In books, meaning is compressed and made durable; it can be preserved, owned, transported, and shared (Alexander & Bartmanski, 2012: 2). The finished book has been made into an icon; crowdsourced photos have been selected and connected to form a bounded whole that materializes the unity of the Old School. After the release party, writers bring *The Book* home and can open it and experience the collective

effervescence that engenders and manifests collective solidarity (Durkheim, 1995).

Experiencing the past

One of the specific aspects of books, compared to the Internet, is that books have a concrete beginning and end that construct a definite sequence of words and images. Digital social media and face-to-face interaction are fluid and difficult to grasp in a concrete manner (Hoskins, 2017). A Facebook group has a beginning, but not necessarily an end; new members, photos and comments are added in a continuous flow. But printed books are static, which calls for careful consideration of their content and design, as Stone says:

> We felt a responsibility to tell the truth about this time, and this couldn't be reduced to *one* explanation, instead it had to be experienced through photographs that speak for themselves. [...] One explanation would not capture the complexity of the many opinions and experiences writers have.

Photographs can be read in many ways: they show what has been, but not what it means (Barthes, 1981: 85). The stories told by photos come all at once; they cannot be translated into a sequence of words without reducing their manifold meanings (Bate, 2013: 5). When I first open *The Book*, I am confused by the lack of obvious structure. I encounter an abundance of graffiti; only a few pages include anything more than photos of pieces with short captions. In the foreword one of the featured writer describes that *The Book*

> is a non-chronological depiction of graffiti in the larger cities of Sweden during 1984–92. It contains never seen before photos, and through the stories and thoughts from

> the pioneers and their apprentices, the reader will get an insight in the life as a graffiti writer during these first years. The book has a free form, it aims to convey the graffiti writers' feelings, rather than to present explanations. It is produced by people who were writers themselves at the time, which makes it different from other accounts of this era. I have never been as dedicated to anything or done anything as important as painting graffiti. I'm not alone in feeling like that. I keep the memories of the first pieces close to me, like gems. [the Book] has great historical value.

"The free form" of *the Book*, its absence of "explanations" and its "non-chronological depiction" mean that the 500 photos within it are disorganized. There are no chapters, sections, themes, page numbers, index, or table of contents. Instead it mixes photos from different cities from different parts of Sweden, photos of work done between 1984 and 1992. Similarly, several spreads in *the Book* manage to cover almost the entire timeframe. In addition, without making any distinctions between the pieces, large parts of Sweden's considerable geographic space is covered.

The Book does not present any obvious narrative; as the foreword says, it offers an "experience" but not an "explanation." Still, even if the editors did not intend to superimpose their interpretation, there is not really a "free" form. The disorganized connections of photos and short texts do actually constitute a structure that constructs an implicit narrative. Because temporal and geographic differences are misrecognized, the content is presented as one united experience, which contributes to the construction of an "era." The writers' "experiences" are presented as shared, as the writer quoted above writes, he is "not alone" in experiencing that graffiti has defined his life course.

Conclusion

As we age, we have longer life courses to look back on and less time to look forward to. Questions about who we were and who we have become get more pressing. For subcultural practitioners, aging has particular implications. Graffiti is a practice that has been associated with youth, masculinity, and crime. In an exercise of male homophily, middle-aged graffiti writers reconstruct subcultural graffiti from illegal writing into memory work. As middle-aged men, these writers look back at when they were young boys and consider the meaning of their experiences. They investigate this by collecting, sharing, and discussing photographs. This case of crowdsourcing is a practice that makes the past present and constructs subcultural memories. Graffiti writers collectively lay a puzzle with photographs and combine them to give shape to a shared past.

When we do things with photos, photos do things with us. Photos spark social connections that can construct collective solidarity. But the past cannot produce or maintain social bonds in itself—this is done through collective memory work in the present. This case illustrates how different kinds of media shape subcultural practice as practitioners age. Digital social media facilitate connections between individuals and photos. Printing a book enables preservation of cultural meanings you can possess and keep close in your home.

The Book that came out of this project is a solid tactile object you can hold; it enables writers to sensuously experience their shared past. *The Book* and its photos become inseparable from the subcultural community and the life courses of its participants. The diverse sites of memory work studied here share a friendly atmosphere that we may not associate with media, particularly not with digital media. This is also different from some other contexts of graffiti practice that are more competitive and conflictual. Here, the

intentions and shepherding of the group administrators and book editors have governed interaction. With this said, the initiators testify that the specifics of the different interfaces and materialities influenced social connections that they did not foresee.

Graffiti practice is contested, but within this crowdsourcing process, explicit aims to change the relation between writers and other parts of society were rare. The writers' stories are primarily intended for a subcultural audience and told on the participants' own terms. Because they do not try to explain their activity to non-subcultural readers, subcultural differences that construct collective identity and symbolic boundaries are maintained. Still, *The Book* makes claims about external recognition of graffiti as a cultural heritage and about graffitied life courses being precious. The statement from one of the participants: "Stop! Hey, no graffiti in the garbage," can be read as: "Don't discard our experiences, this is our lives, this is us."

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08

From writing the streets to Instagram: a history of subcultural graffiti as media

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Introduction

Needless to say, many things have changed since the first graffiti writers started writing their made-up names in Philadelphia and New York City in the late 1960s. First of all, subcultural graffiti – or if you prefer subway graffiti (Castleman 1982), TTP-graffiti (Jacobson 1996), or hip-hop graffiti (Ferell 1996) – is no longer a regional phenomenon, primarily restricted to a few cities on the US East Coast; it is global in the sense that the subculture has spread to most parts of the world. Second, information technologies, such as social media, have made it possible to consume graffiti globally and instantly, yet from a distance (MacDowall 2019). Third, graffiti is no longer a minor offense but in many countries defined juridically as a serious violation that is punished with prison sentences and substantial fines. This has accordingly resulted in a multibillion-dollar industry with various removal technologies, drones, alarms, paint-sensors and special anti-graffiti squads combatting it (Gastman et al. 2016: 86; Kramer 2010; Hannerz & Kimvall 2020). Fourth, subway trains no longer carry graffiti throughout the city day after day, but are now in many places instantly taken out of traffic and cleaned. The arrival of the systematic cleaning – what in graffiti is referred to as *the buff* – has since it was introduced in New York City in the late 1970s (Mirando & De La Borie 2014) become standard in most world cities and has often been extended to include the city itself and its walls (Kramer 2017). Fifth, graffiti is no longer the do-it-yourself-phenomenon it was in the 1970s and 1980s where writers had to rely on office markers and spray paint shoplifted from the local paint store and then adjust them through mixing colors and exchanging nozzles (Gastman et al. 2016: 20ff; see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume). Today, spray paint is produced especially for writing graffiti, with cans being both cheaper and more suitable for the task. There is now a wide assortment of colors, different pressures, and gloss, all avai-

lable through the web (Barenthin Lindblad & Jacobson 2011: 55). Such a technological development also includes markers, spray nozzles – or caps – and a variety of books, magazines, and documentary films on the subject.

