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Bombing, Tagging, Writing: An Analysis of the Significance of Graffiti and Street Art

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Abstract

A first look upon a well-contrived piece of graffiti or street art may inspire feelings of surprise, delight, and amusement, but the connection between graffiti and cultural heritage might be more difficult to perceive. Conventionally, graffiti was synonymous with vandalism, associated with a subculture that needed to be extinguished immediately. However, with the works of such artists as Basquiat, Keith Haring, Banksy, Steve Powers, and the like, graffiti began to be recognized as something more than crime – something with far more value, something that could reach beyond the walls of a gallery. Indeed, this subculture has since proliferated exponentially, and with its popularity a closer connection to heritage becomes more apparent. Though it may be a more radical and alternative way of creating heritage, its increasing recognition suggests that such cultural values are clearly demonstrated.

BOMBING, TAGGING, WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GRAFFITI
AND STREET ART

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_____
Advisor & Program Chair
Randall F. Mason
Associate Professor

For my Pop, who taught me to pay attention, because attention pays.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

A first look upon a well-contrived piece of graffiti or street art may inspire

feelings of surprise, delight, and amusement, but the connection between

uncommissioned urban art and cultural heritage might be more difficult to perceive.

Conventionally, graffiti was synonymous with vandalism, associated with a

subculture that needed to be extinguished immediately. However, with the positive

critical attention devoted to works of such artists as Basquiat and Keith Haring in the

1980s, and present-day works by Banksy, Steve Powers, and the like, graffiti began to

be recognized as something more than crime – something with far more value, art

that could reach beyond the walls of a gallery. Indeed, this subculture has since

proliferated exponentially, and with its popularity a closer connection to heritage

becomes more apparent. Graffiti and street art embody cultural significance through

its individualistic nature, though its ability to beautify and enhance public spaces, and

through its highly visible way of speaking out on political, social and economic issues, because it so clearly represents an artistic subculture with a message seen by some elements of the public and the art establishment as important. Though it may be a more radical and alternative way of creating heritage, its increasing recognition suggests that such cultural values are clearly realized.

The notion that graffiti and street art is purely associated with crime and vandalism is one that is fading quite rapidly with its prolific subculture and wide-spreading notoriety in conventional art circles. Modern graffiti is attributed to a West Philadelphian writer named Cornbread in the late 1960s, but then exploded in New York City on the sides of subway cars.[1] Using "nicknames" with their street number, writers such as Taki 183 and Tracy 168 started to gain recognition by tagging locations outside of their neighborhood. The tags evolved from simple marker sketches to more elaborate pieces with bright colors and an intricate style of lettering, known as "wildstyle." Subway cars became the main target for taggers since they traveled all over the city, thus giving the writer much more exposure than a piece in a stationary location. Graffiti had been associated with crime based on its use as a way to demarcate territory between gangs, and the New York City government implemented a serious anti-graffiti intervention. By 1989, the Clean

[1] Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York, NY: HarperDesign, 2010), 48.

Train Movement was employed to ensure that any tagged subway cars were cleaned immediately before leaving the train yard.[2]

Though the graffiti itself was rapidly being eradicated at the end of the 1980s, the subculture continued to grow. Artists with notable talents (and perhaps a bit of luck) started to become more prominent outside of the graffiti world. Jean-Michel Basquiat, for example, grew up in Brooklyn under the pseudonym SAMO, and later collaborated with Andy Warhol in the early 80's, while Keith Haring's murals gained popularity as a means of social activism, expressing powerful themes of sexuality and AIDS awareness.[3] These artists braved the crossover into conventional art circles, bringing urban art into the spotlight. Furthermore, its association with the hip hop movement in the 1980s carried it "across the pond," where it took flight in Europe. Since then, the proliferation of graffiti and street art have gained wild popularity among writers and audiences alike, and is even formally recognized by the Australian National Trust as culturally significant.

The basic form of graffiti is simply the artist's name on the wall, known as a "tag," as a means of announcing their existence, documenting themselves and establishing an identity within a space. One's name is perhaps the most deeply personal way of identifying ourselves: it is the first thing we are given at birth, and our first answer to the question, "Who are you?" Aside from subway cars, graffiti is often seen on bridges, billboards, abandoned buildings and the like. It is carefully

[2] Ibid., 238.
[3] Margo Thompson, *American Graffiti* (New York, NY: Parkstone International, 2009), 6-10.

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designed with an artistic sensibility and executed in often dangerous places. The

writers risk arrest and injury to simply write their names in these highly visible areas.

The original graffiti done in New York began as a simple tag – the writer's

pseudonym scrawled upon any and every available surface. As competition between

graffiti "crews" increased, the tags became larger and more elaborate, thus

expanding the stylistic vocabulary. In addition to different aesthetic varieties,

application methods started to evolve, giving way to the street art movement. The

differences between graffiti and street art do not have strict boundaries, as few art

forms do, but the main difference is especially articulate in in Cedar Lewisohn's *Street

Art: A Revolution*. Lewisohn's primary distinction between graffiti and street art is

that graffiti centers on the actual text and lettering, cleverly naming graffiti writers

"calligraphy peacocks," while street art is inclusive of an expansive variety of artistic

mediums:

> Graffiti writing has a very specific aesthetic: it's about the tag, it's
> about graphic form, it's about letters, styles and spray-paint
> application, and it's about reaching different locations. If we think of
> street art as, to quote [John] Fekner, 'All art on the street that's not
> graffiti,' then the definition is extremely broad, and this broadness
> reflects the genre's freedom.[4]

Because graffiti is mainly focused on lettering, those who create it are called

"graffiti writers," while those who have crossed over into the gallery world are called

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[4] Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008), 19, 23.

"graffiti artists." For simplicity, both graffiti and street art have been termed "urban art" (Figure 1.1). [5]

Furthermore, the line between public art and urban art is often blurred. Arguably, the vibrant colors and poignant murals enhance a public space. Is its illegal nature simply why it is not considered public art? The works of former and current street artists are being showcased regularly in conventional art circles. For example, the former graffiti writer known as KAWS had an exhibit at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in November 2013, which featured his caricatures of iconic pop-culture characters standing in front of a more traditional oil painting (Figure 1.2). This juxtaposition is indicative of the alternative path that post modern art is taking. The success of British street artist Banksy also cannot be ignored – though his subversive art has its fair share of critics, it is also selling for up to $600,000. [6]

The effects that graffiti and street art have on its audience are perhaps the most significant contribution to cultural heritage. It has long been referred to as a voice of the public, speaking out, in an often clever and succinct manner, on political, social or economic issues. It is highly relatable and can inspire surprise and delight within its viewer, who may stumble upon a piece of street art unexpectedly. The subculture has also grown exponentially in recent years, especially with the ease of

[5] Those who produce works that fall outside of the graffiti parameters of lettering are considered street artists, though many simply choose to label themselves unrestrictively as "artists." Tristan Manco, *Street Sketchbook* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2010), 8.
[6] Eva Branscome, "The True Counterfeits of Banksy: Radical Walls of Complicity and Subversion," *Architectural Digest*, September/October 2011.

access via social media. It is almost effortless to go down a two hour internet rabbit hole with YouTube clips and blog posts devoted to presenting and interpreting graffiti and street art. This is largely due to the fact that it supersedes the lines of race and class; it is not exclusive to a particular ethnic or socioeconomic group, in both the artist's circles and the audience. Though it originated amongst teenagers in underserved communities, it has expanded to include artists from all walks of life. Due to its visual accessibility, graffiti and street art have always been appreciated by the general populace at all levels of society.

The connection to heritage becomes more apparent when graffiti and street art are viewed through a lens of specific cultural values. The *Burra Charter* defines cultural significance as "the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations."[7] By focusing on values established between an entity and its context – in this instance, urban art and the subculture that surrounds in in the public realm – an argument can be made for the advent of graffiti and street art as a form of cultural heritage. Additionally, this art movement can easily thrive within the recent implementation of creative placemaking, where members from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors collaborate with the community to enhance a neighborhood through the arts or other creative means. When applied within the

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[7] Meredith Walker and Peter Marquis-Kyle, "The Illustrated Burra Charter: Good Practice for Heritage Places," (Australia: Australia ICOMOS International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2004), https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B40gMrq2RJzbNTYyZTcxMmQtZGNmNy00YzM2LTg3NmEtNmNlNjkyZjg0MWNk/edit?pli=1&hl=en.

right contexts, urban art contributes greatly to social, historical, aesthetic, and economic values (Figure 1.3).

Several case studies will demonstrate the contributions of graffiti and street art to cultural heritage. The Mural Art Program's project, "Love Letter," was managed by Steve Powers, a former graffiti artist-turned-Fullbright Scholar. The Love Letters are written along prominent rooftops along the Market-Frankford Line in Philadelphia, and effectively connect elements of a community and its inclusive history with the relevant, overarching theme of love, completed with the flair of a graffiti-style mural. The Love Letters, "written for one with meaning for all" are based on a graffiti artist's efforts to win over a young lady by writing her letters where she would see them every day on her commute.[8]

A second example, 5Pointz, will be studied as an example of a community that was formed around a specific site. Located in Queens, NY, 5Pointz is a former factory building that has been a legal space for graffiti artists since 1993, and known as the "graffiti mecca" of the world. It is privately owned and was slated for demolition in August of 2013 with the intention of building a new, 1,000 unit condo building. The curator and contributing artists fought to save 5Pointz, suing the owner for violating the Visual Artists Rights Act. Unfortunately, on November 19, 2013, the building was whitewashed overnight, covering all the graffiti. The tumultuous battle between the

[8] Shira Walinsky and Jane Golden, 2014.

5Pointz supporters and the owner has been one of a passionate art community battling the pressing demands of real estate development.

Finally, the third case study is Rice Mill Lofts, in New Orleans, LA. Built in 1892 and formerly the largest rice mill in North America, the building suffered severe structural damage during Hurricane Katrina. During its renovation, it became a refuge for squatters who left their marks on the brick walls. Instead of removing the graffiti, the owner recognized its value and used it as the marketing focus. This proved to be beneficial, as the apartments with the largest and most expressive graffiti have wait lists. Rice Mill Lofts was developed by Sean Cummings, whose design-centric approach has been catalytic to the stabilization of Bywater, New Orleans after the storm.

