

# Subversion of Public Space: A Study into Architecture and Graffiti



## Introduction

The focus of my dissertation is an exploration into the effect of graffiti on public space and architecture. I aim to investigate whether graffiti is always vandalism or if it can be seen as a valid artistic expression against the built environment. To begin it is useful to study the true meaning of the word graffiti and the ways in which it has developed into its current variety of forms. Derived from the Italian *sgraffio*, meaning to scratch, graffiti has been around since the beginnings of mankind. Paintings such as those found at the Lascaux caves in France were normally made by scratching the cave wall with flint or pieces of bone, however prehistoric man also used a form of spray paint created by blowing coloured powder through a hollow bone; this method was used to create silhouettes of hands and other objects. This use of graffiti has continued throughout our entire history, excavations of Pompeii revealed a large amount of graffiti ranging from political slogans to names, drawings and obscenities.



Grffiti was also used by all sides during both the First and Second World War, with the Nazis using it as a method to spread hatred towards the Jews and resistance groups such

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<sup>1</sup> Graffiti in Vulgar Latin (Photograph: Alek Mccarium , Vivid Pictures , Pompeii. *Artist:* Unknown)

as *'the white rose'* movement who used it to speak out against Hitler from within Germany until their capture in 1943.



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Modern graffiti arose mainly from New York City around the late 1970's, the city's unique mixture of Times Square culture and Harlem slums overlapping in a confined space lead artists such as 'Taki 183, Julio 204, Cat 161 and Cornbread to paint their names on walls or in subway stations around Manhattan... This environment fuelled an artistic battle against the power brokers in society, and a breakaway from poverty and the ghetto.'<sup>3</sup> From this point modern graffiti spread across the western influenced world, tied in closely with the Punk movement in Brittan and later the style and music of hip-hop culture throughout Europe.

Architects themselves have many different views on graffiti; some claim it destroys areas, increasing the fear of crime and defacing buildings; while others see it as an interaction with the urban spaces that they create.

Graffiti artists often do not paint on buildings of artistic or historic value. I will assess whether this relates to the belief that street artists see themselves as painting on the blank

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<sup>2</sup> All Done (Photograph: Nicholas Ganz, Graffiti World, Copenhagen. *Artists: Swet and Done*)

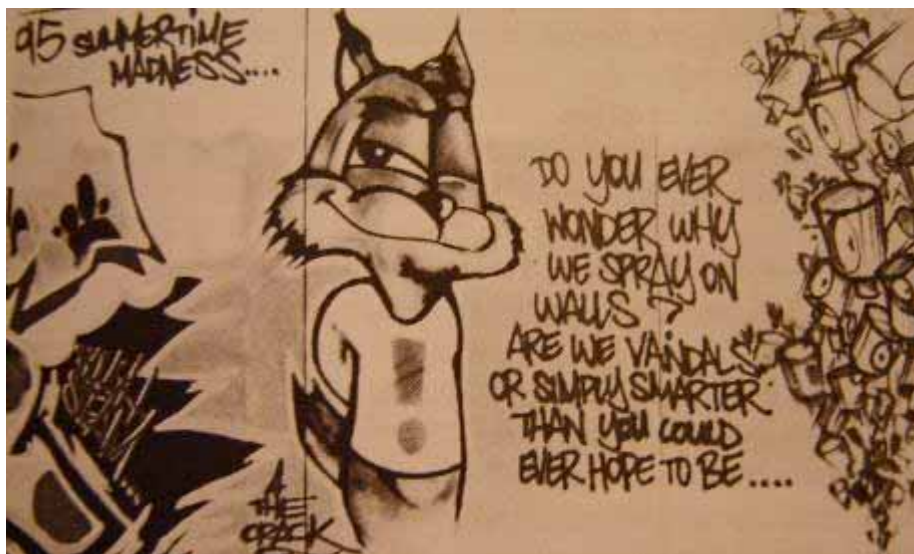
<sup>3</sup> Ganz, Nicholas – *Graffiti World, Street art from five continents*, pg 8, Thames and Hudson 2004

spaces left in the city, the same way an artist would paint a blank canvas, improving them and adding cultural value.

I aim to establish an answer as to whether graffiti should be stamped out by a modern society in a highly developed city, or embraced as a modern form of street decoration to enhance public spaces rather than spoil them.

Finally I am going to investigate the influence of architects upon a city in comparison with graffiti artists; what gives an architect or advertiser the right to change or influence the city as we see it when artists attempting to do the same are perceived as breaking the law. Is bad architecture, in reality a much larger contributor to an increased fear of crime? People feel fear when walking down narrow alleyways and under gloomy bridges; is it the graffiti that is threatening or is it the dark corners and shadows in which the graffiti lies? These narrow passages and under passes are an oversight of the designer, not a creation of the artist. Is graffiti merely a lack of respect for a particular piece of architecture?

## Is Graffiti Always Vandalism?



In 2003 the new laws governing anti social behaviour were extended to cover the acts of graffiti and fly posting. ‘(A) recent study has labelled graffiti as a major anti-social activity...The study even went so far as to say that graffiti is just as damaging to a community as drug dealing and prostitution.’<sup>5</sup> The new status of graffiti as a finable offence has lead to new laws that enable community leaders and police to take immediate action regarding both the artists and their work.

The Home Office Minister Hazel Blears states,

‘Graffiti is criminal damage and an eye sore which blights communities. It affects people’s quality of life, increases fear of crime and reduces pride in a community. It also costs us all millions of pounds a year to clean up – money which could be better spent on other valuable services. One in three people say graffiti and vandalism are problems in their area.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The superior society (Photograph: Frank Malt, collection of steam, London. *Artist: Rough*)

<sup>5</sup> Coates, Colin – *Graffiti - Art or Eyesore* , Nighttime UK, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2004

<sup>6</sup> Blears, Hazel – *Blitz on Graffiti Ref 143/2004*, Home Office Press Release, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004

This quote from Hazel Blears proves problematic because many of the points she makes are personal opinion which she in fact admits are only held by every third person in the country. It is inaccurate to label graffiti 'criminal damage and an eye sore' when it is considered by many to be a valid artistic form of expression and is shown in many leading galleries around the world. It is also used by many top commercial businesses in their advertising campaigns targeting young audiences, most predominately HMV.



The key argument evident in this quote is the claim that graffiti 'increases fear of crime and reduces pride in a community', but as I shall argue, there is no proof that graffiti causes either of these problems; in fact it could be argued that graffiti stems from having little pride in the community.

The main problem with the government report is that graffiti is grouped together with all types of criminal damage and vandalism. At no point is a distinction made in any of the statistics presented between graffiti and other anti-social crimes, yet graffiti is the only crime named specifically so that, on first inspection, it would appear that all of the statistics purely regard graffiti; for example, figures from the same government report

<sup>7</sup> The HMV Dog (Photograph: Karski, , Graffiti World, Antwerp Artist: Karski)

<sup>8</sup> HMV student loyalty card (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Personal Collection, Newcastle)

show that in a single day there were 7855 reports of criminal damage and vandalism and that this costs £2,667,000 per day to clean up and deal with. This statistic is placed in a section which is purely about graffiti, making the problem seem far worse than it is as the statistic would also include the damage or destruction of public property which is far more costly to rectify than removing graffiti. Assuming the statistics were aimed purely at graffiti it would mean that each small tag (the simple and striking signature of an artist) erased would cost the tax payer £340; that is £340 spent on removing something which 50% of people think is 'part of city life and actually adds life and colour into the otherwise grey and boring concrete jungle they live in'<sup>9</sup>



Despite the strict new laws regarding graffiti, local governments and councils seem to also be promoting graffiti as an artistic vent for young people. With the advent of skate parks and other urban areas aimed at teenagers, councils have been inclined to erect graffiti walls and legal graffiti zones. For example in summer 2003 Kent County Council organised an exhibition, 'Urban Reaction' which included art work from graffiti artists in the area and was displayed in the County Hall in Maidstone. A week long workshop was also held to support the exhibition, in which the graffiti artists taught local teenagers how to create their own spray can art. A strange decision considering the government claims that cleaning up graffiti costs local councils 'around £27m per year.'<sup>11</sup> Perhaps it is because councils can see the benefit of having bright, stimulating artwork in their

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<sup>9</sup> Coates, Colin – *Graffiti - Art or Eyesore*, Nighttime UK, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2004

<sup>10</sup> Inch Tag (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Personal Collection, Newcastle Artist: Inch)

<sup>11</sup> Coates, Colin – *Graffiti - Art or Eyesore*, Nighttime UK, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2004

community and can differentiate between graffiti which is purely vandalism and that which is art.