This development of subcultural graffiti is what we want to discuss in this chapter. Our purpose is to outline a history of how graffiti communicates, but also how it is communicated, produced, consumed, and distributed, and how this has developed over its five decades of existence. We will thus attempt to trace out a history of the medialization of subcultural graffiti.

There are, of course, numerous accounts of the history of graffiti, chronicling global (Ganz 2004), national (Gastman & Neelon 2011), local (Barenthin Lindblad 2019) and individual developments (Witten & White 2001; Mirando & De La Borie 2014), as well as legal (Kramer 2015) temporal (Austin 2001), and spatial aspects (Cooper 2008). Subcultural graffiti histories are written and published in various contexts: subcultural (Phase II 1996), journalistic (Gastman et al. 2016), and academic (Castleman 1982; Stewart 1989/2009; Ferrell 1996; Jacobson 1996; Austin 2001). These histories of graffiti usually combine a mix of various formal, stylistic, technological, social, cultural, and political aspects, and primarily rely on ethnographic data combined with various types of visual and material evidence.

The chapter at hand is heavily indebted to the endeavors mentioned above, and those familiar with these stories will probably recognize some of the events and the general timeline. Our purpose, however, is slightly different: we build on these and other sources to chronicle the development of graffiti as a phenomenon appearing as, in, and through, different media. The focus will therefore be not on the deeds of single writers or crews, the development of styles and techniques, or describing graffiti in any specific a local or regional context, but on identifying and mapping shifts in

how, and through what, graffiti has been communicated, and how this has contributed to the development and globalization of subcultural graffiti.

The question of interest is thus how and what would a history of subcultural graffiti as media look like? And how would such a history contribute to the understanding of graffiti as a subculture? We want to do so by analyzing graffiti as a medium in itself, including its being mediated through other mediums such as fanzines, films, and social media, but also through track side walls and trains. The latter is what media theorist W.J.T Mitchell would refer to as nesting, "in which one medium appears inside another as its content" (Mitchell 2005: 262).

This is of concern, not just for those interested in graffiti and media, but also from a theoretical perspective: Historically, the role of the media and commerce has been treated in subcultural studies as part of a mainstream and thus as the opposite to the subcultural and a threat (Hall & Jefferson 1976; see Flaherty, this volume). Sarah Thornton's (1995) eminent work on club cultures partly changed this. Her claim is that media in its different forms are central to subcultural establishment, and that disapproving tabloid stories work to disseminate subcultural beings, doings and ideals. New participants are attracted to the subcultural through mass media exposure and then become part of a collective through niche and micro media – such as music press and fanzines.

Accordingly, media is here seen from a culturally historical perspective as plural: "media" is not one thing but many. Following Jarlbrink et al. (2019), we recognize that an analysis of a history of subcultural graffiti as media needs to pay attention to more than just something that is in between sender and recipient and makes it possible to distribute information in time and space. This means investigating

media as including *technologies and material distribution channels*. Cheaper spray paint, camera equipment and printing technologies, mentioned above, as well as the Internet and social media, have had an impact, not just on how graffiti is distributed, but also how it is produced and consumed. Consequently, we are also interested in media in the sense of *modalities*. Mitchell has noted that the "notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual and semiotic elements", and thus these are "mixed media" albeit not "mixed in the same way, with the same proportions of elements" (Mitchell 2005: 260). Mitchell's point, and ours, is to problematize the term 'visual media', as it, according to Mitchell, is an inexact and possibly misleading concept. Subcultural graffiti's most basic form – the tag – is, as we shall further develop, a case in point: It is at the same time an image and text, as well as a representation of the individual writer. It is here we use Mitchell's term *nesting* – one medium residing within another as content – to rephrase McLuhan's (1964: 305) famous aphorism "the medium is the message", that is, the content of a medium is always an earlier medium. The point here would be to address mixed modalities without MacLuhan's implied technological determinism and explicit historical sequencing (Mitchell 2005: 262).

Following from the stress on technologies and modalities, we are also interested in media in the sense of a social environment, something that instigates, shapes, and regulates social practices. We will point to how the mediatization of graffiti from walking the streets, collectively watching graffitied subways go by, buying books and zines, or scrolling Instagram, means a change in how the subcultural is conceived, yet that this change, rather than having replaced its previous environments, encompasses them.

This understanding of media – as technologies, modalities and a social environment – makes it possible to

transgress both distinctions and borders between, for example, mass media and artistic media, or popular media and subcultural media. We are thus interested in how graffiti has functioned and functions in a wide spectrum of communicational relations and networks, constitutes a media technology in itself, and is content in other material contexts and distribution channels. In other words, we explore how the modal characteristics of subcultural graffiti – text as well as image, but often also movement and sound – are part of its media history. Finally, we examine how graffiti creates social contexts and groups; practitioners and spectators; nodes and cultural networks; audiences and interactions.

Graffiti as networked media

Every historical account on subcultural graffiti, in its various forms, departs from a single medium: the tag. The tag is graffiti's most basic, yet most striking medium. It is defined by its habitual aspect, becoming part of participants' daily activities, and written as you walk through your neighborhood, on the way home from school or to a friend (Gastman et al. 2016, see Hannerz, this volume). Tags reenact an ancient act of writing your name so as to leave a mark; still, it subverts this ancient past as the person behind the name is created through the very act of writing it. The difference between tags within subcultural graffiti and the historic visitors – such as the Vikings Halvdan and Arni leaving a mark inside Hagia Sofia, Rimbaud signing the Luxor temple, or the countless acts of lovers inscribing their initials on a tree trunk – is that in all of the latter acts the name directly represents a body that precedes it. In subcultural graffiti, the tag creates the subcultural individual; it is through the writing of a taken nom-de-plume that the subject is realized (MacDonald 2001; Kimvall 2007; Hannerz 2017). The iden-

tity behind a tag is thus not primarily understood as a noun but explicitly described as a verb. The proper question when two graffiti writers meet is not “what’s your name?” but “whatchu write?” (What do you write?) (Kimvall 2007).