These three case studies valorize the attributes of graffiti and street art as a significant form of cultural heritage. In each situation, the positive elements of graffiti are celebrated, and applied in a manner that embodies heritage values. Urban art is a phenomenon that has been widely opposed since its inception, but has yet to be extinguished – in fact, it has increased greatly in cultural acceptance. Perhaps recognizing its value, and providing an environment for it to thrive in is an effective compromise between its supporters and detractors. This thesis serves as an examination of how urban art can be applied as an active contribution to cultural heritage, thereby justifying its consideration in the conservation sphere.
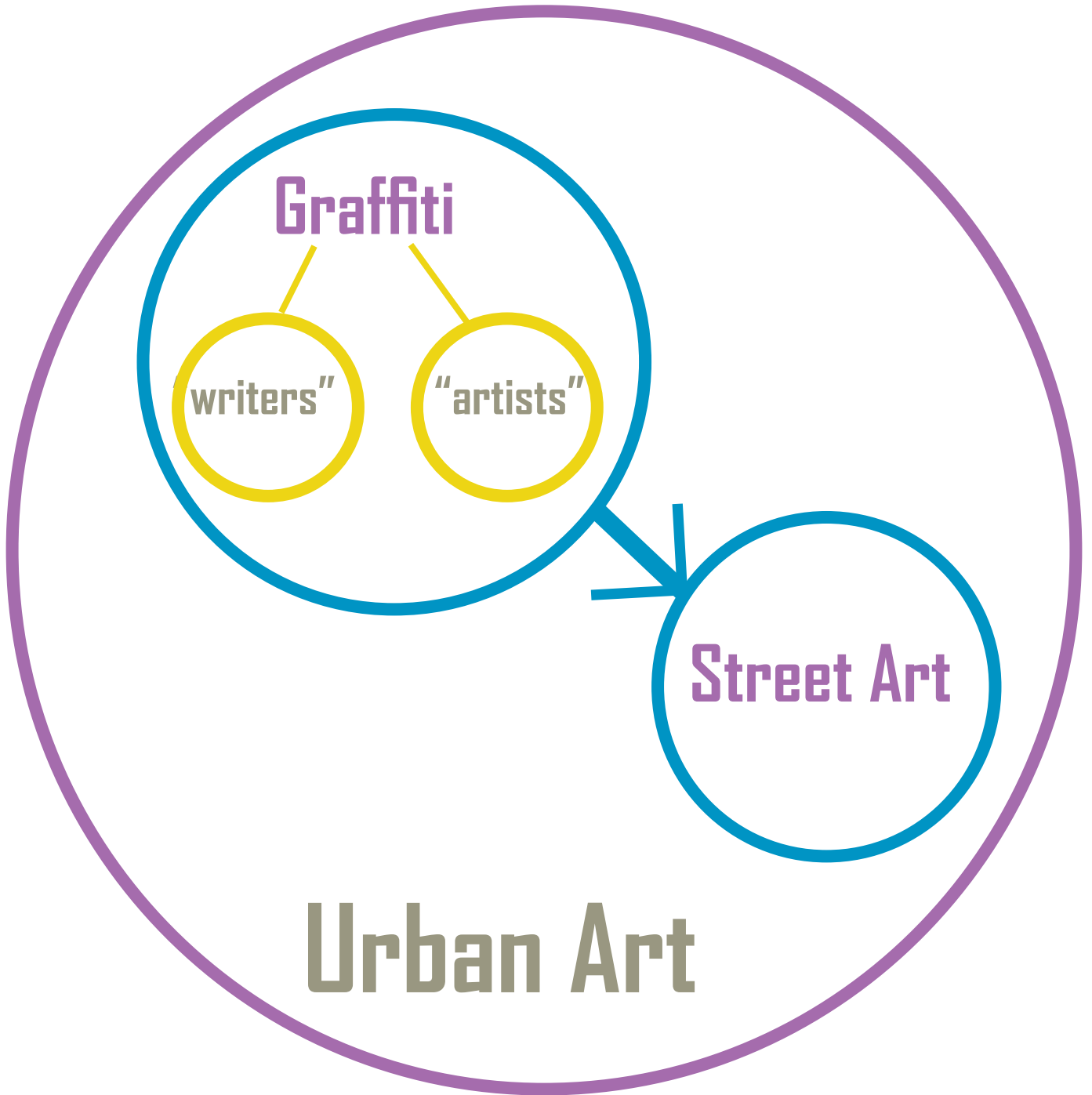
Figure 1.2:
Diagram of the relationship between graffiti and street art

Figure 1.2:
KAWS exhibit at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2013 (Amanda Jakubik to Trendland, http://trendland.com/kaws-exhibtion-at-pafa/.)

1970s

Graffiti

Heritage

1990s

Graffiti

Heritage

2014

Graffiti

HOW
DOES GRAFFITI
AND STREET ART
EMBODY
CULTURAL
HERITAGE
VALUES?
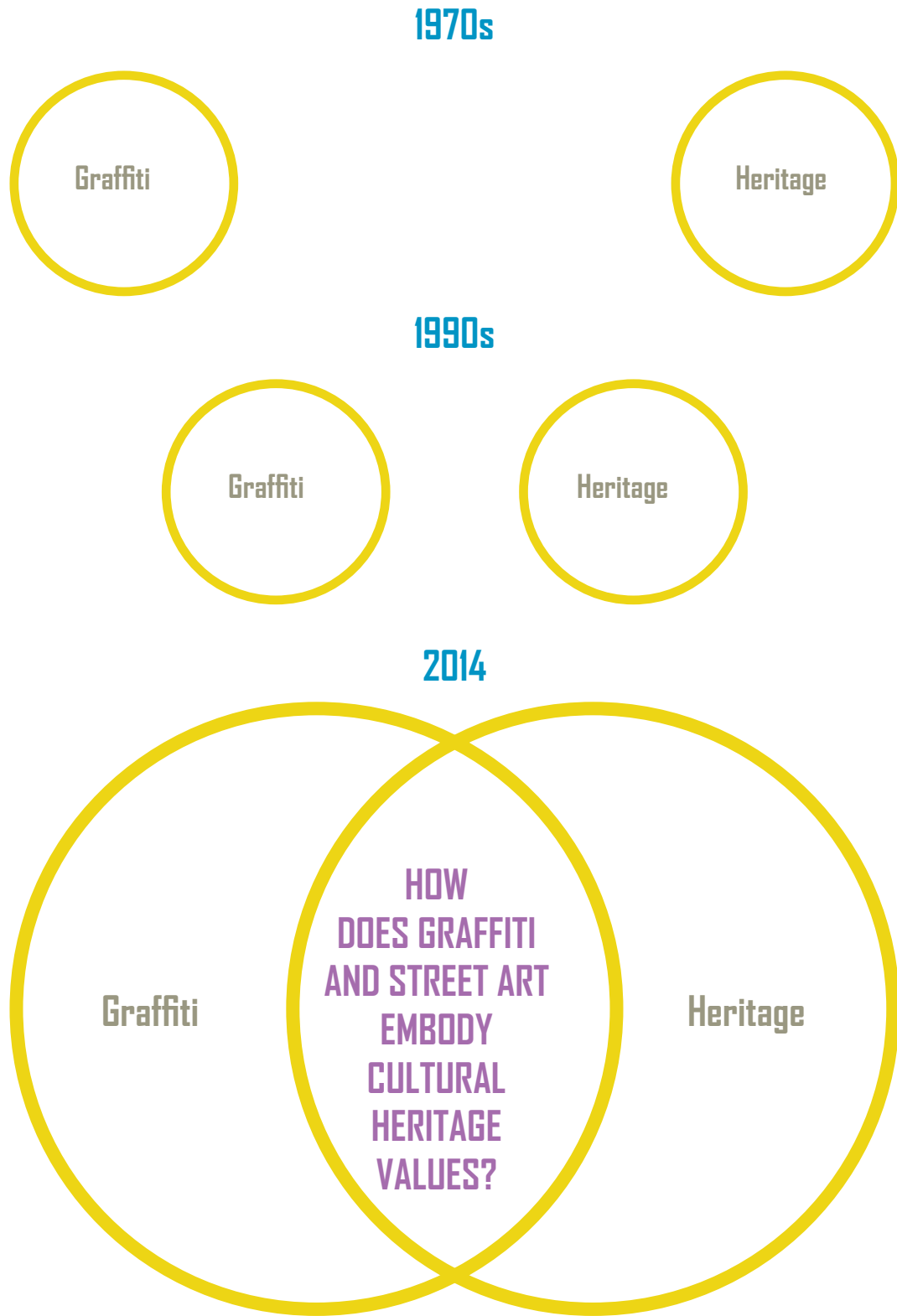
Heritage

Figure 1.3:
Venn Diagram of the relationship between graffiti, street art, and cultural heritage

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Although graffiti and street art have been prominent in urban fabric worldwide, it is still in its infancy as far as its accepted contributions to cultural heritage. There is an extensive amount of documentation on its history, especially the late 1970's subway art movement, and countless articles, websites, blogs, and social media documenting its actuality as a counterculture. This thesis serves to provide a connection between the two as a starting point for its recognition as a valuable form of heritage.

HISTORY

The beginnings of graffiti can be loosely traced back to prehistoric times with the use of petroglyphs on rock walls to illustrate maps or landmarks, as well as cave paintings used for communication (Figure 2.1). Fiona McDonald writes, ". . . it illuminates what appears to be a timeless obsession throughout mankind: drawing and painting on stone and making one's presence known through images."[1] More notably, the graffiti of the Roman Empire is known for covering a range of topics, from politics and gladiators, to homosexuality and poetry. These varied types of mark-making exist all over the world throughout time, and not only serve to reinforce the human need for recognition, but also provide insight in an iconographic way to the layers of a site's historical narratives.

A Parisian photographer, known by his pseudonym, Brassai, is credited with his love for the graffiti he photographed throughout the city in the 1930s (Figure 2.2). He recognized the graffiti as a perpetual component of the urban fabric, and celebrated its anonymity:

> The bastard art of the streets of ill repute that does not even arouse our curiosity, so ephemeral that it is easily obliterated by bad weather or a coat of paint, nevertheless offers a criterion of worth. Its authority is absolute, overturning all the laboriously established canons of aesthetics.[2]

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[1] Fiona McDonald, *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 10.
[2] Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008), 29.