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The graffiti subculture has quickly matured since its birth amongst the hip hop culture of New York in the early 70's. Its first modern use was 'tagging', the spraying of tags to mark gang boundaries, this soon became more elaborate and decorative; with artists and gang members attempting to out do each other in the decoration of 'their turf' in the city. The aggressive nature of the words and gang names became lost behind the swirls and bright colours of 'throwups', large bubble written letters painted quickly, and 'pieces', which is short for masterpieces, large multicoloured lettering. By 1988 studies revealed that 'serious graffiti artists, (are) believed to be responsible for about 50% of graffiti'<sup>14</sup> whilst only 15% of graffiti is gang related. Graffiti was no longer purely rooted in violent subversive behaviour but was a way to decorate the monotonously grey area of the city you lived in and regain a sense of pride in the neighbourhood.

The graffiti 'tag' may be what most graffiti today originated from, however it is insulting to use 'tags' as a model for all graffiti which now exists.

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<sup>12</sup> Big Three (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Urban Reaction , Maidstone Gallery, Artist: Steven Paynter)

<sup>13</sup> Art Made Easy (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Urban Reaction, Maidstone Gallery Artist: Shade Chaos)

<sup>14</sup> Newcomer, Kris – "*Graffiti artists get chance to do their thing*", Rocky Mountain News, pg 39 (14<sup>th</sup> Oct 1988) - found in Ferrell, Jeff – Crimes of Style, pg 4, Northeastern University Press (1996)

There are many ways in which graffiti artists express themselves. There is still the ‘tag’ which shall forever be the tool of the unsophisticated artist; there is the stencil and then there is the elaborate expansion of both the tag and the stencil.



It is not just the artwork that differs but also the reasons behind it. The original boundary marking is still actively used but artists now travel the country and even the world making their mark. In fact many motifs are shared by different artists in different countries, thus blurring the idea of boundaries. Some motifs even protest against the idea of boundaries, both social and political.

Politics has become a huge influence on graffiti artists which is reflected in a large section of graffiti work today. The Banksy picture illustrated above was a direct reaction against the monarchy and capitalism to coincide with the jubilee, showing both the Queen as a monkey and business men rioting. Another big influence is pop culture; many images are satires upon films, television programmes and even advertising; some artists go so far as to repaint parts of large advertising campaigns to alter the message portrayed. Despite all of the other issues, the majority of graffiti today is meant to be decorative and improve or personalise the area in which it is created. The decoration may arise from

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<sup>15</sup> Chequebook Vandalism (Photograph: Unknown, Artist throws anti-Jubilee party , BBC news 24, Artist: Banksy)

<sup>16</sup> Bush (Photograph: Bush, [www.bushdmc.com](http://www.bushdmc.com), Artists: Bush and DMC)

social issues or dissatisfaction with the surrounding environment but its main purpose is still to entertain.

The combinations of reasons people give for creating graffiti vary widely depending on both the style and content of the work they produce. Artists such as Stylo fall into a category of people that paint walls to create a feeling of belonging in public space, in the same way that you would decorate a new house to make it feel like home.

‘If you paint somewhere and go back there, you feel like you belong... like there’s a bit of you there’<sup>17</sup>. This drive to personalise public space touches on the wider issues of ownership and community control which I will concentrate on later.

There have been many professional studies into the reasons behind an artist’s need to paint graffiti but most do so without interaction with the writers themselves. Most studies label graffiti as a ‘crime of style’, an artistic and skilful expression through a deviant act, usually in adolescence. However by labelling it as so, other crimes such as shoplifting can be viewed in a similar way. In fact a sociological report claims that shoplifting could be seen to be as artistically valid as graffiti,

‘What...of other deviant or criminal acts? Would similar attention to detail expose aesthetic or stylistic elements in other less overtly “arty” forms of criminality? Research in a variety of areas shows that it would’<sup>18</sup>.

It is apparent that other small crimes can develop through skill and style but it is highly unlikely that a shoplifter would claim that his “work” is to improve an area or to convey a message to a community. I believe that this desire to communicate with society through

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<sup>17</sup> Stylo, taken from, McDonald, Nancy – The Graffiti Subculture, *The personal benefits of subcultural membership*, pg194, Palgrave (2001)

<sup>18</sup> Ferrell, Jeff – Crimes of Style, *Chapter 5*, pg168, Northeastern University Press 1996

their acts of deviance is what sets graffiti apart from other minor criminal acts and this division is important to the argument.

I think that most artists would accept that their work started at a level driven by adolescent group mentality, but those who developed past this see their work as real art. 'You start to say, well, I'm all grown up, my subject matter's changed, it's not about my tag anymore. It's about painting and interacting with a whole broad audience through your art.'<sup>19</sup>

Graffiti is a great problem not just in physical terms but also in terms of the differing intellectual views in which people hold regarding it. Many politicians, architects and members of the general public view it as a problem that can simply be removed by arresting or fining those responsible; they see it as a problem caused by a minority that do not share the views of the majority. However there are also those who believe that the problem is more deeply rooted; they believe that removing the artwork is only a temporary solution and that the artists will soon return. A good example of the somewhat blind idea that constantly removing graffiti will somehow solve the cultural problems that create it is demonstrated by Middlesbrough councillor Joe Michna. He recently performed a study in which he rated cities around the world according to their public services. First on his list was the removal of graffiti and fly posting, followed by criteria such as public transport, recycling and street cleanliness. By this method of evaluation Middlesbrough was rated fourth best city of all those visited, helped largely by a score of nine out of ten for tackling graffiti. This score put it above Prague, a place he refers to as 'a great city and magnificent architecture but appalling levels of graffiti in the city

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<sup>19</sup> Lee, taken from, McDonald, Nancy – *The Graffiti Subculture, The personal benefits of subcultural membership*, pg219, Palgrave (2001)

centre.’<sup>20</sup> His belief that the removal of graffiti is as important to a city as public transport and indeed architecture must leave him somewhat confused as to why his fourth best city in the world is a place regarded as having almost no cultural value and is completely avoided by tourists.