Tags are in this sense performative in the very sense of Austin’s (1962) notion of the term. In contrast to other forms of unsanctioned public writings, the medium, to return to MacLuhan (1964), is the message. The writing on the walls, or trains, creates its own mediated environment as well as a social environment that goes beyond the single tag. The tag establishes a social environment that creates, at the same time as it implies a symbiotic network between the letters written, the place, previous tags of the same name, and other writers’ tags. In other words, graffiti writers create tags, but the tags at the same time create the writers (Barenthin Lindblad in Cooper 2008). It is probably the logic of this symbiotic network that made Jean Baudrillard talk about the tags in subcultural graffiti as “names without intimacy” and “empty signifiers” (Baudrillard, 1976: 79).

In the texts covering the meanings of graffiti, such as the work of Craig Castleman (1982), Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (1984), Nancy MacDonald (2001), Jack Stewart (1989/2009) and Roger Gastman (2016), graffiti is also described, from its initiation, not only as a communication of belonging, but also as one of presence, skills, and omnipotence. These texts point to how the writing of graffiti was, as early as the 1960s and early 1970s, part of an intricate system of communication where the style and execution of writing came to represent varieties in excellence and control of the medium; the difficulty of the particular location and access signaled varieties in risk-taking, and quantity and coverage across time and space pointed at commitment. The establishment of a subcultural play within which participants participate and compete through the communication of visibility, competence, style, courage and

belonging led to the development of the medium (Hannerz 2023a). When popular places for writing such as subway trains, entrances, and tunnels became saturated with different tags, the bigger and bolder meant that you stood out. This internal development was nevertheless made possible through technical developments. Just as mainstream use of the felt-tip marker and aerosol cans made graffiti writing possible (Stewart 2009: 30; Gastman et al. 2016), the creative use of caps (spray can nozzles) as being interchangeable between different kinds of aerosol products – for example spray starch – made the fat cap possible and hence bigger tags and the development of (master-)pieces. Even though Super Cool 223 is often credited as having invented the piece from the tag, such a distinction is hard to make. Characters were added to tags, such as Stay High 149's use of "The Saint", the stylized logogram of Lee 163d, and clouds around the tags had already been introduced (Stewart 2009: 41ff). The piece, or the masterpiece, was thus gradually developed rather than suddenly invented; it became a means to make your name larger and stand out.

But just as the act of writing meant a creative use of products already available, the figurative language of graffiti was not born out of nothing, but was developed through a playful competition around visibility and style that drew heavily from comics and advertisements (Miller 1994). During the early 1970s, different elements – such as shadows, or 3D, backgrounds, highlights and second outlines – were developed, as was the use of characters to frame, surround, and occasionally replace the letters on the train. The use of characters from mainstream comics such as the Pink Panther, Snoopy, Beetle Bailey, as well as underground comix such as Vaughn Bodé, points to the close links between graffiti and the style of comics – especially the almost obligatory use of an outline to letters and characters – but also to advertisements, not only in lettering but also with the

backgrounds and the position of the characters (see Anssi Arte 2015 for an in-depth and highly informative study on the links between advertisement and the lettering styles of graffiti). The overall code of the medium is clearly subcultural, and primarily communicates with peers, yet is seen by the whole city. And despite the overall subcultural status of the medium, the figurative elements – the characters – are often picked straight out of the broadest everyday visual cultures, such as commercials and mainstream comics, as well as other subcultural contexts, and the letter styles consciously inspired by international and avant-garde typography. As notes writer AMRL /Bama:

> Writers used to flip for company logos, because they would get ideas from them, to the point where you would see a serious looking B-Boy walking around with a Good Housekeeping magazine or any magazine that carries a lot of ads. […] he's looking at the ads, looking for style […] There used to be a place on 42nd street that sold magazines from all over the world, and we used to hit that place! German magazines had great ads, especially during the 70s" (Miller, 1994: 163).

More so, that graffiti is often presented with a linear development from a written medium to a more artistically complex and visual medium is rather incorrect. This structure is implicit in, for example, Jacobson's (1996) interesting definition of TTP-graffiti. Jacobson seems to build his concept on an assumption of artistic development, where the tag is the most elementary and the piece the most elaborate, with a throw-up in between the two other forms, hence the abbreviation T(ags) T(hrowups) P(ieces). A closer look at the history of writing rather points to how tags and pieces preceded throw-ups in both time and style, with throw-ups developing out of fast and simple pieces by writers, for

example, Comet and Cliff 159 (Stewart 2009: 157) around 1974. It would then find its form as a larger version of the tag and a quicker and simpler form of the piece with the work of IN and IZ during the mid-1970s. The development of throw-ups thus completes the full circle of the development that preceded it: fast straight letter tags turning into intricate stylized letters resulting in pieces in which the letters were made bigger but also bent and obscured beyond direct recognition. The throw-up combines the size of the pieces with the swiftness of the tag. It merged the basics of the piece – the outlines to a fill-in – with the repetition and mass production of tags. Whereas pieces were to be unique works, the tag and the throw-up stressed style through quantity and pace.

A final aspect of the figurative language of graffiti as a medium needs to be added, one that is rarely given the attention that it merits: that of the *production*. Whereas the writers of the early 1970s at times wrote next to each other on the trains, the pieces were still individually separated. With the inclusion of characters and background in the mid-1970s, writers began tying their individual works together through a similar color scheme, background or even style of letterings. In graffiti terminology, this is referred to as a production and it supersedes the piece as it includes a collective aesthetic (Snyder 2009). Hence, although we find Jacobson's (1996) definition of TTP-graffiti – tags, throw-ups, and pieces – adequate, we argue that in order to stress media chronology rather than an implied artistic refinement, the theoretical concept designating subcultural graffiti should rather be TPTP-graffiti (Tags, Pieces, Throw-Ups, Productions) (Kimvall and Hannerz, forthcoming). Furthermore, the term TPTP-graffiti makes it possible to distinguish subcultural graffiti from the artistically and culturally partially overlapping phenomena of street art (Kimvall 2019b).

Accordingly, even in its most basic form of media –

that of writing – subcultural graffiti captures a multimodality, merging text and image with walking and experiencing the local neighborhood. This is also the most rudimentary of distribution channels: graffiti being produced, consumed and distributed through walking. More so, Mitchell's notion of nesting is here rather obvious in its different forms. Each of the forms of TPTP-graffiti includes and points to another form. The piece or throw-up is often signed with the tag, the production entailing both the tag and the pieces. Each form adds to another rather than replaces them. This is no different today than it was almost fifty years ago: Contemporary graffiti, regardless of whether we speak of New York City, Paris, London, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, or Bucharest, still revolves around these forms. Whilst the layman's attitude towards graffiti is as meaningless disorder, graffiti rests on an obvious aesthetic order, relating to various forms of the basic medium of writing.