Stateside, modern day graffiti arguably began with the proliferation of

"Kilroy," a war doodle emerging in the 1940s who became a symbol of patriotism

during World War II. However, graffiti supporters were few and far between after

this phenomenon.[3] With the decline of the urban centers in the mid-20th century

came pockets of blight and neglect in many neighborhoods. Gangs were often

responsible for the territorial graffiti scrawled on city walls. But it is often out of such

dire conditions that a change occurs. A countercultural shift began in the 1970s, with

the iconic emergence of subway graffiti and hip-hop in New York. This phenomenon

is widely documented, beginning with two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Norman

Mailer's 1973 essay, *The Faith of Graffiti* and Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper's

S± ³ šµArt. Both of these books were written concurrently with the spray-can art that

took over New York's subway system and facilitated the birth of hip-hop and

breakdancing. They capture the raw essence of the urban fabric in ethnic

neighborhoods and how the inner city youth yearned for recognition. The movie

Wild Style is also significant as a representation of New York in the early 1980s, and

has achieved "cult classic" status with its 30th anniversary in 2013 (Figure 2.3). These

sources are remarkably astute to foresee the future impacts of these social

epidemics.

The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present and *The

History of American Graffiti* adequately describe the history of the phenomenon, from

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[3] McDonald, *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present* 79.

prehistoric markings to the New York subway scene and its influence throughout

individual cities in the United States. Since this movement was so prolific and

influential, much of the other literature begins with a synopsis of New York freight

train graffiti. Documentaries like *Style Wars* interview the original graffiti writers,

such as Lady Pink, who asserts her rationale:

> We are folk artists. We're one of the few arts that were started by
> American kids, by teenagers, and just 'cause it was started by a youth
> culture doesn't make it any less valid. And it's going three-dimensional;
> we're altering our environment. Is that what graffiti originally was?
> Yes.[4]

Indeed, its influence has reached worldwide; European spray paint colors

were named after the original New York writers.[5] Though its impact is recognized

globally, this thesis focuses primarily on the national scale.

INDIVIDUAL DOCUMENTATION

In addition to the literature on the roots of graffiti and its many visual

adaptations, there are a number of resources that focus on documentation. Since

the nature of graffiti and street art is of a temporary nature, capturing it is not only a

challenge, but also necessary for the artists' notorieties. With the world at our digital

fingertips, there are limitless sources for photo documentation and artist promotion

– not only through websites and blogs, but through *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube,*

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[4] Tony Silver, Henry Chalfant, and Linda Habib, "Style Wars," (Los Angeles, CA: Public Art Films, 2004).
[5] Ibid.

Tumblr, and the like. The beauty of this technology is that the artwork transcends

barriers of language and distance to reach any viewer armed with Wifi.

The *Wooster Collective* site is especially worth mentioning for its success since

its inception in 2003. What started as an email chain among friends to share new

pieces of street art in a Soho neighborhood has grown tremendously: "The

collective's mission is to discover and document authentic art experiences via book

publishing, salons, lectures, gallery shows, and online . . ."[6] Its founders, Marc and

Sara Schiller, were featured in a *TedX Talk* in 2011 and "have become a global source

as curators and as a mouthpiece for this movement of ephemeral art."[7]

The Schillers have various publications on the topic, but one that is especially

poignant is entitled *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*. This book

examines how the street art movement has grown and deemed more acceptable as a

form of cultural expression. In collaboration Anne Pasternak, director of public arts

fund Creative Time, and civil rights lawyer Tony Serra, in addition to over r150 artists,

Trespass explores the rules that street art has grown within, and then moved

beyond.[8]

In addition to digital resources, the vast majority of literature on graffiti and

street art showcases photographs and interviews of artists and their works. These

[6] Marc and Sara Schiller, "Wooster Collective," www.woostercollective.com.
[7] Marc and Sara Schiller TEDxTalks, ""Gaming the Streets: Uncommissioned Art and Its Relationship to the City"," in *TEDxTalks: Bloomington* (TEDxTalks, 2011).
[8] Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).

interviews prove to be immensely informative as to the artistic intent as well as circumstantial contexts. Cedar Lewisohn again is exemplary in showcasing the key players of the graffiti movement, as well as Manco's *Street Sketchbook,* which explores an artist's creative process by looking at their sketchbooks.[9]

Several documentaries are also worth mentioning as a contributing source of artist mindsets. Such films such as *Bomb It* and *Infamy* provide a plethora of insight into the graffiti movement's growth at the international and national level, and effectively illustrate how each city has its own distinguishing style and attitude. *Sly Artistic City* focuses mainly on Philadelphia's graffiti, and how the economic and social factors of the late 20th century contributed to the local youth's creative expression. A writer named Satch comments: "We saw it as something, right, that was necessary to fill our sense of belonging, you know, in pretty much the neighborhoods that didn't offer a whole lot."[10]

These methods of documentation and sharing via technology are indicative of the vast countercultural following of graffiti and street art. "Graffiti hunters" are prevalent in urban environment, utilizing cell phone apps to geo-locate works. Additionally, some of the various blogs will occasionally conduct informal lectures or tours of easily accessible art.[11]

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[9] There are numerous resources of this type of literature not named because they lack scholarly input, and comprise solely of photographs and/or redundant interviews.
[10] Robert Moran, "Sly Artistic City," (2010).
[11] Conrad Benner, walking tour with author, 2014.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The literature on cultural heritage is incredibly vast, but the scope of this

thesis requires examination of heritage at the most basic levels in order to firmly root

the connection to graffiti and street art. Public opinion is mixed: those that consider

it vandalism are incapable of seeing any connection whatsoever, while graffiti

aficionados can see nothing else. For the purposes of those on the "vandalism" side,

a more broad approach is necessary in order to clearly delineate the value. Randall

Mason introduces heritage values as products of their context:

> Values are produced out of the interaction of an artifact and its
> contexts; they don't emanate from the artifact itself. Values can thus
> only be understood with reference to social, historical, and even spatial
> contexts - through the lens of who is defining and articulating the
> value, why now, and why here?[12]

Anne Markusen and Anne Gadwa apply these concepts of heritage values in

an artistic manner in their white paper on creative placemaking, in which the arts are

utilized to define physical and social aspects of a community.[13] Creative placemaking

is focused on beautifying the public space within a community in an effort to make

heritage values more tangible. Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local* is another

example of how public art can reinforce cultural heritage, and explores the

theoretical concepts of what, exactly, public art is and whom it serves. These

[12] Randall Mason and Marta de la Torre, "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002).
[13] Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, "Creative Placemaking," (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010).

examinations in artistic applications of heritage prove to be a useful framework for investigating alternative forms of public art.

Though there are solid foundations on which to build a knowledge base for the history, evolution, and individualistic nature of graffiti and street art, the literature is disconnected among these separate genres. Furthermore, because of the vandalism stigma that surrounds graffiti, its embodiment of cultural heritage may be more difficult to ascertain. By following the framework laid by Markusen, Gadwa, and Lippard, in addition to the global accolades modern graffiti has received, one can begin to perceive its value. The supporting evidence undoubtedly exists; it is just a matter of demarcating the connections back to heritage. This thesis serves as the thread to quilt these genres together as a valid example of cultural heritage.

Figure 2.1:
Example of ancient petroglyphs (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)

Figure 2.2:
Brassai photography (Nicholas Spyer, http://nicholasspyer.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/067.jpg.)
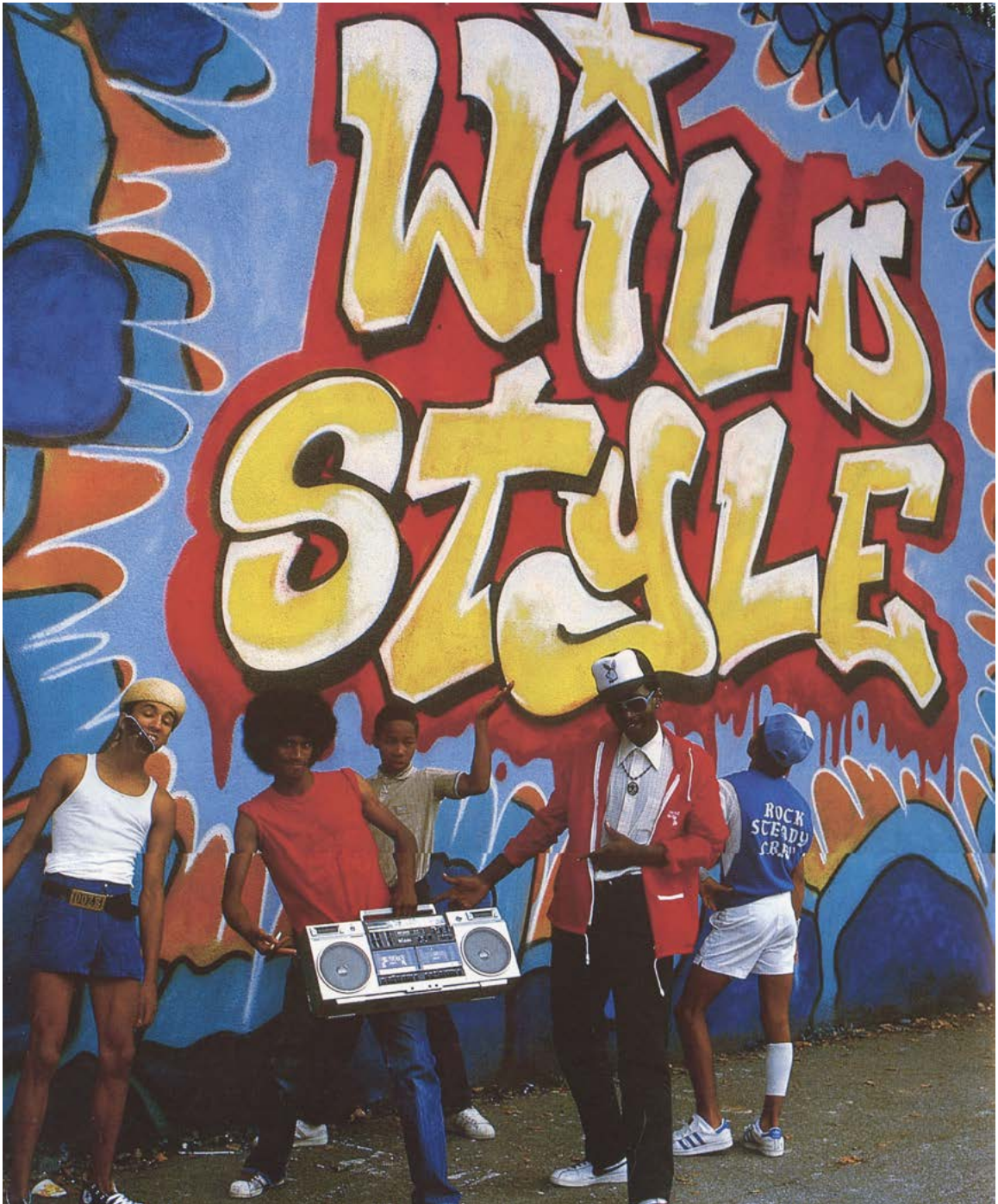
Figure 2.3:
Wildstyle, 1983 (Margo Thompson, American Graffiti (New York, NY: Parkstone International, 2009).)