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<sup>20</sup> McKenzie, Sandy – *Travels With My Clipboard*, Evening Gazette, pg14, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2005

## Graffiti and Architecture

There is a large divide between architects who appreciate and incorporate graffiti in their work and those who see it as a menace to architecture. It is a common perception of modernism that it chose to ignore the social aspects of architecture, instead concentrating on the search for the perfect and beautiful form. However by looking back to the era in which modernism started we can see how it was driven by the strong social agenda of the time. 'Modern architecture was evolved less than a century ago to reconcile an idealized vision of society with the forces of the industrial revolution.'<sup>21</sup> The social agenda has changed greatly over nearly a century in most of Europe and America at least; the industrial revolution has been almost entirely destroyed, taken abroad to save money and the idea of a perfect society has been diluted since the end of the cold war along with the more extreme political views which gave rise to the idea that it could be created. Importantly Modernisms failure, as a style, to deal with issues such as the environment, which was not considered important at the time, but is now regarded as almost common sense, leads the public to underestimate its attempts, albeit through a rigid formal language, to tackle other social problems. Whether our perception of modernism is based in truth or a misguided understanding of the modernist philosophy is not relevant to my question; however it does affect the way that architects perceive graffiti. The main appreciation of graffiti comes from within the post-modernist movement. A style based on the idea of bringing popular culture into architecture, its roots can be seen emerging around the same time as pop art and it follows a similar philosophy. It aims to encourage mass interaction and appreciation of itself from the general public, avoiding to a large

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<sup>21</sup> Curtis, William – Modern Architecture since 1900, *Preface*, Phaidon Press (1996)

degree the over complicating of architectural ideas. Post modern architects and artists still draw from the ideas and philosophy of the past but they now make them somehow more self explanatory, they aim to create a masterpiece that is simple, practical and for everyone. This can be more easily shown using Roy Lichtenstein's take on cubism in his pop art work



Architects such as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown are strongly linked to the birth of this movement, it is an eclectic mix of vernacular design, classic proportions and eccentricity. 'The movement away from, knee-jerk Meisian modernism and toward a modernism rooted in contextuality, historical forms, symbolism, ornament and sometimes even.... Fun',<sup>23</sup>

In the recent exhibition 'Out of the Ordinary' Venturi and Scott-Brown attempted to show how architecture can connect to its users by embracing reality.

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<sup>22</sup> Lichtenstein, Roy – Girl With Beach Ball III, 1977

<sup>23</sup> Lowry, Patricia "Exhibit showcases work of architects Venturi and Scott Brown", - Post Gazette (12<sup>th</sup> November 2002)



The use of a Graffiti Wall screaming VSBA (Venturi and Scott-Brown Architects) aphorisms such as ‘Viva vulgar vitality’ and ‘Less is bore’ pointed strongly to their belief that Graffiti is a part of the creation of public space. VSBA have never been afraid to add ornament to their own buildings in order to increase interest, they recognise the fact that a community can not be created in a machine and must be given a way to express itself within their environment. For VSBA graffiti is a manifestation of reality and communicates the flux and chaos that everyday life creates. The aim of post modern design could be seen as to make popular culture part of a richer view of modernism, and by doing this, to make it more inclusive of all the people and variations that society creates. The most successful projects are those that are seen to adapt to the ever changing needs of the user and the passer by. It is important to regard a building as a ‘machine for living’ but also to understand that it’s outward face and location will affect a much wider audience than the building itself will ever contain. To try and fit the community in which your building sits is of course a very important idea, it is however an idea that still to this day is rarely considered in the major projects that really impact upon local communities, but I will talk about this in detail later.

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<sup>24</sup> VSBA Wall (Photograph: Patricia Lowrey, Exhibit Showcases Work Of Architects Venturi And Scott Brown , Arts and Entertainment, November 12<sup>th</sup> 2002)

<sup>25</sup> Keep It Real (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Personal Collection , London, 2004, *Artist: Banksy*)

The idea of the graffiti wall is not isolated within a movement of the avant-garde but has been adopted by local councils. Starting in the Dogtown and Miami Beach areas of California as a way of dealing with an increasing level of street art and vandalism by local youths, graffiti walls have started to appear in cities around the world; the purpose, to give graffiti a place to exist whilst at the same time attempting to subtly move it out of the public eye. This can be viewed in both a positive and negative light; the creation of a graffiti wall is usually incorporated within the construction of a skatepark or basketball court. By forming recreation spaces within a community where teen actives can take place the social problems causing graffiti are partially solved, without a suitable vent for their energy many teenagers may turn to graffiti as a method of expressing their dissatisfaction. By attempting to remove the problem from public view this method fails to fully recognise all the social factors that lie behind street art as a subculture. In this way legal graffiti zones can be seen simply as a method of anti-graffiti. In fact many parks are actually painted by 'professional' graffiti artists prior to their opening at the order of local authorities; this prevents local youths from decorating it in their own 'substandard' way. It is an unwritten rule of street artists to not paint over work which is more competent than your own. The idea of commissioning graffiti art for a new urban space goes against the spirit of graffiti; as it is pre-empting the public reaction. Graffiti walls are just one of many passive methods used to prevent street art without fully attempting to tackle the reasons behind it. The least subtle of these methods is of course heavy policing and the use of CCTV, however, more recently clever architecture has been used effectively. The idea behind this method of design is to actively reduce an individual's opportunity to commit an act of vandalism. Various techniques can be

employed to achieve this goal but the most common is to attempt to make every outside space overlooked. Placing buildings so that they face each other and having strictly enclosed courtyards means that artists have no place to hide and perform their work, in high streets the glass fronting of shops also works in the same way although it may not have been created for this purpose. This method reduces graffiti but also inhibits the free flow of public space and increases the 'big brother' sentiment. The number of blank brick or concrete walls is kept to a minimum to reduce the areas which may become a target for graffiti artists. Where they are needed it is usual to place some kind of barrier planting in front of them, this obscures the wall but also prevents the artist from reaching it. This could, of course provide a place for the artist to hide so these plants are usually thorny low lying bushes. Such plants are used despite their unattractive nature as they are best suited to the purpose. This misuse of planting is common, when police in Denver discovered that homeless travellers were using road side planting as a place to shelter it was replaced with low lying bushes which moved the 'problem' away but was ineffective at reducing noise pollution and road dust. The best example of these public space planning techniques being used throughout an entire development, to prevent subversive behaviour can be found in the Disney corporations planned community next to Disney World in Los Angeles, Celebration.

## Celebration and Paris

The Disney Corporation's man made community is the prime example of how graffiti and the subversion of public space have been prevented, not by laws and enforcement but more by social control and modification of ideals.

Since Walt Disney's own vision of the 'perfect' American town in the 1960s EPCOT (the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), the Disney corporation have strived to make the dream a reality; the opportunity to purchase swampland in Florida, next to Disney World Resort was the first step. The aim of the town was to eventually contain 2,500 homes and 8,000 residents. The town opened in 1996 and by 2004, less than ten years after the first residents called Celebration their home, this aspiration has been achieved. During the past three years, Celebration has broken its home sales record each year, surpassing \$120 million dollars in new home sales in Financial Year 2003.

The early brochures for Celebration immodestly described it as a massive project in social engineering, an attempt to recreate the kinder, gentler America of the past:

*'There was once a place where neighbours greeted neighbours in the quiet of summer twilight ... There is a place that takes you back to that time of innocence ... A place of caramel apples and cotton candy, secret forts, and hopscotch on the streets.'*<sup>26</sup>

Many people doubt whether the America of the past which Disney strives to recreate ever actually existed. The sociologist Stephen Fjellman does not believe such an innocent America ever existed and he believes that Disney is rewriting the collective memory of a nation. He terms this 'new' history 'Distory', it is also known as 'Disneyfication'.

Disney needed to create a strong sense of community in order to reproduce their idea of an ideal America. They use architectural and public space planning techniques in order to

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<sup>26</sup> Disney Corporation – *Welcome to Celebration*, Disney promotional material, 1996

engineer this sense of togetherness. All the houses in the town are of 'neo-traditionalist' design, with their clapboard exteriors, pastel colours, front porches and picket fences; this creates a feeling of familiarity and equality amongst the community. It also serves as a safeguard against unwanted architectural styles as all building in the town, including offices and retail outlets, are forced to conform to the new, imposed surroundings.