Trains and benching: from the hyperlocal to the translocal

Writing tags, as described above, was initially a hyperlocal communication; it was produced and consumed among peers and locals, while passing by and moving elsewhere: to and from school, to and from leisure activities, etcetera, meaning that the writing of tags often followed bus lines and centered around subway stations that writers would pass. As you would walk around the city, you would meet the tags of others, thus production, distribution and consumption were fused through the activity of writing (Gastman et al. 2016; see Hannerz, this volume). The first node of this social environment was also based in the streets: the Writers' Corner on the corner of 188th Street and Audubon Avenue. Chris Pape and Trina Calderón (2016) tell of how this corner

became *the* meeting place for writers in the early 1970s, a place where you could meet other writers and establish physical networks. The facade of the actual corner and a nearby truck became a hall of fame and writers began to establish alliances and friendships with one another.

But at the same time, graffiti had started to go beyond the streets. Buses and trains were already tagged in Philadelphia in the late 1960s, and by the summer of 1970, the insides of the subways became the main target of New York writers (Stewart 2009:16, 28). Through the trains, subcultural graffiti invented its own mass medium as it incorporated and made use of the subway system as a distribution network for their names. Whereas the communication through graffiti in the streets were limited in a sense by production, distribution and consumption being tied to a particular place, the subway cars became a medium of communication that was translocal: the subway cars with its graffiti travelled through the city. More so, in comparison to the streets, graffiti in, and on, the trains meant that the communication was concentrated through the medium. Tags, and later pieces and throw-ups, were delivered to a particular audience in a spatially condensed environment through the train. The trains had the advantage of constantly delivering new surfaces to exploit, as well as previous messages, to the same spot. Writers could thus get their names up from within the subway system rather than having to walk the city putting up tags.

Whereas the initial tagging in the streets created a social environment where the production, medialization, distribution and consumption of graffiti all revolved around the single context of the local or even hyperlocal, the trains meant that the technologies, modalities and social environment coalesced into a single subcultural infrastructure around the subway. At the same time, as the train moved graffiti from the local neighborhood to the regional, the train created a social environment that was condensed

through the nodes of the subway and the trajectories, yet dispersed as they traveled from borough to borough (Austin 2001: 67). In a socially fragmented and segregated city, this distribution network evokes the etymological roots of the word distribution as made up of "dis-" and "tribus" so as to deal out in portions or *to allot among the tribes or a tribe*. The writers, notes Austin (2001: 66), exploited the trains to "create an alternative 'screen' where the writing community could make itself visible to the city and to itself." This last part is important, as the trains worked to connect and bring together individual writers as well as crews of writers from different parts of the New York metropolitan area – as it was covered by the Metropolitan Transit Authority's subways (Castleman, 1982).

This situation – where medium and distribution as well as geographical and sociocultural context are fully integrated – further established a new social environment, as it meant an equal condensation and concentration of the audience. Much like the advent of early mass media, such as the personal radio or home television, which meant that family, neighbors, friends, and other social groups gathered around so as to listen to the news or follow a boxing game, graffiti on trains gathered the writers at particular nodes in the subway system. Whereas the first subcultural node of graffiti, the *Writers' Corner* on 188th Street and Audubon Avenue, was literally a street corner, the later nodes were located at subway stations: 149th Street and Grand Concourse in the Bronx, the Brooklyn Bridge subway station in Manhattan, and Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn (Castleman, 1982: 84ff). Similar to the original writers' corner, these nodes were used as meeting places, as well as for exchanging experiences, ideas and concepts. But, more importantly, they were also used so as to consume, discuss and criticize pieces of graffiti as it passed by (Austin 2001: 68; Castleman 1982; Cooper & Chalfant 1984). The benches that were intended to be used

by passengers simply waiting for the trains were here utilized to establish an arena for evaluating and discussing the graffiti in front of them.

We have previously made the analogy between the vertical swiping of pictures on Instagram and the horizontal passing of graffiti outside the train car window (Kimvall 2008; Hannerz 2016), but it can easily be transferred to the early days of benching, where new works were delivered on display and then replaced by another. All around the subcultural graffiti world, similar spaces (with or without subways, corners, or benches) have usually been referred to as either writers' corner or writers' benches. The latter noun also gave birth to the verb 'benching' – used to denote the activity of socializing and watching graffiti on trains.

Further, although sketch books had already been used as an auxiliary medium at the first writers' corner (Pape & Calderón 2016), it was further developed around the writers' benches. Accordingly, the nodes of the communication network of the subway gave birth to another subcultural technology, one that might have been the first auxiliary medium: the *black books*. At the writers' corners and benches, participants shared, traded, and commented on signatures and drawings within the same context as the production, distribution, and consumption of the graffiti (see Austin 2001: 127). The medium of black books evolved through the condensation of the subway – and it was a response to the fluidity of the very same medium. Castleman (1982:21ff) describes the black book as a sketch book that almost every writer carried around to collect drawings by other writers – preferably the older and more experienced. A sketch book implies that the black book was used as a preparatory tool, an auxiliary medium used to produce the (master)piece. But the way it is described by Castleman, the black book also seems to have functioned as a pedagogical tool, where aspiring writers could study the styles of more

experienced writers in a way that was not possible from benches at platforms where the trains usually stopped for a few seconds. Further, Castleman also connects the black book to the concept of burner: "a writer who does an exceptionally fine drawing in one of them is said to have 'burned the book'. A 'burner' in an autograph book reflects well on both the artist and the owner of the book" (1982: 21). In this way, the black book constitutes an artwork, (or a collection of art works), in its own right. As a medium, the black book thus seems to have a threefold function as a sketch, as a pedagogical tool and as an artwork. These different functions of the black book do not necessarily contradict each other, and in their book *Graffiti New York,* Eric and Luke Felisbret (2009: 330) define a black book as a hard-bound sketchbook "used for personal artistic development and for collecting other artists' work".

The new social environment established through the transit system fused the production, distribution, and consumption of graffiti at the same time as the movement of the trains disconnected the written from its immediate context and enabled a translocal, or regional, distribution. Similarly, the auxiliary media associated with the physical culture of the subculture – the photos, sketches and black books – constituted a materialization that superseded the written from its immediate context.