CHAPTER 3
HISTORY

Modern day graffiti can take on innumerable forms, from stenciled characters to ironically modified billboards. But one must keep in mind the basic driving motivation: to leave a mark somewhere upon our physical environment. A graffiti writer interviewed in the documentary *Bomb It* reminds us, "If you put a pen into any child's hand, naturally, he'll go to the wall."[1] Is this desire part of our need to connect with past and future inhabitants? Is it an egotistical attempt at recognition? Is it art? Regardless of the psychological basis, there is undoubtedly some inherent appeal in leaving something of ourselves behind.

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[1] Jon Reiss, *Bomb It*, (New York, NY: Docurama Films : Distributed in the U.S. by New Video, 2008).

This fascination is hardly a recent phenomenon. Prehistoric etchings and cave

paintings are indicative of humankind's efforts to communicate, using symbols to

represent landmarks or tribal boundaries. These petroglyphs are found worldwide,

dating as far back as 40,000 years.[2] While this manner of communication was socially

sanctioned and therefore differs from the illegal nature of present day graffiti, it is

interesting to note that the etymology of graffiti is from the Italian "graffiare,"

meaning "to scratch." The term "graffiti" came to light in the late eighteenth or

early nineteenth centuries to describe the etchings found on the walls in Pompeii.[3]

Pompeian graffiti in the first century A.D. may be the first documented form

of unsanctioned marking, with topics ranging from gladiators to love poems to

homosexuality (Figure 3.1). Much of the writings were crude obscenities, but "I am

here" type of messages still carry through as a common thread, indicative of the

human desire to impart their presence. Furthermore, the graffiti was often highly

political, not unlike that of what we see in present day works. Even in this early

period of civilization, graffiti acted as the voice of the public speaking out against

authority. Artist Fiona McDonald suggests the location of the graffiti was another

important factor, and that the more heavily covered walls were along the most

traveled footpaths and therefore had the most viewer exposure.[4] The graffiti was

plentiful throughout the cities, as one inscription indicates: "O walls, you have held

[2] Fiona McDonald, *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 10.
[3] Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008), 26.
[4] McDonald, *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present* 37.

up so much tedious graffiti that I am amazed that you have not already collapsed in ruin."[5]

Perhaps the examples that will resonate most are the inscriptions found at many heritage sites. While climbing the 450 steps to the dome of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, Italy, one can see traces of those who have made the climb in years past (Figure 3.2). The dome is especially decorated with the jubilant initials of breathless tourists. Some are scrawled in marker; some are etched; some are barely visible after removal efforts. These marks are indeed a thorn in a conservator's side, regarded as defacing the sanctioned heritage work, but are difficult to avoid in such landmarks. The desire to be seen by other tourists supersedes the salvation of the historic fabric in these enviable locations.

The examples of graffiti from ancient civilizations until the 20th century can be seen throughout the world, but the most prolific and international "traveler" in the early 20th century was a war doodle named Kilroy. This little sketch, often found in the bulkheads of military ships, originated in the United States during World War II, and was quickly adopted as the mascot of the armed forces. Kilroy's little fingers gripped a wall as he peered over, his bald head and long nose inquisitive, proclaiming "Kilroy was here" (Figure 3.3). He soon became ". . . a morale booster: While it was not the stars and stripes, it represented the United States. KILROY graffiti in any war theater let successive waves of soldiers know that they were not stepping on

[5] Ibid., 38.

unknown ground."[6] Kilroy soon became such a familiar face overseas that opposing

forces believed he was a spy.[7]

Though he was primarily associated with the U.S., Kilroy began to appear

internationally under different aliases. Mr. Foo hailed from Australia, Chad from the

United Kingdom, Herbie from Canada, and so on. Kilroy was later memorialized in

2004, carved into the granite of the Washington World War II memorial (Figure 3.4).

In the years after World War II, there was a migration from the popular urban

centers. The GI Bill provided many benefits to veterans, including low-interest

mortgages, and in combination with a highway development program, the suburbs

became increasingly more popular, in effect depleting the city population of white,

middle class citizens. Additionally, deindustrialization and the civil rights movement

of the 1950s greatly altered the socioeconomic makeup of urban areas, creating large

areas of blight, especially in minority neighborhoods. These conditions led to the rise

of gang violence and drug prevalence in Philadelphia and New York, where these

under-served communities did not provide many empowering opportunities for their

youth. Typically, gangs would use their graffiti to delineate territorial lines, instilling

fear onto the city walls and palpable distress amongst its citizens.

Darryl McCray, a teenager attending a reform school in 1965, is credited as

being the first graffiti writer.[8] Nicknamed "Cornbread" for requesting comfort food

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[6] Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York, NY: HarperDesign, 2010), 41. Capitalization in original.
[7] McDonald, *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present* 79.

in his school cafeteria, Cornbread began writing his name alongside those of the

North Philadelphia gangs. Meanwhile, in West Philly, Cool Earl, Kool Klepto Kidd, and

Chewy also started writing (colloquially called "getting up") on walls previously

tagged with gang graffiti: "'We were just on the subway writing on the

advertisements . . .It was almost like, 'We were here,' like it was our route,'"

according to Kool Klepto Kidd.[9] These two camps of writers in different sectors of

the city worked independently, but were always cognizant of each other's existence.

For several years, their tags chased each other, attempting to ultimately meet:

"When Earl, Chewy, Cold Duck and myself [Kool Klepto Kidd] met Cornbread, Tity,

and Dr. Cool No. 1, that was really a beautiful feeling because we had been tracking

each other for the longest time" (Figure 3.5)[10]

   This union ultimately became the first graffiti crew in 1969, and spawned the

establishment of numerous groups of writers, all seeking the same goal. Philly is

often called a "city of neighborhoods," and it became quite a competition to see who

could get up in the most areas. These accolades were highly sought after by the

writers, but it was a friendly rivalry. In the documentary *Sly Artistic City*, T-Bone

reminisces gaily about how the graffiti culture served to unify teenagers from all over

town, with the attitude that the entire city was their canvas.[11]

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[8] An individual that does uncommissioned, illegal graffiti is called a "writer," rather than an "artist," which is used to describe an individual who works within an art gallery.
[9] Gastman and Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti*, 50.
[10] Ibid., 51.
[11] Robert Moran, "Sly Artistic City," (2010), 2:37.

In 1971, an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, entitled "The Aerosol Autographers: Why They Do It," by Sandy Padwe, showcased the original graffiti crew of Cornbread, Kidd, Cool Earl, Cold Duck, Chewy, and Bobby Cool (Figure 3.6). The article interviewed the teenagers on their craft to determine what their motives were: "'There isn't much choice of what to do,' McCray said. 'I did it because there was nothing else. I wasn't goin' (sic) to get involved with no (sic) gangs or shoot no (sic) dope, so I started writin' (sic)on buses.'"[12]

Sly Artistic City also cites the blighted environment as a motivator for the youth to get into graffiti. Satch remarks:

> This was illegal; however, we didn't see it that way. We saw it as
> something that was necessary to fulfill our sense of belonging in . . .
> the neighborhoods that didn't offer a whole lot, you know. Society
> didn't offer us a whole lot, so we had to make up lives for ourselves.[13]

New York City suffered from similar conditions after World War II, and in 1969, the moniker of a Greek teenager, Taki 183, started to appear in the subway stations, similar to how Cornbread and his crew's names started to proliferate throughout Philadelphia.[14] The number at the end of his nickname represented his address, 183rd Street in Washington Heights (Figure 3.7). Once Taki 183's tag started to appear in places outside his neighborhood, his notoriety spread like wildfire. Who was this mysterious man hiding behind a magic marker?

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[12] Sandy Padwe, "The Aerosol Autographers: Why They Do It," *Today*(1971),
http://www.12ozprophet.com/news/throwback1972-the-aerosol-autographers.
[13] Moran, "Sly Artistic City," 15:20.
[14] Gastman and Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti*, 54.

Echoing the tagging phenomenon in Philadelphia, similar writers began to autograph subway stations with their names and street numbers throughout the city, again for the sake of friendly competition (Figure 3.8). In 1971, this inspired another article in the *New York Times* entitled "Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals," where Taki was interviewed on his motivations behind his compulsive signatures: "'I didn't have a job then . . .and you pass the time, you know. . . I just did it everywhere I went . . .You do it for yourself.'"[15]

Perhaps these newspaper articles served as validation for the recognition these kids so desperately sought, for graffiti emerged in droves around the city. Tags started to appear on the actual subway train, rather than the inside of the stations, which would carry them on its route throughout New York (Figure 3.9). This level of exposure was exactly what the writers were after: the more they got their name up, the more popular they became. Cedar Lewisohn examines how the teenagers found an outlet in their blighted neighborhoods:

> Graffiti writing in this period gave people from marginalized areas of society the opportunity to "be somebody", if only in their own sub-sect. You could literally make your mark in the world, be a creative individual, be cool, and most importantly, be a star. What's most exciting about the invention of graffiti writing is that it was done by a small group of teenagers. Through graffiti, their aspirations changed entirely. Suddenly they wanted to draw and paint; they wanted to be artists, and because the art that they were doing was a magpie-style,

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[15] "Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals," *The New York Times*(1971), http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/arts/taki183.pdf.

remix art that borrowed from culture at large, they started to look at the world as a place from which to take inspiration.[16]

Crews from all five boroughs met at "the writer's bench," at the Grand Concourse Station in the Bronx to compare sketchbooks.[17] Tagging space was at a premium, and in order to have the most visibility, one's tag needed to stand out above the rest. A writer's tag is considered an extension of their personality, and they would practice it narcissistically, almost to the point of compulsion.[18]

Because of the surge of writers coming forth, wall space became limited, and competition between crews increased. Not only did the tags have to develop into more elaborate styles to stay fresh, but they also had to be placed in more unreachable locations. Thus, in the mid-1970s, a new strain of graffiti was born, called "wildstyle," and its evolution was imminent in order for a writer to remain a prominent figure in the graffiti world. The basis of wildstyle is a manipulation of the letters in the writer's tag, often using arrows to give it a sense of motion (mimicking the trains), and a variety of color was incorporated to increase its visual appeal (Figure 3.10). Additionally, writers began to become more familiar with the train lines, favoring the number 2 and number 5 trains since they are mostly elevated lines that travel the furthest, from the Bronx down through Manhattan.[19] The subway cars served not only as a means of circulating a tag, but also as an esoteric line of

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[16] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 43-44.
[17] Tony Silver, Henry Chalfant, and Linda Habib, "Style Wars," (Los Angeles, CA: Public Art Films, 2004), 3:49.
[18] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 49.
[19] Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, *Subway Art* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984), 23.

communication between writers. Getting up on all lines, and therefore getting one's

name around to all five boroughs, was called "going all-city" and was a highly sought

after achievement.[20]

Tracy 168 is credited with originating wildstyle, but the text was only one

component: "So I was 'wild:' don't tell me how to live unless you're ready to die for

me, and 'style:' class, I respect you, you respect me."[21] Wildstyle was also used to

describe the lifestyle and outrageous risks writers would take to get their names up.