The new developments are created in groups on new land, strictly abiding by the plots allocated to them, and this ensures that there are no forgotten spaces, infill sites or unplanned public areas. The basic idea of Celebration is that residents will accept less space in their own property, and smaller gardens, in return for communal space in the form of parks, squares, walking and cycle paths. The houses are even spaced tightly together, in order to discourage the detached existences of American suburbanites. Above all, everyone in Celebration is within easy walking distance of the town centre, where the main thoroughfare, Market Street, has small, friendly stores and no corporate brand names.

All of these factors are essentially subtle methods of dissuasion, aimed at subversive behavior. The buildings built so close together means that there is little to no free wall space on which artists could leave their mark. The focus on public space, means that areas which would usually be subverted by skateboarders and street artists are constantly overlooked and in use. This is emphasized through the pedestrianisation of the town; with residents choosing to walk rather than use cars, there is no need for alleyways, access roads or car parks which are commonly used by those who are thought of as subversive in society.

This increased sense of community, although seemingly forced, acts as a deterrent to subversive acts as people are less likely to perform a subversive act on the property of someone they are acquainted with.

In September 2003, homeowners assumed majority membership on the board of the Celebration Residential Owners' Association and assumed responsibility for the association's leadership. This leads to a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the town which in turn leads to respect for public property which echoes the respect one feels for their own property. There is no fear of crime in Celebration as the combination of subtle methods of dissuasion and the mentality of residents attracted to the kind of lifestyle offered, means there is neither the opportunity nor the will to commit crime.

The question that arises from Celebration is not whether these methods of social control are working but whether they are actually benefiting the residents?

Having a town shrouded in a perfect ideal and being placed next to the ultimate 'fantasy land' Disney World, means that residents are extremely detached from reality. Without a visible reminder of the problems they moved there to escape from, the slightest dissatisfaction becomes a major crisis; for example there have been complaints that the education offered in Celebration schools is too progressive and not competitive enough. In a 'normal' community parents are usually satisfied with a certain level of education but in a 'perfect' community parents expect their child to perform perfectly.

If we look to Paris, a city considered to be one of the most beautiful in the world, we find a complete integration of subversive behaviour and everyday acts. A more obvious choice for studying graffiti may have been Copenhagen; however I did not wish to study

a city which was famous for its graffiti because I feel that this shows a domination of subculture which would not be acceptable beyond a small community. This is on the other end of the scale to Celebration's strict control however the outcome is just as disjointed from 'reality'.

When considering the beauty of Paris graffiti, street art and public performances (such as busking) are not usually taken into account. You are more likely to eulogise on the structure of the Eiffel Tower or the masterpieces in its many museums; however individual pieces do not give the entire city its character and it is all aspects of Paris' artistic expression that create the overall effect.

Paris is a city built and rebuilt on the same site over thousands of years. Its architecture is truly eclectic with a combination of old and new buildings with new plots constantly found interweaving with existing sites and public spaces. In Paris it is possible to stroll from the beautiful Opera Quarter to the garish Red Light District in just a few minutes; you are constantly interacting with all aspects of society. Graffiti is seen as filling in the spaces left behind during Paris' many incarnations.



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<sup>27</sup> Lady of Paris (Photograph: Tilt and Fafi, Graffiti World, Paris. Artist: Fafi)

This picture by the artist Fafi perfectly encapsulates the attitude of Parisian graffiti artists. The figure itself portrays a stereotypical Parisian bohemian from the turn of the century; this disused railway arch gains new life framing the figure as if she were on stage. Immediately this forgotten space has become part of the artistic culture of Paris once again. Through the social acceptance of graffiti, Paris has spawned street artists who do not fit the norm. The renowned architecture of the city inspires artists to work to a more artistically recognisable level, moving away from the low skilled tags found in many cities. As the picture shows, Miss Vann, is female, in her twenties and is painting in broad day light with a brush; this breaks all the stereo typical norms of a graffiti artist at work. This exhibits graffiti as an accepted rather than a subversive art form. The second picture shows a piece by the artist Nemo; he has clearly spent time designing a painting to fit this site, opposite Notre-dame Cathedral, the level of detail and shading would not be possible in such a prominent place in most cities.



Graffiti has become so integrated into Parisian life that street artists have been able to move out of the shadows and into the high streets. Shutters over shop fronts all through Paris are decorated with business names and advertising painted by graffiti artists.

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<sup>28</sup> Miss Vann (Photograph: Unknown, Graffiti World, Paris 1996 Artist: Miss Vann)

<sup>29</sup> Hammock (Photograph: Steven Paynter, Personal Collection, Paris 2004 Artist: Nemo)



The artist Lokiss was even invited to create a backdrop inside of this boutique and now makes a living painting walls and interiors.

Despite the abundance of graffiti in Paris, certain buildings are left untouched. These are the buildings that make Paris famous, the buildings that are icons of beauty and culture in the City of Lights. This can be directly linked to one of the many unwritten rules of graffiti; not to paint over work that is more competent than your own.

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<sup>30</sup> Le Printemps Hausmann (Photograph: Lokiss, Graffiti World, Paris 1999 Artist: Lokiss)

## Graffiti and Cultural Identity

As Paris proves graffiti artists will, as a rule, not touch buildings that already bring a cultural identity to an area. To further my understanding of the unwritten rules of graffiti I conducted interviews with several prolific street artists and others who have studied graffiti culture at either a professional or personal level. The first point that I realised when starting these interviews is just how close knit and well connected all the artists involved appear to be, starting from just two emails sent to graffiti based websites I received within a week fourteen responses offering help and information for my study. I also discovered that, despite the common perception that graffiti spawned from working class backgrounds and that it mainly caused by teenagers, this is not case.

Following my interview with Duncan Cumming, a famous urban photographer, I discovered that during his five years experience cataloguing graffiti and interacting with the artists he has come to find that almost all prolific artists are from a well educated background.

‘Typical graffiti (i.e. New York style) – usually requires several cans of paint for each ‘piece’ at prices around £2.50 - £4.00 per can... The artist usually has at least a basic understanding of artistic concepts, and quite possibly has studied or goes on to study art or design at university. A large part of this type of street art is the skill of the painting, which requires lots of practice to perfect, i.e. takes several years. As a result the best artists aren’t young (but they need to start young), and it’s not unusual for graffiti artists to be in their 30’s or 40’s.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Appendix 1, pg I

He also states that the typical stencil artist is a ‘well educated... university student and possibly typically middle-class’<sup>32</sup>

The age and class of graffiti artists, as Duncan Cumming presents it, seems to reinforce the hypothesis that most street artists are striving to add culture to their surroundings. The fact that most are well educated and artistically trained emphasises the idea that graffiti is caused to convey a message or to add artistic integrity to an area.

As a result of my other interviews and research, I discovered that graffiti artists have many different reasons for producing their work, for example one interviewee stated, ‘political, comical and site-specific art is wonderful and can really cheer up a grey morning’<sup>33</sup> whilst another claimed, ‘it’s a form of information... the voice of those who live in urban areas’<sup>34</sup>. Despite the many different reasons behind graffiti the majority believed that they were bringing cultural identity to places otherwise barren of artistic value.

Looking at graffiti as a method of enhancing public space raises new questions. The primary question being, if graffiti is created as a reasoned reaction to its location then is it in fact as valid a form of street decoration than commissioned art and advertisements?