To sum up this part, as media in itself, graffiti appears to occupy a somewhat paradoxical position in the media landscape of the 1970s and 1980s. Tags and throw-ups are hand made yet based on seriality or even mass production, and thus both unique and reproduced. The pieces are also unique, and rarely mass produced; still, the use of the subway as a distribution technology meant a mass mediation to large and condensed audiences. In terms of modalities (text, image, sound, touch, smell), subcultural graffiti is most often a hybrid of text and image, as the letters in a tag, a throw-

up or graffiti piece are as much visual as they are textual. In this sense, graffiti is often literally "painted words", a phrase otherwise used indirectly as to describe importance of subject matter in history painting and the theoretical discourses in abstract modernist painting (Mitchell 2005: 258). It is also multimodal when combining the figurative (characters) and textual (piece). From this point of view, graffiti is in Mitchell's sense a braided media – "when one sensory channel or semiotic function is woven together with another more or less seamlessly" as in "cinematic technique of synchronized sound" (Mitchell 2005: 262).

Chronicling: graffiti as nested

The use of the subway trains as a distribution network brings us to the importance of the buff: a car wash for trains established in the New York City subway in 1977 (Austin 2001). Whereas the buff is often discussed for how it threatened graffiti as a whole – as it eradicated years' worth of tags, pieces, and throw-ups on the trains – or for how it revitalized the subculture – as it in an instant wiped the train cars cleaned and thus provided new canvases to write on – our focus is rather on what the buff meant for the medialization of graffiti. From the point of view of the transit authorities, the success of the buff was that it largely destroyed the subcultural media infrastructure outlined in the previous section: Within a decade, New York City was graffiti-free in the sense that graffitied cars no longer ran in traffic, and thus the benching and the nodes of the subway lost much of its meaning.

The buff meant that graffiti slowly started to move away from trains as a primary means for distribution and instead began using the train as a means for consuming graffiti. As writers increasingly ventured out along the subway

line to hit the track side walls and tunnels, trains – even though they were still being graffitied – no longer delivered graffiti to an audience, but rather delivered the audience to the graffiti. The transit system thus remained central, but the train was no longer the main screen onto which graffiti was projected. Instead, it became the space from where to experience and consume it. Traveling through European cities in the 1980s and 1990s followed a similar trajectory, even though the trains, at the time, were neither systematically buffed nor minutely surveilled, the track sides and the city walls were the main medium for graffiti pieces (Kimvall 2008). The technologies and social environment thus changed, as the subcultural nodes of particular stations became less central. Consider, for example, the difference between experiencing the track walls along the line from the train and walking the city. Both are immediate in the sense of being there, yet the former places the individual piece within the larger context of the line even though your vision is limited by the speed of the train and its distance to the wall. Walking the streets, however, is more direct, both in the sense of immediacy and control. It involves a multi-modality, you can walk up to the tag or the piece, study it from different angles, and take your time. Nevertheless, the immediacy of the context risks getting lost.

This does not mean, however, that the trains lost their meaning as a medium of graffiti. Their meaning was just altered. Photographing your pieces already existed to a certain extent around the writers' corners. As Joe Austin (2001) notes, photos became, together with sketches and stories, an important medium for displaying, distributing, evaluating, and developing the works. In a way the photos developed the black book. In *Subway Art,* Dondi White describes how he and his friends took photos of their work in order to study them and make progress. Similar to one of the functions of the black books, the photographic medium worked both as

a document and a learning device (Chalfant & Cooper 1984: 32). The combination of clean trains and cheaper and more accessible camera technology meant that graffiti on trains lived on – to this very day – largely through the material representation of the photo. Your piece might be erased within hours but the photo of it still exists (Kimvall 2019a; Hannerz 2023b). With the terminology of Mitchell (2005), the medium of a graffiti written or painted on the wall is nesting within photography (see Jacobson, this volume).

This change of the medialization of graffiti coincides with the appearances of external chroniclers. The works of researchers, photographers, and photojournalists such as Craig Castleman, Jack Stewart, Martha Cooper, Henry Chalfant, and James Prigoff all filled an important void in documenting graffiti, in that the medium of the trains lost parts of its immediacy and vertex with the cleaning of trains (Snyder 2016:208). Still, the increased dependency of the photograph, and later the moving images, as a central material distribution channel meant that the distribution and consumption of graffiti was partly separated from the production. The social environment created – first through the tags in the streets, and then later through the trains – was largely de-fused. On the other hand, the local and regional character of this environment was replaced with a global one. The lack of internal documentation and distribution, and the success of the documentary movie *Style Wars* (1983), the book *Subway Art* (1984) and motion pictures such as *Wild Style* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984), meant that graffiti spread across the world. As a phenomenon stemming from New York City, this is not unique to graffiti. As Marshall Berman (1982) poignantly pointed out: New York City has for more than a century functioned as an international communication system and been a multi-media performance with the world as an audience.

All over the world, writers imitated the styles, formats

and placements from New York City. The subway remained the most desired object to paint and write on (see Paulsson, this volume). However, as mentioned above, in many parts of the world the train line replaced the subway car as a primary medium for display. In northern Europe, for example, most of the graffiti was consumed from and through the window of the subway or commuter train.

Even if chronicling through books and documentary movies disseminated the graffiti subculture geographically, and to some extent gave birth to new versions of graffiti, it initially also meant increased consolidation of graffiti mass media as partly external. This consolidation includes both the number of people who could access a sender position in this new distribution system and the images distributed. Since very few of the often teenage graffiti writers had access to the international publishing system, the books were authored by roughly a dozen adult chroniclers from outside the subculture. Furthermore, early to mid-1980s chronicling established an international subcultural canon of masters and masterpieces that, almost forty years later, still stand strong, and some pioneering graffiti writers that for various reasons were left out of the early movies and books are often destined to remain in the obscure corners of graffiti history (Kimvall 2019a).

In one of the last books of the era, Henry Chalfant's and James Prigoff's *Spraycan Art* (1987), Vulcan reflects on the drastic changes in the system of graffiti production and consumption: "Fame, nowadays, is a lot different. You can get fame for having good style. Ten years ago, style was part of it, but you had to have a lot of good pieces, hundreds" (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987: 25).

When the subway system was used as a distribution network, subcultural visibility, and the fame it brought, was dependent on hard labor by individual writers and collective work by crews, of continuously getting up on the subway.