The danger, of course, is another integral part of the allure.

Sneaking out after dark, graffiti writers would break into the subway rail yards

to paint the sides of the cars, often with spraypaint cans they had stolen. Recall that

many of the writers were teenagers, so they first had to sneak out past their sleeping

parents into the night to create large-scale versions of their tags, called "pieces"

(short for "masterpieces"). The yards were not easily accessible, surrounded by high

fences, barbed wire, and the like. Furthermore, the rails had live wires running

through them, adding a potentially life threatening risk to the mix.

The train yards were the most common place for the writers to complete their

pieces, but even more daring locations included the tops of buildings, bridges, police

cars, billboards, etc. Reaching these obscure locations presented obvious challenges

as far as accessibility Aside from a safety hazard, the writers often feared their fate if

[20] Ibid., 50.
[21] Reiss, *Bomb It*. 11:25

they were caught by the police. They faced arrest, fines, or even jail time if they were

over 18. The risks, no doubt, were plentiful, but the payoff was substantial:

> Sometimes the graffiti writers would set out from their own turf at dark, yet not begin to paint until two in the morning, hiding for hours in the surest corners of the yard or in and under the trains. What a quintessential marriage of cool and style to write your name in giant separate living letters, large as animals, lithe as snakes, mysterious as Arabic and Chinese curls of alphabet, and to do it in the heat of a winter night when the hands are frozen and only the heart is hot with fear. No wonder the best of the graffiti writers . . .get the respect, call it glory, that they are known, famous and luminous as a rock star. . . .Nothing automatic about writing a masterpiece on a subway car.[22]

By 1975, subway graffiti had exploded at an incredible rate. Crews were on a

mission to paint the largest pieces they could, called "top-to-bottoms," which

covered the majority of a subway car (Figure 3.11). Meanwhile, the urban

environment had not improved significantly, even on a national level, and for many

underprivileged youth, the graffiti crews were the only stability available: "'There

certainly wasn't much to be proud of about our country then,' says Bilrock. 'Vietnam,

COINTELPRO, Watergate, the assassinations of all our leaders and hope. I don't think

I need to explain myself.'"[23] The graffiti movement was so prolific that it became a

hotbed of political action. Mayor John Lindsay had begun an anti-graffiti campaign in

1972, which merely cleaned subway cars, thereby creating a fresh canvas for graffiti

writers. However, graffiti was only one of New York's problems.

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[22] Norman Mailer, *The Faith of Graffiti* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1974).
[23] Gastman and Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti*, 86.

Amidst a fiscal crisis, New York underwent a restructuring project which promoted gentrification. This had a tangible spatial effect on the working class, pushing them to the outskirts of the city to create a "corporate mecca" that "cater[ed] to middle and upper class professionals."[24] As a result, tagged cars – the visual language of the displaced and largely minority youth - became an unsightly display for the city's administration (Figure 3.12). Urban studies scholar Maggie Dickinson highlights the palpable struggle between the writers and the government:

> Graffiti called attention to a mass transit system that had fallen into utter disrepair and which the city had no possible [financial] means to fix. Many of the more skilled writers saw their creative efforts as attempts to beautify a neglected, ramshackle transit system that had been subject to years of disinvestment and deferred maintenance (Austin 2001). The ability of young people to spontaneously initiate a project that completely saturated the insides and outsides of New York's massive network of subways with their names and images probably *was* demoralizing for a city administration that was virtually paralyzed by financial crisis.[25]

The attention that Mayor Lindsay gave to his anti-graffiti campaign successfully ignited the debate in the public eye.[26] Not only was graffiti a symbol of the lower class, omnipresent in all subway lines, but it was also reminiscent of the territorial gang graffiti done in the 1960s. It hindered the new impression that New York was attempting to generate "as an urban space populated by and catering to

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[24] Maggie Dickinson, "The Making of Space, Race, and Place: New York City's War on Graffiti, 1970 - the Present," *The Critique of Anthropology* 28(1)(2008), http://coa.sagepub.com/content/28/1/27.full.pdf+html.
[25] Ibid. Italics in original.
[26] Ibid., 32.

the needs of white-collar professionals."[27] This negative connotation effectively

framed all graffiti writers as criminals that the Metropolitan Transit Authority had no

control over: "They try to make it look like graffiti writers break windows, and

everything, and it ain't (sic) even like that. You know who be doin' (sic) that? [Kids]

who be (sic) high when they come from school are the ones who break the

windows," claimed several teens at the writer's bench.[28]

Mayor Ed Koch, elected in 1977, was the first city official to effectively

eradicate the graffiti crisis – at no small price. By 1978, the MTA was spending

approximately $15 million dollars a year on graffiti removal.[29] One of Koch's

implementations was the installation of special barbed wire fences, with 2-inch long

blades approximately 2 inches apart, that would collapse upon itself if some unlucky

intruder fell into it. In addition, he ordered that attack dogs be put in the train yards.

When some concerns were raised about the dogs stepping on the third (electric) rail,

Koch suggested that a secondary fence be built to contain the dogs around the

perimeter, and by 1980, this double-fence system was installed in all 19 yards.[30]

Additionally, the MTA began a repainting program to clean the trains, but it was

abandoned four months later, after 85% of the subway cars were graffitied over

[27] Ibid., 34.
[28] Silver, Chalfant, and Habib, "Style Wars," 4:09. Transcription varies from original.
[29] Craig Castleman, *Getting Up : Subway Graffiti in New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), 155.
[30] Silver, Chalfant, and Habib, "Style Wars," 1:01:00.

within a week.[31] In a time of fiscal crisis, were these implementations an effective use of tax dollars?

Graffiti was not the only subcultural movement coming to life in the city. Breakdancing and hip hop were also popular activities among inner city kids. Again, in an underserved environment riddled with gangs and drugs, the youth had to create alternate activities as their afterschool pastimes. As one dancer says, "Breaking is when you don't have nothing (sic) to do, and everyone is standing around getting high."[32] The movie *Wild Style* is credited as being the first film to document the emergence of hip hop as a grass-roots movement, and it portrays how creative actions such as breakdancing, emceeing, rapping, and graffiti were integral parts of the cultural landscape. Director Charlie Ahearn cites the "vibrancy" of these movements as inspiration:

> "I'd go to clubs, and there was this whole feeling in the air that all of this was emerging. And it wasn't just the Bronx, it was throughout the city. . . When it came out in 1983, it was the second highest-grossing film in New York City. After 'Terms of Endearment.'"[33]

There was no doubt that the evolution of these different subcultures was done with an artistic sensibility – raw talent that had nowhere else to flourish. However, reactions to graffiti were mixed: though some deemed all graffiti writers miscreants, others celebrated their efforts to change the environment. Pop artist

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[31] Dickinson, "The Making of Space, Race, and Place: New York City's War on Graffiti, 1970 - the Present". 34.

[32] Silver, Chalfant, and Habib, "Style Wars," 8:13.

[33] Joe Neumaier, "Iconic New York Hip Hop Film, 'Wild Style,' Celebrated on 30th Anniversary," *New York Daily News*(2013), http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/iconic-new-york-hip-hop-film-wild-style-celebrated-30th-anniversary-article-1.1469905.

Claes Oldenburg appreciated the subway art: "You're standing there in the station, everything is gray and gloomy, and all of a sudden one of those graffiti trains slides in and brightens the place like a big bouquet from Latin America" (Figure 3.13).[34]

Indeed, graffiti piqued the interest of several individuals in conventional art circles, and writer's collectives such as the United Graffiti Artists were formed with their assistance (Figure 3.14). Some of the earliest gallery showings included an agglomeration of styles, from traditional graffiti writers to Pop Art icons like Andy Warhol, Lawrence Weiner and Robert Mapplethorpe. [35] Many of the subway artists featured in *Style Wars* also made the transition to galleries, though their time there was fleeting. Lewisohn attributes their transient gallery time to a lack of exhilaration:

> Tagging is an often dangerous and potentially deadly pastime, but it is on this perilous illegality that the activity thrives. There are many differences between making legal and illegal graffiti. These differences are conceptual, stylistic, and time based. When the illegal element is gone, so is the adrenaline rush of illegality; all that's left is the adrenaline rush of creativity.[36]

However, a select few artists braved the crossover. These collaborative efforts formed a network of interactions between both highbrow and graffiti artists, and it was in these interactions that former graffiti writers Jean Michel-Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf were catapulted into the spotlight. All three of these

[34] Margo Thompson, *American Graffiti* (New York, NY: Parkstone International, 2009), 15.
[35] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 42.
[36] Ibid., 45.

artists found their beginnings by "injecting elements of street culture into the main stream of contemporary art," albeit by different approaches.[37]

Haring and Scharf met while attending the School for Visual Arts in New York in the late 1970s, and were captivated by the art in the subways – so much so, that they endeavored to paint their own works.[38] Haring was renowned for his chalk figures that portrayed controversial topics, while Scharf was known for his rebellious interpretations of pop-culture icons (Figure 3.15). Basquiat, on the other hand, was already on the graffiti scene under the pseudonym "SAMO," leaving cryptic messages on walls around the city (Figure 3.16). He had a strong inclination towards pop art, and crossed paths with Haring and Scharf during their time at the School for Visual Arts. Thanks to the synergistic gallery collaborations of graffiti writers and prominent Pop Art figures in the 1980s, Haring, Scharf and Basquiat made a significant transition into high culture, where they remain some of the most influential artists of the 20th century.