Some people may find graffiti less offensive than advertising and commissioned public art. Many people have ethical views against certain companies for example GAP

Clothing because of their use of sweat shops and animal skins. A large billboard would arguably cause more distress to this an individual than graffiti would to another. Any company who can afford to advertise can display any message they wish within trading

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix 1, pg II

<sup>33</sup> Appendix IV , pg I

<sup>34</sup> Appendix II , pgs III

standards guidelines, and it will take hundreds of complaints to force the removal of a campaign, whereas a single complaint against a piece of graffiti will result in its removal. Advertising does not take into account its location as the same scheme is used throughout the country; it is not representative of an individual city or produced by its population. Even commissioned art often faces problems of these sorts despite the fact that its main purpose is to be representative of its location, and is more often than not produced by a resident of its surrounding city. For example Stockton on Tees commissioned a local artist to produce a public sculpture that would represent the residents of the town. The resulting piece was a group of three racing greyhounds. This was seen as offensive by the residents as it suggested that the main interest of the town was gambling on a sport which is seen by many to be cruel to the animals involved. These types of public art work are designed to be heavy and difficult to vandalise almost as a pre-emptive measure against the reactions they will cause. These reactions inevitably rise out of a city unhappy with being represented by a single, undemocratic idea; this is where graffiti differs; even though it is also undemocratic, graffiti is never seen as representing more than an individual or small group's view on their environment.

Architecture can be seen as fulfilling the same purpose as public art. What gives the architect the right to presume the opinion of an entire society? Could one architect's poor decision regarding his building be as bad as graffiti, or could it, in fact be the cause of graffiti?

## Conclusion: Is Architecture To Blame?

*'Something had gone wrong with postwar living arrangements and turned a hopeful world sour. The source of the problem was town-planning and architecture. And the source of that problem was Modernism.'*<sup>35</sup>

Although this quote applies more directly to America it also describes Britain's attitude to architecture after the war. By the time large scale redevelopment of housing in Britain started in the fifties modernism was already over forty years old. It was essentially seen as the most fashionable and also cost effective way of building large scale social housing for the post war population boom. These buildings however were not designed last, everything from schools to nuclear power stations were built quickly and cheaply as a stop gap to get the country back on its feet. It was assumed that once economic stability had returned these developments would be either re-modelled or replaced. If the fifties had the foresight but not the money to follow these ideas through then today's society is quite the opposite. We live in a society where the wealthy are extremely wealthy, yet would rather rely on existing, unsuitable buildings and social spaces than create new ones. The biggest development that outer city and suburb areas see today is not ideological new social schemes but rather large scale capitalist ventures and I will use the most prominent of these, supermarkets to illustrate my argument. Whereas the original modernist architects felt that their designs were for the benefit of the country as a whole these new developers create buildings to fuel their own economy. Large chain stores will happily echo the minimal modernist style but fail to include any of the core principles. It is generally accepted that the so called 'international style' is a thing of the past; killed off by an increase in environmental awareness and the return to the idea of *genius loci*.

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<sup>35</sup> Diskey, Jenny – Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Property Value, London Review Of Books, August 2004

This is a fact that most out of city developers have chosen to ignore; in an effort to create brand familiarity supermarkets such as ASDA (Wall Mart) use the exact same shop design on every site throughout the country, and now internationally. Although we are now pleased to see ourselves as a globalised society we yearn for our own cultural identity. Stores like ASDA ignore this need for individuality because the service they provide is seen as a necessity, this is emphasized in the architecture of the shops themselves, it is almost impossible to think of a supermarket which is directly accessible by the local community. The companies show no desire to integrate themselves with the community and this is clearly shown by the orientation of all main entrances to the car park. This often causes supermarkets to be inaccessible by foot. Although buildings like these are frequently the targets of both graffiti and vandalism the resentment caused by the building creates a lack of pride in the entire community which is itself then 'vandalized'. It would appear that it only takes one bad piece of design to take away the entire sense of ownership and pride from a community. As a further problem these structures are seen as an invading force. The building itself is threatening the small town values of the community and replacing them with a capitalistic ideal. Oppression as a cause for vandalism and graffiti can be seen as far back as graffiti in the Roman Empire, structures representing the Roman authority were vandalized to show dissatisfaction with the imposed political and religious beliefs.

In order to solve the 'problem' of graffiti we first need to solve the social problems that create it, as we have seen these problems are often caused not solely by architecture and town planning but the loss of control that the community feels when a problem building is created on their door step. The extreme way of solving this problem may be via

historical reversion seen in celebration, however if this ideal was copied across the globe then we would quickly return to the same position we are currently residing in. Only in cities renowned for their culture does the balance between local identity and globalization appear to have been met. This may be partly due to the cultural power such places exude, even Disney adapted its view of the ideal world in order to make Disneyland Paris more suitable for its home. The other advantage that these large cities have is their ability to try and fail new ideas repeatedly until an answer is found. Newcastle itself can be seen as currently being in the middle of this process of evolution. The answer for small towns and suburbs however is not so easy to find, they can not afford to evolve in the same way because one wrong decision can destroy a small area and the town may never recover. The final answer can only come from the community, they must be encouraged to develop their identity and defend it against harm. Large shops and developments are without doubt required by modern society but they must be controlled by the areas they influence. There is no reason why a community should not become proud of its new developments but this can only happen if they are included in the design process. After all graffiti artist is only striving to sculpt his public realm in order to feel a sense of belonging and pride in his home.

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## Appendix 1

Hi Duncan,

Thanks so much for offering to help; trying to get hold of relevant books and papers has been almost impossible so far. To start with I think it's best for me to give you basic outline of my thesis, it is of course going to go through quite a bit of development as I proceed over the next few months but this is the starting point.

----- I am looking into the effect of graffiti on public spaces as part of a dissertation in architecture. I aim to investigate whether graffiti is always vandalism or if it can be valid artistic expression of modern culture. Architects themselves have many different views on graffiti, some claim it destroys areas, increasing the fear of crime and defacing buildings; while others see it as an interaction with the urban spaces that they create; in any case it would appear to be an unwritten rule of graffiti artists not to paint on buildings of artistic or historic value. I will assess whether this is true and if it relates to the belief that street artists see themselves as painting on the blank canvas' left in the city, improving them and adding cultural value. Hopefully this will point towards an answer on whether graffiti should be stamped out by modern society in a highly developed city, or embraced not as an alternative to modern street decoration but as a part of it; after all what gives an architect or advertiser the right to change or influence the city as we see it when artists attempting to do the same thing are seen as breaking the law. Is bad architecture, in reality a much larger contributor to an increased fear of crime? How many times have you walked down an alley-way and under a bridge and been scared? Is it the graffiti that causes the fear, or the dark corners and shadows in which the graffiti lies? These narrow passages and under passes are an oversight of the designer, not a creation of the artist. -----

I have set out the questions below; do not feel that you have to answer all of them. If you have any additional comments then just put them in as you go, even if they may not seem relevant at the moment they may well turn out to be as my work develops. If you have any questions let me know.

Can you give a brief biography to help explain your relationship with street art, what your background is including your life outside graffiti, and how did you first become involved with street art?

*I started taking photographs of graffiti about 5 years ago. At the time I was taking photographs of lots of things, mostly on an urban theme, and graffiti was just one of them. Others included cars, signs, etc. Over time I found out more about graffiti, and started concentrating my photography on this (although I still take other photos too).*

*I also setup the website about 4 years ago, initially just as a personal exercise and a place to display a few photographs (which at that time weren't yet concentrated on graffiti). This expanded to become almost entirely graffiti photos, and act as a resource used by graffiti artists and fans of graffiti.*

*Apart from that, I work as a web developer, although I did very briefly study architecture too.*

It's often claimed by social scientists that street art is for the young and working class (lowest or labouring class), would you say it is a fair assumption of street art today or in the past?