A couple of years later a single photo of a piece in one of the early books could render worldwide and long-lasting fame (or as pointed out above, the lack of presence in a book could put a pioneering writer or a whole crew into global obscurity). The work of the chroniclers was crucial for the documentation and dissemination of subcultural graffiti, but as it coincided with the buff, it also meant that the writers lost the immediate control of their own mass-media.

Graffiti as subcultural mass media infrastructure

The very first graffiti zines, such as David Schmidlapp and Phase II's *IGT* (*The International Graffiti Times*, later renamed International *Get Hip Times*, 1984-1994) were already present by the mid-1980s, but it was not until the late 1980s or even early 1990s, with the establishment of a graffiti fanzine-scene, that the subcultural regained control of the production and distribution of graffiti as mass-media. This zine-scene partly grew out of the network of pen-pals that had been established as the scene grew globally. Sketches and photos, as well as the stories behind them, were communicated to other writers, in other cities and countries, much like in other subcultural groups – be it punks, goths or comic artists. It was a one-to-one communication: private, yet worked to create both an interest for what was happening in other cities, as well as building global subcultural networks (cf. Snyder 2016, see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume).

More so, fanzines were far from unique to graffiti. They had existed, for example, within the avant-garde art world since the 1960s, and were made possible through cheaper printing technologies and Xerox-machines becoming standard office supply. Yet contrary to music subcultures, graffiti long lacked a physical infrastructure. Punk

zines could be sold at shows and record stores, distributed through subcultural record companies, and thus tied to other media consumption. Graffiti, however, at the time largely relied on local gas stations, office suppliers, or paint and hardware stores for the supplies needed for writing, and the latter were rarely paid for. Beside the writers' corners, which were often precarious places for the distribution of physical documentation due to the risk of police raids, graffiti largely lacked a concentrated socio-geographical environment compared to other subcultural groups.

To an extent, this makes graffiti, as a subculture, rather unique. Punk, hip hop music, rave, goth and other music-based subcultures had an already existing media structure to tap into: that of recorded music. This media structure included commercial companies, publishers, logistics, magazines and an array of other entities (cf. Thornton 1995). The music networks also included public geographical nodes in the shape of record shops. The first punk zines – complete with photos, illustrations and interviews – coincided with the first punk shows and first punk records, to the extent that it is hard to draw a solid line between the documentation of the subculture and its initial development (Hannerz 2015). Fanzines in punk constituted both the chicken and the egg, whereas in graffiti, the development of a published subcultural documentation would take more than a decade to develop. The subcultures around skateboarding and climbing are in this sense closer to graffiti in the development of a subcultural media infrastructure than the music-centered subcultures (Borden 2001).

But just as graffiti initially parasitized the train system, so it had to parasitize other subcultures—such as hip hop—and sociocultural structures. In the absence of graffiti stores and safe meeting places, the subcultural zines used clothing stores, record stores, magazine shops and art galleries for

distribution. The retail music chain Tower Records, with stores across the US as well as in parts of Southeast Asia, the UK and elsewhere, became an important international distributor. Larger corporate distributors such as Tower Records were, however, an exception, and to a large extent the distribution was dependent on the cooperation between zine-makers. Malcolm Jacobson (2015) describes how zine-makers swapped copies with one another so that they could be distributed to various local stores, and thus mimicking developing the distribution of photographic images between pen-pals since the late 1970s.

The transformation of the social environment through fanzines and the distribution networks is also reflected in the early fanzines. For example, the second issue of the fanzine *SFM*, released in 1991, contains four short articles and advertisements, all of which discuss and reflect on graffiti mass-media as well as promoting other products. The early video-zine *Video Graf* was promoted in explicit contrast to photos in books and fanzines, with the argument that "You can only look at a flick, but you EXPERIENCE Video Graf. See shit happen right before your eyes. Plus hear what the writers have to say." In contrast to the predominantly visual qualities of the photography ["a flick"], the multimodality of video is here obviously perceived, or at least promoted, as a richer, and more accurate medium for graffiti: a way of "experiencing" graffiti – the nesting of graffiti as an image is here replaced, at least as a promotional argument – with what Mitchell would refer to as braiding, "when one sensory channel or semiotic function is woven together with another more or less seamlessly" (Mitchell 2005: 262).

The links between mass-media and the geographical distribution of subcultural graffiti is in the same issue of *SFM* discussed under the headline 'Europe':

> Back in the 70's if you even suggested that graf would be worldwide, you'd be getting some weird looks your way.
>
> But thanks to books like Subway art & Spray can art and tourists who liked what they saw when vacationing in NYC, that's a reality. The styles that emerged were influenced in a way by the popular NY styles, but now more and more writers overseas are experimenting and coming up with their own individual styles.
>
> England, Germany, Australia and Sweden lead the way – take a look… (SFM, 1991)

SFM was an abbreviation for *Styles 4 Miles*. The fanzine focused on outlines (drawings and sketches), specifically by writers from the US, but as noted above, also from Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. As such it continues, in a different form, the tradition of the black book. Some of the material might very likely be taken from black books but is disseminated far beyond its initial semi-private audience.

Zines such as *SFM* did not just become a global development of black books; more importantly, they became a global version of the writers' corner. They advertised other zines and included their addresses; they featured scene reports and interviews with writers across the Atlantic, as well as the Pacific Ocean, and thus provided a means for graffiti writers to communicate with each other. When you found yourself in Rome on your Interrail in the 1990s, the care-of addresses of the local zines were a good way to start when seeking to connect with other writers. More so, the drawings once shared semi-privately through black books at the writers' bench or corner corresponded to the photos exchanged via mail to other parts of the country or the world.

During the 1990s, the DIY-spirit of subcultural print media meant establishing a wide variety of graffiti zines all

across the U.S. and Europe (Duncombe 1997). Some were photocopied and in small circulation; others were in full color and with an edition numbering thousands. All of this relied on a subcultural infrastructure of distributing each other's magazines, as well as exchanging photos, interviews and local zine reports (Jacobson 2015). In 1996, the crew behind the Paris-based zine *Xplicit Grafx* released a book – *Sabotage* – covering European graffiti. And other zine makers, such as the Swedish *Underground Production,* would follow in its footsteps a few years later, thus creating subcultural publishing companies in graffiti (Snyder 2009). In the 2000s, this led to more and more books on graffiti being both produced, published as well as distributed from within the subculture. This infrastructure, as well as the video-zines and graffiti films produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s, furthered this subcultural internal control of mass-media. It is worth mentioning that among the initiators of *Underground Production* was the second author of this text as well as Malcolm Jacobson (see Jacobson, this volume). Moreover, the publishing house that grew out of Underground Production, Dokument Press, is today partly an academic press and the publisher of this very volume (cf. Jacobson 2015).