Meanwhile, graffiti was still rampant on the subway lines. In 1989, the Clean Train Movement was implemented, in which a train that was tagged would not be driven out of the yard. The MTA had finally realized that graffiti writing was all about getting their tags around town - ergo, preventing a train from even leaving the yard defeated the whole point of tagging it. This was considered the final victory for the MTA, but yet another challenge for the graffiti writers. They took to the walls and

[37] "Paul Kasmin Gallery," http://www.paulkasmingallery.com/artists/kenny-scharf.
[38] Thompson, *American Graffiti*, 7.

other visible surfaces to do their craft, which prompted Mayor Rudolph Giuiliani to

create the Anti-Graffiti Task Force during his term in 1994. This was part of Giuliani's

stance on "quality-of-life" crimes, and employed a number of efforts to combat the

graffiti epidemic. A specific call line was created for citizens to report occurrences of

graffiti, and a 25-member team was utilized to be the "eyes on the street."[39]

Though Giuliani's Task Force was successful enough to remain one of New

York's city agencies even at present, graffiti had already begun its migration across

the world. Its link to hip hop was a catalyst for its travel. "If graffiti in the early 1980s

was limited to a relatively small insider audience, hooking up with a musical

revolution that permeated every corner of the globe certainly had the effect of

placing graffiti in the mainstream," Lewisohn notes.[40] In addition to its link with hip

hop, graffiti also traveled via the media, in the forms of magazines and movies.[41] An

interesting progression was that the aesthetics of graffiti responded differently

within the European urban landscape. Blek le Rat, credited for being one of the

progenitors of stencil graffiti, sought to apply the New York style in Paris, but soon

realized that "American" graffiti did not fit within the Parisian cityscape.[42] His

stencils sought to respond to the French urban fabric, and were one of the early

departures from traditional spraycan art that paved the way for variations on a

[39] Jonathan Hicks, "Mayor Announces New Assault on Graffiti, Citing Its Toll on City," *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/17/nyregion/mayor-announces-new-assault-on-graffiti-citing-its-toll-on-city.html.
[40] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 35.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Reiss, *Bomb It*.

theme (Figure 3.17). Much like architecture is influenced by the physical, social,

political, and economical environment, graffiti and street art, too, evolved in a site

specific manner.

This evolution has given way to one of the largest countercultural phenomena

of the 20th century, and its origins inextricably began with groups of teenagers having

some creative fun in the 1970s. Their desire to express themselves, to be noticed and

acknowledged in a time where their communities had been forgotten, became a

catalyst for those in similar situations worldwide.
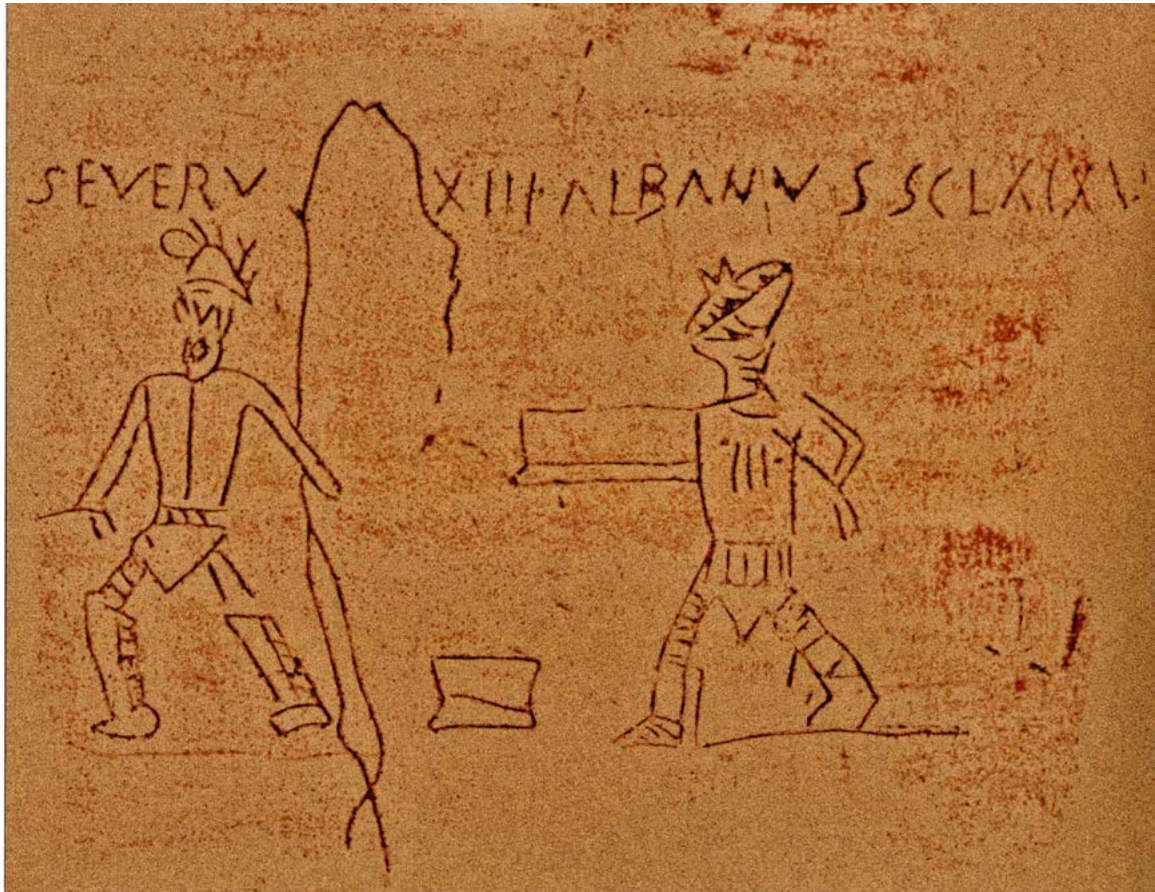
Figure 3.1:
Pompeian graffiti, depicting gladiators (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)

Figure 3.2:
Inscriptions at the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, Italy, 2013 (by author)
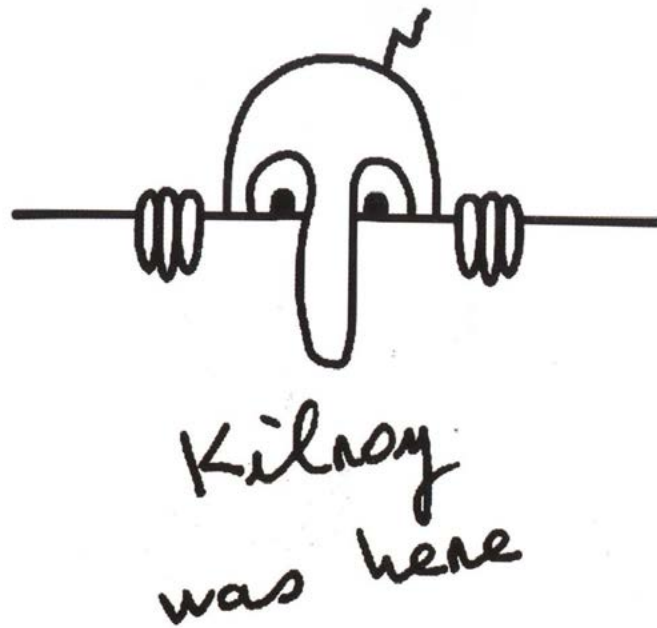
Figure 3.3:
Kilroy doodle (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)
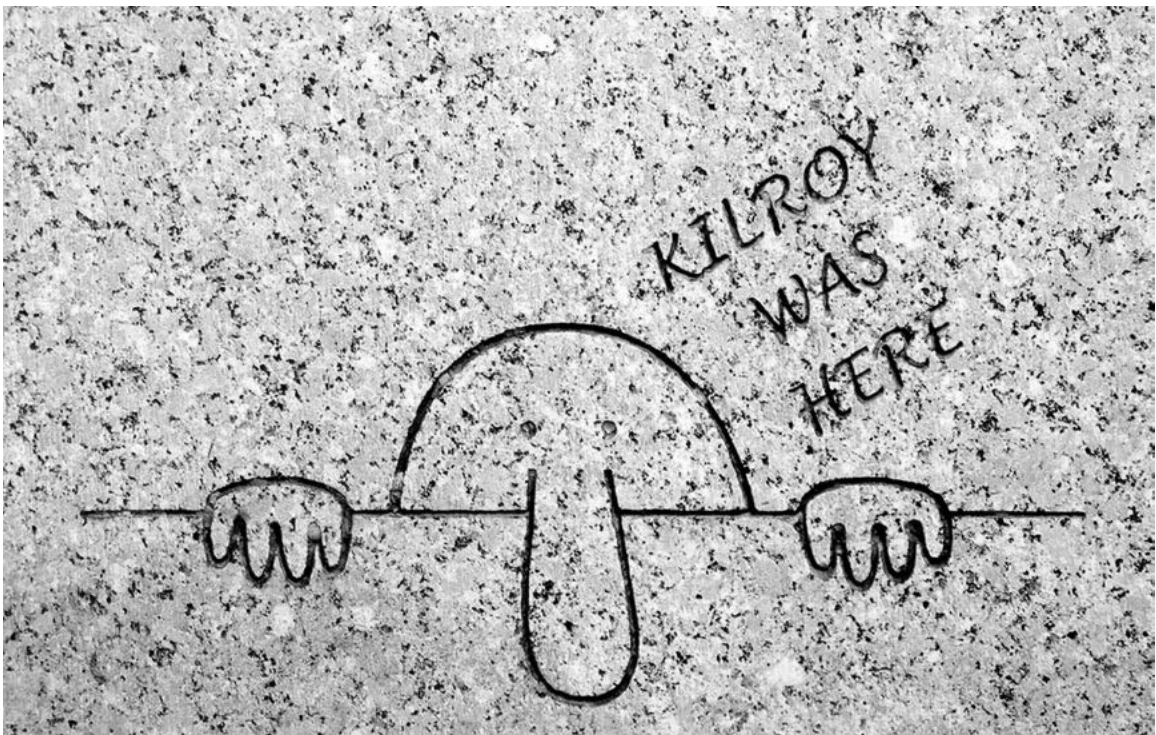
Figure 3.4:
Carving of Kilroy into the WWII Memorial (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)

Figure 3.5:
Philadelphia "originals" (Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon,
The History of American Graffiti (New York, NY: HarperDe-
sign, 2010).)

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Figure 3.6:
From left to right: Kool Klepto Kidd, Chewy, Cold Duck, Bobby Cool (Robert Moran, "Sly Artistic City," (2010).)

Figure 3.7:
Taki 183 (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.8:
Subway tags (Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, The History of American Graffiti (New York, NY: HarperDesign, 2010).)

Figure 3.9:
Exterior of a subway car (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.10:
Wildstyle pieces (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.11:
Various pieces (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.12:
Police surveillance (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.13:
Context within the urban fabric (Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, Subway Art (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1984).)