*The assumption isn't entirely accurate, but you need to look at the different types of street art, as I believe you could have different classes for different types:*

- *typical Graffiti (i.e. New York style) - usually requires several cans of paint for each 'piece' at prices around £2.50 - £4.00 per can. i.e. it could be an expensive hobby if you were painting large pieces frequently. Although there is also a tradition of 'racking' paint (i.e. stealing). The artist usually has at least a basic understanding of artistic concepts, and quite possibly has studied or goes on to*

- study art or design at university. A large part of this type of street art is the skill of the painting, which requires lots of practice to perfect, i.e. takes several years. As a result the best artists aren't young (but they need to start young), and it's not unusual for graffiti artists to be in their 30's or 40's (the early graffiti artists from the 1970's would mostly be in their 40's now).*
- *gang graffiti. In the UK this is done by small local gangs of kids. This is typically your young, working class graffiti. Not a great deal of skill or style involved, normally involving just tagging the name of the gang and/or the gang members. This is probably the most common form of graffiti in the UK, and what most people without a great deal of knowledge on the subject consider as 'graffiti'. Those who consider themselves graffiti artists don't refer to this type of style.*
  - *street art - e.g. stencils and stickers. This is a form that seems to have grown a lot in the last few years. The typical artist seems to be well educated, probably a university student, and possibly typically middle-class.*

How do you think Graffiti affects the city? Both positively and negatively?

Do you think that Graffiti artists do genuinely feel that they are adding to the character of the urban space when they create a piece of work? Or is it just a case of making their mark?

*Both. Making your mark is probably the number one aim (at least for tagging and throw-ups), but I think most also believe they are improving the urban landscape. Given the choice between a plain concrete wall, and the same wall with any kind of graffiti on it, I think almost all would prefer the latter.*

How do you, or others choose a location for your work? Are there certain buildings or locations that you feel shouldn't be painted on?

*Among graffiti artists there's a basic understanding that you don't do it on things like houses, places of worship, trees, etc. However, these rules aren't always adhered to, especially when it's just kids tagging.*

Do you make a distinction between street art and other forms of Graffiti? Do you think that some forms of graffiti have more cultural value than others?

*To me, Graffiti is writing on walls, street art is everything else (stickers, stencils, murals, etc).*

*I don't think different types of graffiti are more culturally important than others, just as I couldn't say oil painting has more value than watercolours (for instance).*

Some social situations and aspects of town planning seem to spawn graffiti, would you consider graffiti to be influenced by people's dissatisfaction with their built environment? How does this affect you?

Many artists strive to have their work accepted by the public by adding social comment or humour. Does this make the work more valid for display in a public area?

*I don't think the validity should depend on the public's acceptance of it. However, if it makes it easier for the public to understand or enjoy the work, then that's a good thing.*

Different cities around the world hold different views on Graffiti. In places like Paris and Brighton it is widely accepted as part of their bohemian life style; however New York claims to boast a zero tolerance approach at least in central parts of the city. Do you think that any city has the right approach or does it depend on the city and its inhabitants?

*I think the public in general don't have a problem with graffiti. The intolerance usually stems from the local council's policies, which in some way dictate to the public how they should react (through the media).*

Most cities now have authorised graffiti zones, does this devalue graffiti as a whole, or should it be encouraged?

*It should be encouraged, as it gives graffiti artists a chance to paint somewhere without fear of arrest. The result is that they can spend longer working on their piece, during daylight, and ultimately produce finer work, than if they did it illegally at night. It also allows for people to see the graffiti who otherwise might not be able to view it (if it was concentrated on illegal spots which might be hard to find or notice).*

What affect do you think the legalization of graffiti would have?

*It'll never happen, at best there will be a widespread use of legal walls. Possibly in the very long term, it might dilute the cachet graffiti currently still has, which in part is due to it's borderline legality.*

If people had a better understanding of street art and the reasons behind it would their view of it change?

*I think so - often there is a misunderstanding of graffiti and different types of street art. Usually this is the media and authorities categorising graffiti art and vandalism as the same thing.*

Would the perfect city need street art?

If you have any other comments or ideas that you think may help or warrant investigation as part of this topic let me know.

You also said that you may be able to get other people interested in helping me, which would be extremely useful. They needn't all answer the questions if they just want to make some comments or suggest books and websites that may have useful information.

I've forwarded the details to some people who might get in contact. You could also try asking on my forums for some volunteers.

HTH, I left some questions blank, but hopefully you've got enough to go on... if not let me know and I can probably contribute some more (including some that I left blank).

## Appendix II

Hi,

Thanks so much for offering to help. To start with i think it's best for me to give you basic outline of my thesis, it is of course going to go through quite a bit of development as i proceed over the next few months but this is the starting point.

----- I am looking into the effect of graffiti on public spaces as part of a dissertation in architecture. I aim to investigate whether graffiti is always vandalism or if it can be valid artistic expression of modern culture. Architects themselves have many different views on graffiti, some claim it destroys areas, increasing the fear of crime and defacing buildings; while others see it as an interaction with the urban spaces that they create; in any case it would appear to be an unwritten rule of graffiti artists not to paint on buildings of artistic or historic value. I will assess whether this is true and if it relates to the belief that street artists see themselves as painting on the blank canvas' left in the city, improving them and adding cultural value. Hopefully this will point towards an answer on whether graffiti should be stamped out by modern society in a highly developed city, or embraced not as an alternative to modern street decoration but as a part of it; after all what gives an architect or advertiser the right to change or influence the city as we see it when artists attempting to do the same thing are seen as breaking the law. Is bad architecture, in reality a much larger contributor to an increased fear of crime? How many times have you walked down an alley-way and under a bridge and been scared? Is it the graffiti that causes the fear, or the dark corners and shadows in which the graffiti lies? These narrow passages and under passes are an over sight of the designer, not a creation of the artist. -----

I have set out the questions below; do not feel that you have to answer all of them. If you have any additional comments then just put them in as you go, even if they may not seem relevant at the moment they may well turn out to be as my work develops. If you have any questions let me know.

Can you give a brief biography to help explain your relationship with street art, what your background is including your life outside graffiti, and how did you first became involved with street art?

*got into it about 3 years ago just doing stencils(that policeman was my first 1) after seeing some of banksy's stuff, then watched the film wildstyle and was so impressed with the burners on that I decided to practise sketching some stuff then, met a few other people who went down along the railways to paint and met up with them now n again,, you start small with crappy little tags to get the hang of the can then build up in to bigger n better things.*

It's often claimed by social scientists that street art is for the young and working class (lowest or labouring class), would you say it is a fair assumption of street art today or in the past?

*I wouldn't say that's necessarily true all the time but most ppl I know who do burners or tags are, stencils seem to be the new toys of the upper class liberals*

How do you think Graffiti affects the city? Both positively and negatively?

*I think its all for shits n giggles really, positively u get stuff other than concrete n bricks to look at and kids come together in crews n what not, then it's a form of information, lots of groups use*

*it now including the ALF, even the bloody NF!, negatively some peoples property does get damaged but most artists refuse 2 write on houses or important monuments unless for political reasons of course. Also graffiti gets a lot of stick for it costing so much to clean! Hence why legal walls are a good idea but at the same time wheres the fun in not having the feeling u might get caught!*

Do you think that Graffiti artists do genuinely feel that they are adding to the character of the urban space when they create a piece of work? Or is it just a case of making their mark?

*Those that take it seriously for sure they add colour and life to urban areas! Tagging is more about pissing ur teritory out tho, that's the thing different types of graf are about dif types of things.*

How do you, or others choose a location for your work? Are there certain buildings or locations that you feel shouldn't be painted on?

*See where the CCTV cameras are! But as I said b4 I'd never do some1's house unless it was a vivisectors!!*

Do you make a distinction between street art and other forms of Graffiti? Do you think that some forms of graffiti have more cultural value than others?