Still, the different media remained de-coupled – in the sense that graffiti was distributed and consumed largely outside of the medium of writing. The writing was still separated in time and space from the consumption and distribution of graffiti. If the tag was the beginning of producing and distributing graffiti, walking constituted the initial means for both production and consumption. The only way you would get an idea of the subculture, of its participants, hierarchies, differences, and similarities, as well as its links and conflicts, was to physically experience it – in a specific geographical context. The technologies, material distribution channels, and modalities thus coalesced in a particular environment. At first by walking the streets, then

by benching, and with the increasing interest in highway and train trackside spots, through traveling by train or car. Just as this is a development of media, it is equally a change in control and immediacy. As we will see, the Internet has changed this completely. The horizontal passing-by of pieces, as in a train journey, has largely been replaced by a vertical movement: swiping through your Instagram flow.

Graffiti as online phenomena

If music subcultures have historically had an advantage in terms of being able to exploit a physical subcultural infrastructure for distribution and consumption, the Internet, in many ways, switched the tables. When the music industry was decrying piracy, and subcultures such as punk and rave championed vinyl, and even cassettes, rather than digital distribution, subcultural graffiti largely embraced the new technology. Through digitalizing its previous forms of media, the graffiti subculture re-coupled the different parts of a subcultural mass-media – in ways unimaginable in the 1980s or 1990s. Still, this followed from graffiti's history and traditions. Chat-rooms, email-lists and social forums made it possible to discuss the definitions, hook-ups, traveling, information, and of course, conflicts that had previously been covered through letters or fanzines – in an immediate, direct, and inclusive way. This was furthered when sharing pictures and films became possible online. The website *Art Crimes* started already in 1994 and was probably the first net-zine focused on graffiti, and most certainly the first digital writer's corner where people would eventually cyber-bench. Many other digital media followed. Some, such as *12ozprophet.com*, evolved out of a printed fanzine. The Finnish fanzine *Äimä* (2000) discusses, for example, graffiti web pages as one of the most important countermeasures to zero tolerance:

> The other rate Finland has the 1st place in is the amount of Internet accounts [...] there's also a huge amount of hits in graffpages from Finland. Since there is action out there but the buff is so effective, the net has become an important forum for writers to show what's going on out there. (Äimä 2000)

More importantly, and perhaps more controversially in relation to subcultural graffiti, we argue that from a media history perspective, the Internet made it possible for participants to regain subcultural control of the distribution and consumption of graffiti. Together with the arrival of graffiti customized spray paint and graffiti shops, the different elements of graffiti media were again re-fused, yet on a global scale. As these graffiti shops went online, graffiti was at once democratized but at the same time stratified: regardless of where you lived you could order spray paint directly to your door, and for half the price of what the rust preventive paint at the local gas stations once cost. The ease by which spray paint can now be acquired, the improved quality of the paint, and the lowering of costs, has largely meant a decline in the need to steal paint, but also an increase in possibilities: easy access to paint, notes Stockholm writer Skil, made it possible to do a whole car with a purple fill-in, something that previously was simply impossible as there was no way you could amass 20 cans of purple through stealing (Sjöstrand 2012: 134). More so, a quick look through contemporary graffiti films, for example, *Fyboda* (2017), points to how the high-pressure spray cans can now be used to paint whole cars in minutes. Still, these technical developments have had the consequence that the subcultural commitment of knowing how and where to steal paint has largely been replaced with a need for the financial means to pay for it. This is not the time nor place to argue for the consequences this has had on the DIY-ethos of graffiti; it suffices

to say that from a sociological perspective the reliance of stealing paint was financially inclusive yet subculturally exclusive, and that an emerging graffiti industry has turned this partly upside down (see Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė, this volume).

Yet, it would be too simple to argue that technology in itself changes graffiti; rather, it enables other forms of creativity. Whereas the DIY-aspect, pre-Internet, was largely tied to the doings of graffiti as well as its materialization through print media, social media has made it possible and simple for anyone to become a producer and distribute graffiti. Hence, changes in the ways graffiti is done and consumed relates rather to how technology is being used. With Fotolog initiated already in the beginning of the 2000s, and Flickr and Tumblr in the mid-2000s, the arrival of smartphones tied the consumption of graffiti to its distribution and production. Besides communicating, the smartphone can be used to map out the surroundings of a spot, specifying the location of that potential abandoned factory, locating possible entrances through maps, and then finally guiding you to the place (see Paulsson, this chapter). Further, the smartphone is used to document the entire practice. It provides you with the means to cut the image, add filters and brighten the image, combining photos and films and adding a soundtrack, such that you can distribute the final result to others through messaging apps, or through Snapchat, Instagram, etcetera (MacDowall 2019). The smartphone this way *produces* graffiti. The series of tags and pieces consumed through walking the streets or traveling the line, the context within which you were up or not, are now largely virtually assembled, through Instagram feeds and YouTube-videos (Hannerz 2023a).

Internet graffiti enables you to remove the flaws, to censor the mistakes. It makes productions possible that twenty years ago would have been hard to document and

even harder to distribute. The Instagram accounts of @ dais_dk, @moses.taps, or @whentriplgetsfurious, to name but a few, capture this re-fusion of the different stages of mediation: Triple's and Dais' stop motion graffiti, or Moses and Taps' short films, where zoomed-in elements of train pieces are warped into another piece rolling by. All of these are examples of graffiti where the piece is produced through the technologies of social media; it is a layering and juxtaposition of different forms of modalities that is made possible through camera technology and social media. The online videos by Good Guy Boris, 1UP, or KCBR are here similar in their playfulness, and for the use of the technology, not just as a means to remediate-as, for example, a photo of a graffitied train, but as a merger of the technology and the graffiti so as to become something more.

In many ways, the Internet has made it possible to retain, not only graffiti as a communication, but also its different forms of medialization: the writing, the trains as mass communication, and the remediation of graffiti through photos and films. Yet the creative use of media technology has led to a digital subcultural infrastructure that is both at the same time global as it is hyperlocal. These new media constitute what contemporary graffiti has become. Most of the graffiti writers we have followed in our different research projects now consume more graffiti on their phones than they do on-site. They might be unaware of a new piece along their own trainline, yet remain perfectly knowledgeable about the latest stunt by their favorite writers from the USA, Germany or France, whom they are able to follow on social media almost in real time. The immediacy of not only the medium but also of the communication makes it possible for a piece or tag to spark respect, admiration, or controversy online before the local citizens have even woken up to see it. Yet social media also means that the object is continuously being produced. The meaning of the work – its context, his-

tory, and relation to a larger body of work by the same individual – is being immediately co-produced with its mediation: The consumer becomes part of the production, adding information, providing feedback, and interacting with other writers in the commentary field of Fotolog and then later Facebook and Instagram.