Figure 3.14:
Blade, aerosol paint on canvas (Margo Thompson, American Graffiti (New York, NY: Parkstone International, 2009).)

Figure 3.15:
Keith Haring, "Untitled," Acrylic on Vinyl (The Keith Haring Foundation, "Untitled, 1982," http://www.haring.com/!/art-work/886#.U2HiO_ldWSp.)
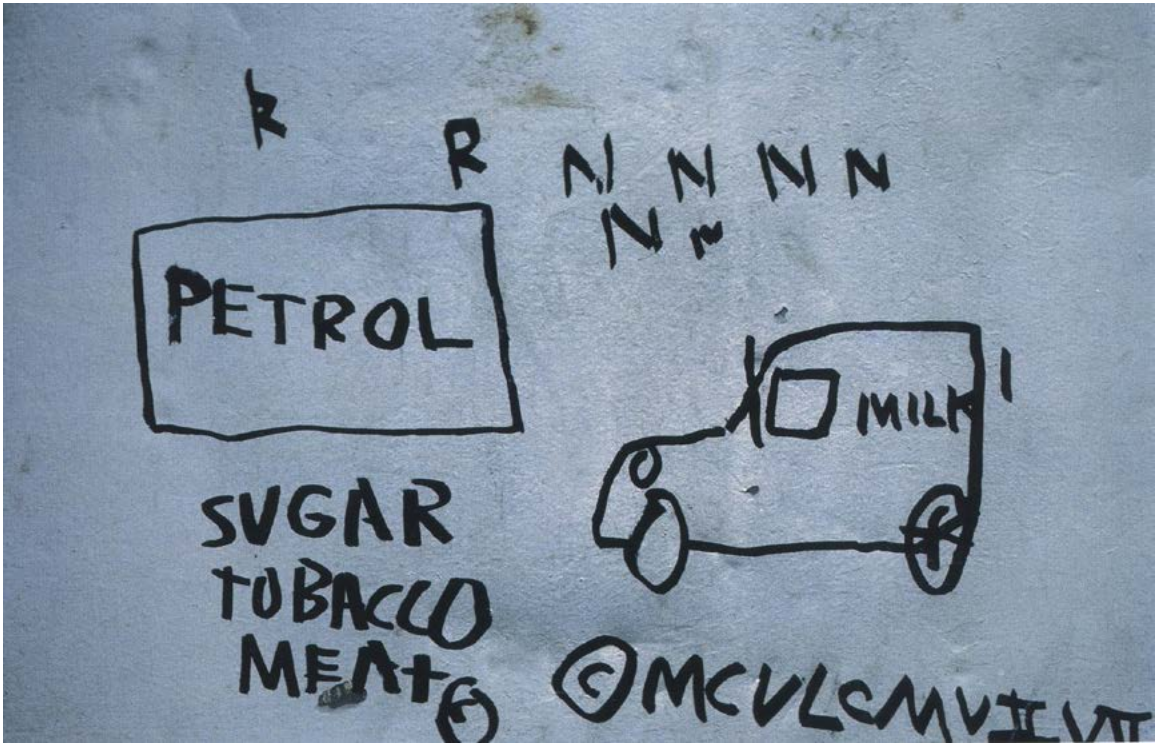
Figure 3.16:
SAMO graffiti (Cedar Lewisohn, Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008).)

Figure 3.17:
Blek le Rat, stencil graffiti (Cedar Lewisohn, Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008).)

CHAPTER 4

WHY GRAFFITI AND STREET ART?

The New York subway graffiti movement that began in the 1970s became the

prototype for a worldwide phenomenon, and with its constant evolution came a

subset: street art. The discrepancies between the two genres must be examined to

better appreciate how each contributes to the values of cultural heritage, while still

understanding that they are not mutually exclusive, and some crossover remains.

The most obvious and important similarity is how and where the work is completed:

an uncommissioned piece in the public realm. Furthermore, its popularity in

mainstream culture has proven that this movement is not fleeting, nor dying out.

Because of its illegal nature, it carries a negative connotation; yet its popularity

speaks to the positive effect it has on its audience. Graffiti and street art are

significant phenomena that warrant analysis through a heritage lens.

In order to keep up with the competition in the 1980s, graffiti writers began to

design rubber stamps, stickers, and stencils as a medium of more efficient tagging.

Some spraycan purists believed these methods to be inauthentic to the true nature

of graffiti, but infamy was the name of the game. Because of the ease of replication,

writers began to branch away from typography, into symbols and characters: "Just

as in advertising, having an instantly recognizable style or logo was essential to

working in the street or on trains. One could not depend on a captive audience's

attention for more than a split second, so establishing that connection was crucial."[1]

Having a visual signature that was universally identical also had its advantages with

respect to the ephemeral nature of graffiti: even if one stencil was eradicated, a

clone image could be put up again instantaneously.

GRAFFITI VS STREET ART

The different variations of graffiti have grown in a multitude of directions

since the subway art days. The proliferation of stencils and stickers gave way to an

explosion of creative mediums that are derived from the original graffiti style, but

removed enough to warrant their own classification as street art (Figure 1.1). The

[1] Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York, NY: HarperDesign, 2010), 382.

greatest difference is on a broader scale. It is a common misconception that the sole

distinction between graffiti and street art is "in a spraycan" versus "out of a

spraycan." However, the most rudimentary boundary between the two genres lies

within the content level: graffiti is, and always has been, about the written letter.[2]

Throughout its evolution from the tag to wildstyle, the only stylistic elements that

changed were the formation of the letters and experimentations with color,

shadows, 3-D effects, etc. Graffiti uses letters exclusively, whereas street art

ventures outside those parameters. An additional distinction lies in how these

individuals label themselves. Graffiti writers are those that write in the public realm;

graffiti artists are those who have crossed over into the gallery scene. Street artists

often prefer to simply be labeled as "artists," choosing not to restrict themselves to

one particular category.[3] Steve Powers believes that these terms are not

incongruous: one can be both a graffiti writer, and a conventional artist, as he himself

is.[4]

According to Lewisohn, there are three distinct differences between graffiti

and street art: (1) differences in physical technique of application, (2) differences in

motivation and audience, and (3) differences in aesthetic appearance.[5] Graffiti is

applied by either spraypaint or permanent marker, whereas street art can be

expressed with almost anything on hand. The variety is so great, that one can almost

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[2] Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008), 21.
[3] Tristan Manco, *Street Sketchbook* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2010), 8.
[4] Stephen Powers, lecture to author's class, March 2014.
[5] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 18.

consider street art as anything that does not follow the stylistic rules of graffiti, yet

exists illegally on the streets. The mediums vary from yarn installations, to laser light

shows, to wheatpasted posters, and even modifications to streetscape features such

as signs and streetlamps (Figure 4.1). In some instances, they can appear to be so

commonplace it can be challenging to distinguish street art from sanctioned public

works.

The second difference between graffiti and street art is the intention and

audience the piece is directed. Though a graffiti writer typically has a strong artistic

inclination, the product – the tag - is of a solipsistic nature. It is, after all, their

moniker that is painted repeatedly. The beautification of a space with bold bright

colors and carefully considered letter formations come with the territory as an added

bonus, but an authentic graffiti writer essentially only paints one thing: their nom de

guerre. The intentions, too, are self-serving. Again, because the pieces are meant to

be as accessible as possible, exposure to those outside of the graffiti community is

inevitable, but the pieces are not intended to be deciphered by outsiders. Street art,

on the contrary, is not as exclusive, according to Marc Schiller, co-founder of the

Wooster Collective blog:

> Graffiti is a code. Graffiti isn't easy to decipher unless you're in the
> world of the artist. The whole point of doing graffiti is to encode your
> name in a very unique style that not many people can decipher. So
> that polarises (sic) people. You either understand graffiti and you're
> like, 'That's fucking awesome,' or you're like, 'I don't get it'. The
> people that don't get it aren't necessarily not interested, they just can't
> decipher what graffiti is about. Street art doesn't have any of that

hidden code; there are no hidden messages; you either connect with it or you don't. There's no mystery there.[6]

Another crucial difference is that street art is far more responsive to its site. Schiller and his wife, Sara, have been instrumental to the infiltration of street art into mainstream culture with *Wooster Collective*. They cite this kind of environmental interaction as one of their prime interests and motivators, because it starts a "dialogue" between the artist, the city, and the viewer.[7] A piece of street art is carefully planned in advance, keeping the site conditions in mind, and is executed in a manner that is inclusive, and sometimes interactive, to both the urban landscape and its inhabitants.

An artist by the name of Ji Lee began "The Bubble Project" in 2005, in which he targeted the numerous advertisements that penetrate the city walls. This project simply applied "conversation bubbles," much like the ones seen in comic strips, to the individuals portrayed in the ads. Ji intentionally left the bubbles blank, in order to invite the public to write in their thoughts, and then would return a few weeks later to document the dialogue (Figure 4.2). Some bubbles were provocative, some satirical, some esoteric, but as *Wooster Collective* notes, "'bubbling' is about reclaiming our public spaces, neutralizing the negative effect advertising has on our

[6] Ibid., 63.
[7] Marc and Sara Schiller TEDxTalks, ""Gaming the Streets: Uncommissioned Art and Its Relationship to the City"," in *TEDxTalks: Bloomington* (TEDxTalks, 2011), 1:53.

daily lives and 'instantly transforming the corporate monologue into a true public

dialogue" (Figure 4.3)[8]

RATIONALE

As a result of differences in application techniques, artistic media, and

intention, street art has a substantially different aesthetic than graffiti. Regardless of

these distinctions, the two genres are inexplicably connected, both in origin and a

broad sense of intent: "What graffiti writing shares with street art is a basic sense of

appropriation: making the city your own by claiming the space."[9] Lewisohn provides

a loose diagram of the connections and evolutions of tagging and street art (Figure

4.4).[10]

Reclaiming public space is not always strictly about possession. Often, street

artists and graffiti writers produce their art in locations that have little or forgotten

beauty of their own. Street art enthusiast Riika Kuittinen writes:

> Hoardings, disused buildings and advertising boards are used as a
> canvas or printing surface much more often than buildings that hold
> more value. Street artists add aesthetic interest to disused public
> space. Arguably, a stencil work on a wall is free public art. This
> renegade act of kindness in creating art on the street undermines
> ownership: the work belongs to no one and everyone by default.[11]

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[8] Marc and Sara Schiller, "Wooster Collective," www.woostercollective.com.
[9] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 65.
[11] Riikka Kuittinen, *Street Art: Contemporary Prints* (London, UK: V&A Publishers, 2010), 16.