*All of them have cultural value n they just differ in how pleasing they are to the eye, its all personal opinion, like I like the political stuff just coz it makes you feel like even people you don't know are out there n doing stuff! Like im not a fan of tagging but u gotta have balls to do that aswell so no graf is more or less important than ne other*

Some social situations and aspects of town planning seem to spawn graffiti, would you consider graffiti to be influenced by people's dissatisfaction with their built environment? How does this affect you?

*You are gonna get graf where theres few CCTV cameras n wherever there are people! Its not just dissatisfaction with the urban area its about the general society, which is worse in very built up areas hence more graf. Where I live its all london's overspill so you have the very rich living next door to the very poor so of course theres tensions there, but theres not artistic graf round here only tags so I don't think its always to do with where you live. its only in the cities where you find most of it, people travel in to do pieces coz more people will see it.*

Many artists strive to have their work accepted by the public by adding social comment or humour. Does this make the work more valid for display in a public area?

*No, it just makes it more relevant to be there*

Different cities around the world hold different views on Graffiti. In places like Paris and Brighton it is widely accepted as part of their bohemian life style; however New York claims to boast a zero tolerance approach at least in central parts of the city. Do you think that any city has the right approach or does it depend on the city and its inhabitants?

*Its seen as vandalism so no.*

Most cities now have authorised graffiti zones, does this devalue graffiti as a whole, or should it be encouraged?

*it should definitely be encouraged it wont devalue it because there will always be people doin it on trains outside shops...*

What affect do you think the legalization of graffiti would have?

*fewer arrests/cautions and more tax money can go to the important things in our society like war.*

If people had a better understanding of street art and the reasons behind it would their view of it change?

*For those who are open minded yes, but I suspect not on the whole as it is still seen as only vandalism*

Would the perfect city need street art?

Definitely it it the voice of those who live in urban areas

### Appendix III

Hi Russell,

Thanks so much for offering to help; trying to get hold of relevant books and papers has been almost impossible so far. To start with i think it's best for me to give you basic outline of my thesis, it is of course going to go through quite a bit of development as i proceed over the next few months but this is the starting point.

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I have set out the questions below; do not feel that you have to answer all of them. If you have any additional comments then just put them in as you go, even if they may not seem relevant at the moment they may well turn out to be as my work develops. There are a few things which may not translate into American phrases, if you have any questions let me know.

Can you give a brief biography to help explain your relationship with street art, what your background is including your life outside graffiti, and how did you first became involved with street art?

*In the early 1990s, I became a self-taught graphic designer. I mostly designed T-shirts and stickers. This was in Atlanta, GA, a place that was mostly car culture with very little graffiti. In 1995, after getting laid off from an advertising job, I travelled in Europe studying art and design as cheaply as possible. That included public ads and street art. In 1997, I moved to San Francisco, did graphics for work, and got into the street art scene first as a documentarian, then for mostly political reasonings. Now I put up stickers and stencils on the streets and have just started to make posters.*

It's often claimed by social scientists that street art is for the young and working class (lowest or labouring class), would you say it is a fair assumption of street art today or in the past?

*This statement is incorrect from my experience. I see all kinds of people making street art: Twist/Barry McGee is a rich successful artist who still goes out with kids. Shepard Fairy still goes out. Rumor has it that Banksy is a rich designer. Personally, I know many poor white artists that put stuff up too. Can't say what their backgrounds are, but they're prolific. A lot of kids of color do go out as well, but they are just the stereotype in the current state of street art. In California, they're the ones that are targeted for laws against street art (veiled in gang legislation).*

How do you think Graffiti affects the city? Both positively and negatively?

*There aren't a lot of ways for marginalized people to communicate in public. Corporations and governments control the flow of information in the public commons. Graffiti can be a tool to allow these people to communicate to a larger audience. I see this a lot with regards to political topics. Traditional pieces also add beauty to blighted environments, and give marginalized people a chance to artistically express themselves*

*as well. My experience with poor innercity youth is that they have very few legal outlets to express themselves. They are mostly seen as criminals in training, consumers, etc.*

*Negatively, I personally do not like gang tagging. I realize it is an outcropping of ones need to express themselves, but think that it is based on a violent lifestyle and merely a means to mark territory or dis other gangs. There's no merit to it and it does create an atmosphere of caution for the people who live in those parts of the city.*

Do you think that Graffiti artists do genuinely feel that they are adding to the character of the urban space when they create a piece of work? Or is it just a case of making their mark?

*It depends on the artist. I have met some artists who pick meaningful images and locations to place them. There are other artists that treat their work like a brand and mainly want to break into galleries. Some artists are in between those two, while even others believe that the commons belongs to the people and that they are entitled to use the space as a tool of communication.*

How do you, or others choose a location for your work? Are there certain buildings or locations that you feel shouldn't be painted on?

*In the San Francisco stencil scene, it's mostly sidewalks. There is a rich tradition of mural art in the Mission District that is usually respected, but there are no written rules of illegal street art. Some people dis murals, churches, 100 year old houses, etc. just because they can. I've seen some murals go untouched for years, mostly out of respect, while others are tagged within weeks of going up.*

*I recently heard that its becoming harder and harder to put up pieces in SF. This makes the locations either harder to find or easier to get painted over. On the tracks, there are still really old pieces up but not a lot of new ones that I've seen. You'd probably get different answers from different folks.*

Do you make a distinction between street art and other forms of Graffiti? Do you think that some forms of graffiti have more cultural value than others?

*Personally, I think all street art is a great way to combat the consumptive nature of our society. I'm glad that I can look at stickers, posters, stencils, tags, etc. instead of ads and logos. There's a level of acceptance in the Mission District, probably b/c of the large Latino population there and their vibrant mural art connections. It really does bring life and color to the streets.*

*Street artists tend to communicate to one another more than graffiti artists do. And street art is blatantly political. This creates another level of cultural value and proves that those without the thousands of dollars can still make billboard messages by simply wheatpasting pieces of paper over the ad.*

Some social situations and aspects of town planning seem to spawn graffiti, would you consider graffiti to be influenced by people's dissatisfaction with their built environment? How does this affect you?

*I've noticed that blight creates graffiti. If you have a neglected building, it will usually get tagged. Freeway overpasses tend to attract graffiti too. Recently in San Francisco, there was a slew of antigentrification graffiti, a direct reaction to developers putting up expensive live/work lofts around certain neighbourhoods. Yes, graffiti is a reaction to a person's built environment. It could be a means to take some type of control back from the people that may not care about the artist. Personally, I don't have a connection to dissatisfaction with my environment. I have reacted to the gentrification of my neighborhood, and I have also felt that the banalities of certain neighbourhoods creates a need for urbanization.*

Many artists strive to have their work accepted by the public by adding social comment or humour. Does this make the work more valid for display in a public area?

*Humor is subjective, so it might not make the art more valid. I enjoy all types of art and know that a lot of people do react better to the humorous pieces. In SF, a local weekly gave a cover story to the stencil "Monkey Knife Fight" and an artist's search for the maker of the phrase. It was a funny piece. In the Mission District, social comment goes a long way in the validity of street art. Most of the murals are commentary, and a local poster collective is all political and has some validity. Political posters get more respect than a self-promoting artist's posters. Also, a mural was recently boarded over due to constant defacement. It depicted a free Palestine and was constantly being a target of antiarab sentiment. The owner of the building chose to board it.*

Different cities around the world hold different views on Graffiti. In places like Paris and Brighton it is widely accepted as part of their bohemian life style; however New York claims to boast a zero tolerance approach at least in central parts of the city. Do you think that any city has the right approach or does it depend on the city and its inhabitants?

Most cities now have authorised graffiti zones, does this devalue graffiti as a whole, or should it be encouraged?