To reiterate: the medium creates its own social environment that enables certain things and hinders others.

Conclusion

In Selina Miles' documentary *Martha – A picture story* (2019), there is a poignant scene where Martha Cooper, photographer and co-author of the book *Subway Art* (Chalfant & Cooper 1984), arrives in Europe on a book tour. It is the year 2004, and twenty years have passed since the release of the book that has now innumerous times been described as a subcultural bible, a book that defined and introduced subway graffiti to a global crowd. Yet, when arriving at the venue in Berlin, Cooper seems to be rather unaware of her status as a subcultural celebrity: she notes with obvious surprise, that whereas she had struggled for recognition in the photography world, in the hip hop and graffiti-subculture "everybody seemed to know who I was". In the next scene, a seemingly embarrassed Martha is dragged on stage and meets a cheering crowd after having been simply introduced with "This is Martha Cooper!".

Subway Art, together with *Spraycan Art* (Chalfant & Prigoff 1987) and the documentary film *Style Wars* (Chalfant & Silver 1983), did not just define and disseminate what graffiti was and how it was done: it also came to define the layout of how graffiti should be (re)presented. Its full-page spreads – with Henry Chalfant's decontextualizing studies of specific artworks and Martha Cooper's contextualizing

photos of graffiti in the urban landscape combined with thumbnail photos of pieces, portraits of writers, and portions of text – have been endlessly repeated and imitated in graffiti books and zines, record covers, and unintendedly, yet somewhat ironically, in the way Instagram presents the overview of a single hashtag or account.

Considering subcultural graffiti from a media historical perspective sheds a slightly different light on the history of graffiti. It entails a shift from individual creative innovation towards collective processes, as well as a decentering of artistic creation in favor of production in a wider sense, as well as interest in technology, distribution, and reception. Focusing on media – the mediation, distribution, modalities, and social environment of subcultural graffiti – offers new possibilities of exploration, possibilities that we in this chapter have only had room to briefly touch upon. Instead of looking at development from the (normative) standpoint of artistic refinement, which from the rudimentary tags and throw ups has led the master pieces and full production walls, a media historical perspective suggests a development where the seemingly simpler throw up developed out of the piece. We have thus suggested the development of Jacobson's concept TTP-graffiti (Tags, Throw ups, Pieces) to TPTP-graffiti (Tags, Pieces, Throw ups, Productions) as an analytical concept, defining the subcultural graffiti developed since the 1970s, that is formally different from the, in other aspects, closely related field of street art.

Returning to Mitchell's idea of nesting, and thus of moving away from McLuhan's chronological sequencing and technological determinism, we have, throughout this chapter, shown how the history of subcultural graffiti as media constitutes a history of addition – in the sense that no established graffiti media have ever ceased to exist. Some media may have lost their position as a central instance within this

specific subcultural structure. For example, in terms of media as mediation and distribution, the graffiti zines slowly lost their function as the crucial graffiti news channel and primary platform for display, with the birth of the Internet and the development of social media – but they did not cease to exist as a medium: they remain as an alternative analogue format of underground distribution, or more condensed or exclusive material remediations of a particular writer or phenomenon. Tags are still written and consumed through walking the streets but can also be experienced as nested within another media, as through online videos. With the clean train era in New York, and elsewhere, the subway cars have gone from a necessary distribution network to idolized and even fetishized objects of desire (Hannerz 2023a). A panel piece on a subway car in New York City will perhaps never run the line, but it still has the potential of reaching millions of viewers through a hashtag on Instagram. The benches on subway stations such as 149th street and Grand Concourse that were used to watch pieces passing by – what we have referred to as media as a social environment – are now complemented by the distribution of photos of these pieces online, creating a form of cyber-benching. Graffiti has, in Mitchell's terminology, been nesting within a number of different other media: photography, books, videos and later various digital camera technologies. In fact, graffiti could be claimed to have been using the most typical, later fetishized, substrate media and distribution system – the subway system – as a nest.

The intricate contemporary media infrastructure is made possible through both technical developments and subcultural developments within graffiti. The buff, long since extended from the trains to include the inner city and the tracksides, is no longer a threat to graffiti. It constitutes the foundation to the re-fusion of the production, distribution, and consumption of graffiti. Consequently, cities such

as Berlin, Copenhagen, Melbourne, New York, Paris, Rome, or Sydney are closer to us than ever. The single piece or tag that was previously seen in the streets, at tracksides and on trains, which the majority most likely shrugged off as ugly or meaningless, can, through the right accounts, reach a concentrated audience of thousands of interested writers and graffiti fans. Accordingly, the history of subcultural graffiti as media points to graffiti's incisive and ceaseless creativity. Of exploring, exploiting, and transforming existing technologies into subcultural resources.

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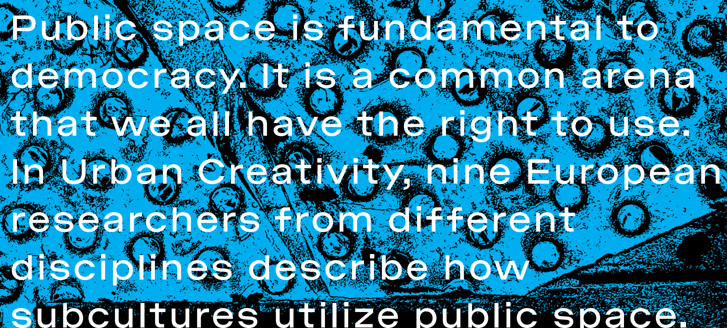

Public space is fundamental to democracy. It is a common arena that we all have the right to use. In Urban Creativity, nine European researchers from different disciplines describe how subcultures utilize public space.

The essays are about graffiti and street art, the Occupy movement, the umbrella protests in Hong Kong and the Free-party movement. These are examples of interventions in the city that aim to temporarily or permanently change the meaning, function or accessibility of urban public space.

The book is the result of an interdisciplinary research collaboration initiated in 2018 at the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies at Lund University on the theme of Urban Creativity.