*It should be encouraged. In California, it is a felony to paint graffiti. Giving kids and artists a space to put something up legally is respected in SF. I work at a community arts center that has a 2 square block zone of legal graff and murals. It has become a tourist stop for mural fans, has won awards, and is constantly getting youth to interact with more legal means of doing art. For more suburban visitors, graffiti equals threat of violence. From my experience, it draws people in to a more creative, cohabitative mood, so is beneficial for cities.*

What affect do you think the legalization of graffiti would have?

*Humans have tagged things for centuries, so I doubt that legalization would completely regulate it. You will still have people willing to go around the rules and laws. However, legalization would be a bold experiment in how urban centers see and use their commons. The Mission District is a colourful place already, so I can only imagine what it would look like completely covered with graf and mural art! It would be interesting to study urban centers and see what the percentage of wall space is actually already painted. The Mission would have a fairly high percentage, and though it doesn't lower crime, it does give an outlet to those who might commit more violent crimes. And it allows artists to use the streets as a gallery space and political bulletin board. Making it legal would probably create an amazing street art revival.*

*Some people see graffiti as urban eye noise, making it hard to focus. I think the world would be a better place if sections of it were colourful and full of expressive art.*

If people had a better understanding of street art and the reasons behind it would their view of it change?

*For some, it is just eye noise created by thugs. Even if they met the artists, I doubt they'd change their minds on this issue. I have a friend who is a muralist among other talents, and her cousin works for the graffiti abatement dept. in SF. They have had several heated discussions about graff and have never come to any solution. The cousin sees grey paint as the solution while my friend thinks that SF needs to put a lot more money into programs that support the kids.*

Would the perfect city need street art?

*A perfect city would probably incorporate street art into its landscape. The concept of using the commons for group projects like muraling seems like a vital part of a perfect city. I wouldn't want to see billboards, bus ads, etc., but would love the idea of having visitors from around the world come to my perfect city to see all the amazing free public art. Florence, Italy has the right idea: the buildings are art themselves, with art attached on to them and surrounding them. Why not add street art to the list of sculpture, architecture, etc. as amazing ways to detail your perfect city? While we're at it, why not make it all ecofriendly/green so that the tourists visiting can learn about sustainable, closed-system solutions and get to see a lot of great art?*

## Appendix IV

Hi, Thanks so much for offering to help; trying to get hold of relevant books and papers has been almost impossible so far. To start with i think it's best for me to give you basic outline of my thesis, it is of course going to go through quite a bit of development as i proceed over the next few months but this is the starting point.

----- I am looking into the effect of graffiti on public spaces as part of a dissertation in architecture. I aim to investigate whether graffiti is always vandalism or if it can be valid artistic expression of modern culture. Architects themselves have many different views on graffiti, some claim it destroys areas, increasing the fear of crime and defacing buildings; while others see it as an interaction with the urban spaces that they create; in any case it would appear to be an unwritten rule of graffiti artists not to paint on buildings of artistic or historic value. I will assess whether this is true and if it relates to the belief that street artists see themselves as painting on the blank canvas' left in the city, improving them and adding cultural value. Hopefully this will point towards an answer on whether graffiti should be stamped out by modern society in a highly developed city, or embraced not as an alternative to modern street decoration but as a part of it; after all what gives an architect or advertiser the right to change or influence the city as we see it when artists attempting to do the same thing are seen as breaking the law. Is bad architecture, in reality a much larger contributor to an increased fear of crime? How many times have you walked down an alley-way and under a bridge and been scared? Is it the graffiti that causes the fear, or the dark corners and shadows in which the graffiti lies? These narrow passages and under passes are an over sight of the designer, not a creation of the artist. -----

Can you give a brief biography to help explain your relationship with street art, what your background is including your life outside graffiti, and how did you first became involved with street art?

*I studied visual art and design and then gained my degree in fashion. My work was mainly concerned with the study of youth culture thus areas such as music and political expression were very relevant. My professional design work had led me more towards graphic design and image reproduction. There has been the recent resurgence of interest in graffiti art and the growth of stencil graffiti. Artists such as Banksy have given the work a recognised professional media status. Advertising agencies have picked up on this and have commissioned stencil campaigns, particularly in Soho, London in the last couple of years. I believe that as the use of technologies has increased, so too has our need to revert back to basic mark making.*

It's often claimed by social scientists that street art is for the young and working class (lowest or labouring class), would you say it is a fair assumption of street art today or in the past?

*I myself hail form a working-class background so I can identify with that speculation. However, graffiti influences are now much more apparent and accepted as part of contemporary painting and graphic art which can be seen in more formal or gallery-type settings.*

How do you think Graffiti affects the city? Both positively and negatively?

*I love it, but then I am biased! I think the level of artistry and humour rather than wanton destruction has to be an element when judging the work.*

Do you think that Graffiti artists do genuinely feel that they are adding to the character of the urban space when they create a piece of work? Or is it just a case of making their mark?

*Probably a bit of both. The origins of mark-making are so primitive and territorial, I think we sometimes forget that we are simply urban animals! Political, comical and site-specific art is wonderful and can really cheer up a grey morning.*

How do you, or others choose a location for your work? Are there certain buildings or locations that you feel shouldn't be painted on?

*Difficult question, the anarchist in me says, just bomb the lot, the early 30's adult says that some areas of conservation should be respected.*

Do you make a distinction between street art and other forms of Graffiti? Do you think that some forms

*I think there are some really fantastic new hybrids of street and graffiti art that can only push the creativity forward. I think purists in any creative form need to constantly review what they do and be aware of new work pushing through. However, I do have the utmost respect for traditionalist graffiti artists who would never paint on canvas or do commercial work.*

Some social situations and aspects of town planning seem to spawn graffiti, would you consider graffiti to be influenced by people's dissatisfaction with their built environment? How does this affect you?

*I live and work in East London that is an area of huge creativity, many different age groups and nationalities. Personally I love the colour, constant evolution and surprise mix of street art and graffiti which appears here. The art here is considered and well executed. The area has a very young vibe which sits well with the constant onslaught of stickers, spray, stencils and flyers.*

Many artists strive to have their work accepted by the public by adding social comment or humour. Does this make the work more valid for display in a public area?

*I think some of the site-specific street art is hilarious. I love the way that artists can build on a piece and see further possibilities and greater subversion than the person that originally used the site. It is great to see the mutual respect and unwritten rules of graffiti etiquette, not tagging over another persons tag etc. Two artists may never meet but they might develop a kind of anonymous art piece together, that's strange yet fantastic.*

Different cities around the world hold different views on Graffiti. In places like Paris and Brighton it is widely accepted as part of their bohemian life style; however New York claims to boast a zero tolerance approach at least in central parts of the city. Do you think that any city has the right approach or does it depend on the city and its inhabitants?

*Traditionally graffiti does sit more obviously in some urban areas. Other times it is good to see something completely out of context that really makes think. Graffiti is never going to disappear and ignoring that fact is not going to solve any issues. Recognition of graffiti as a unique art form will only improve education and the quality of work.*

Most cities now have authorised graffiti zones, does this devalue graffiti as a whole, or should it be encouraged?

*You will never ever kill illegal graffiti, that is the nature of the beast. I believe there is room for both authorised, regulated work plus that little bit of freeform!*

What affect do you think the legalization of graffiti would have?

*I don't think that much would change to be honest, apart from some great artists could be a bit more open about their craft which I think is a good thing. I don't think there would be a sudden explosion of spray can art everywhere or anything!! Open discussion and the sharing of ideas can only be for the best, it helps to move an art form along.*

If people had a better understanding of street art and the reasons behind it would their view of it change?

*Yes, but I think the views of all sides have to be taken on board. There are many reasons behind graffiti and street art, not all of it is destructive and equally not all of it is executed well.*

Would the perfect city need street art?

*Yeah, I reckon! No city will ever be perfect but it is that colourful grubby part that gives the human touch.*