In a historically mercantile city such as Philadelphia that has an abundance of abandoned buildings, artists have their pick of canvases. According to Conrad Benner, creator of the popular *StreetsDept* blog, Philadelphia street art is more vibrant in working-class neighborhoods like Fishtown, where there are greater physical opportunities for artists to enhance the space.[12] Benner gives credit to the Mural Arts Program for commissioning street artists to work in more posh neighborhoods, such as Rittenhouse Square, and thereby drawing attention to this more alternative form of public art (Figure 4.5).

With this kind of crossover, the lines between authorized and unauthorized art become blurred. Likewise, the term "public art" is ambiguous. Often, we think of public art as a large sculpture in the center of a plaza: static, cold, and insular. The abundance of red tape surrounding such an installation surely stunts creativity. But why must that be the image that comes to mind? Anne Pasternak, president of the public art program Creative Time, explores the boundaries:

> . . . There are multiple approaches to art in the public realm – from memorial tributes to lives lost and monuments of heroes on horseback, to land art in remote destinations and celebrated transformations of urban plots; from spectacular to modest, permanent to temporary, beautiful to badass. Surely there could be no one way to produce great art in the public realm, but . . . it is those artists that are unencumbered . . .who trespass into the everyday world to critique, lampoon, disrupt and agitate in order to create social awareness and even advocate for social change. In the process, they activate our urban spaces as places for democracy, keep our cities alive with creativity and powerful ideas, and engage new audiences . . . Just

[12] Conrad Benner, 2014. Walking tour with author.

think of how many times you have been confused, delighted, and moved by these interventions . . .[13]

An example of socially engaged art was demonstrated by a group of graffiti writers showcased in the documentary *Bomb It*. During South Africa's apartheid regime in the 1970s, entire communities were demolished as a result of government-ordered, racially-designated residential areas. Writers Falko, Wealz, and Faith 47 addressed some of these repercussions by painting graffiti on a wall in one of Capetown's slums (Figures 4.6, 4.7). In addition to a scene depicting a group of children wholeheartedly expressing their reactionary delight, Wealz emphasizes the project's importance to its residents:

> In hindsight, you look back and go, "Ahhh, what we're doing actually did make a difference and it wasn't just about drawing a name. It actually was helping towards something, because it gave them individual status and made them part of something bigger – it made them belong. It made them feel that they are personally worth belonging to something.[14]

This begs the question of who is more entitled to public space than those who occupy it.[15] Museums may be isolating; even in their architecture, they are designed to convey perceptions of high culture and refined taste. Graffiti and street art offer "a far more direct viewing experience, but is no less valid. It could be argued that

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[13] Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010), 306-07.
[14] Jon Reiss, *Bomb It*, (New York, NY: Docurama Films : Distributed in the U.S. by New Video, 2008).
[15] The analysis of public space is a complex issue that warrants further investigation, not included in this thesis.

looking at art in the street, with its speed and real-life context, is a more accurate reflection of the world . . ."[16]

In the aforementioned example of Capetown, South Africa, graffiti writers beautified a displaced community, and thereby spoke out indirectly on a social issue that shaped their environment. Some artists, however, are not so prudent. It is unnecessary to say that much of the motivation behind graffiti and street art is largely drawn from an artist's opinions on a controversial social, political or economic issue. Some pieces are philosophical musings, some are heavy with angst, some serve to memorialize, and others are caustic and cheeky. Filippo Minelli poignantly writes words relating to the ever-changing world of technology, such as "FACEBOOK," "MYSPACE," and "FLICKR," on the walls of structures in third-world countries to highlight the stark comparison (Figures 4.8 – 4.10).[17]

French artist JR uses his work to demonstrate how futile political conflict can be. In a project entitled "Face 2 Face," JR photographed various citizens of Israel and Palestine that shared the same occupation, printed and pasted them side by side on the West Bank Barrier (Figure 4.11). When bystanders learned that one of the faces belonged to their "enemy," JR asked them if they could tell which face belonged to which country, to which most could not readily distinguish. JR summarizes the

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[16] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 127.
[17] Schiller, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*, 74. Capitalization in original.

project's ultimate goal: "We want, at last, everyone to laugh and to think by seeing the portrait of the other and his own portrait . . .We can be optimistic."[18]

Minelli and JR are but two of the audacious artists that give the public a voice of their own. Banksy is maybe the name that is most closely associated with the graffiti and street art scene, perhaps because of his unapologetic interventions that have catapulted him into mainstream culture. An anonymous artist hailing from the United Kingdom, "Banksy's use of humor and irony conflicts with universal ethical codes in order to convey his political message in a provocative yet not overtly polemic way."[19] Indeed, many of Banksy's works are pithy criticisms of the commercialized world, inventively worded/designed and placed in locations that are directly in the public eye (Figure 4.12). He is also known for his inconspicuous installations in various museums (Figure 4.13). He mounts framed portraits of his own work alongside conventional art pieces as a poke at their inclusivity:

> You don't have to go to college, drag 'round a portfolio, mail off transparencies to snooty galleries or sleep with someone powerful, all you need now is a few ideas and a broadband connection. This is the first time the essentially bourgeois world of art has belonged to the people. We need to make it count.[20]

This juxtaposition of low-brow and high-brow art has helped put the graffiti and street art subculture in the spotlight; however, the irony is that Banksy's pieces

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[18] JR, "Face 2 Face: Israel and Palestine," http://www.jr-art.net/projects/face-2-face.
[19] Samuel Oliver Crichton Merrill, "Graffiti at Heritage Places: Vandalism as Cultural Significance or Conservation Sacrilege?," *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2011): 67.
[20] Will Ellsworth-Jones, "The Story Behind Banksy," *Smithsonian Magazine*(2013), http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-story-behind-banksy-4310304/?page=1.

are selling for upwards of $600,000 per piece. He counters that he donates much of

his art, and all the images on his website are available for high-resolution download.[21]

Banksy's acerbic wit and brash statements may be a thorn in the side of some,

but his success is unprecedented. He operates on sheer acclaim, regardless of repute

– love him or hate him, his works are so subversive, one cannot ignore him. Shepard

Fairey, another street artist who penned the 2008 Obama Hope Poster (Figure 4.14),

writes: "He has a gift: an ability to make almost anyone very uncomfortable. He

doesn't ignore boundaries; he crosses them to prove their irrelevance."[22] Banksy's

success is so notable that was included in *Time Magazine's* "Top 100 Influential People

in 2010."[23]

PRESENT DAY APPROBATION

Banksy's success can be partially attributed to the fact that there is a huge

following of street art and graffiti, due to its proliferation via the internet. There are

innumerable blogs dedicated to sharing these works – some are from the artist

themselves, but, more frequently, they are from the audience. In an age where the

Millennial Generation has a smartphone practically implanted in their hand, and a

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Shepard Fairey, "The 2010 Time 100: Artists - Banksy," *Time*(2010),
http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1984685_1984940_1984945,00.html.
[23] Ibid.

photo is only a few finger taps away from being shared in a public forum, the graffiti and street art movement has spread like wildfire.[24]

One of the original blogs, *Wooster Collective*, began in 2001 as an exploration of a Soho neighborhood of New York shortly after 9/11. In a time of tragedy, the Schillers discovered their local street art as a pleasant distraction of surprise and delight. Over the course of one year, Marc had taken over 2,000 photos within a four block radius. He then shared the link where he posted the photos to approximately 20 friends that he and Sara felt would feel equally as inspired as they had been. Before they knew it, they had 40,000 hits on their blog.[25]

The Schillers recognize, and remain true to, the power of individualistic efforts to advocate for change, whether it be aesthetic or cultural, from prominent artists such as Banksy to artists that remain largely unknown or unrecognized: "If we are to believe in the power of ideas, as we must, we must understand that it is not in the thoughts we keep to ourselves but only in sharing them that ideas attain their potential."[26]

The degree to which the movement is spread via mass media also speaks to its multicultural flexibility. Art in any genre is appreciated universally, regardless of the national origin, language, or socioeconomic status of the artist or audience - just take

[24] In fact, a new movement called "viral art" is sweeping the internet, as a way of claiming digital public space. As technology becomes increasingly (and sometimes alarmingly) more comprehensive, viral art may very well be the future of the graffiti and street art movement.
[25] The Wooster Collective, "10 Years of Wooster Collective Pt. 1: The Origins of Wooster Collective," (2013), 9:00.
[26] Schiller, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*, 220.

a look at the lines outside the Louve or at the Metropolitan Museum of Art! Henry

Chalfant, author of *Subway Art*, one of the forefront books to document the 1970s

subway graffiti movement, comments on its evolution in an interview with Lewisohn:

> A worldwide renaissance of culture that had its start on the mean
> streets of New York has taken place. Artists who began as 'bombers'
> have infiltrated every branch of the media and entertainment business,
> graphic design, web design, film, music, and dance in an explosion of
> cultural expression. In the 1970s, graffiti writers transcended the rigid
> territorial boundaries observed by the warring gangs who preceded
> them. They created a multicultural, multi-racial community that
> reflected the diverse population of New York. Now, in the face of a
> world that is becoming increasingly balkanised (sic), street artists,
> using rail passes and the internet, emulate the original graffiti writers
> by crossing national and cultural borders to create an international
> movement.[27]

The public's access to graffiti and street art, in conjunction with its grassroots

method of communicating public opinion, augments its significance as cultural

heritage. Like any other art form, its media is varied, but its inspirations are drawn

from an "ordinary" perspective, rather than a lofty elitist one, and are therefore

more relatable on a personal level. This is evidenced by its increasing popularity and

vast proliferation. Its additional worth in the beautification of public space or as a

vehicle for social engagement further supports its significance.

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[27] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 8.

Figure 4.1:
Streetscape modification by Roadsworth, entitled "Male/Female," 2007 (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 4.2:
Ji Lee, "The Bubble Project" application, 2007 (Ji Lee, http://www.thebubbleproject.com/.)

Figure 4.3:
Ji Lee, "The Bubble Project" interaction, 2007 (Ji Lee, http://www.thebubbleproject.com/.)

Figure 4.4:
Lewisohn's diagram of urban art evolution (edits by author for clarity) (Cedar Lewisohn, Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008).)

Figure 4.5:
HOW & NOSM, "Personal Melodies" for the Mural Arts Program, 2012 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 4.6:
Graffiti brightens a Capetown slum (Jon Reiss, Bomb It, (New York, NY: Docurama Films : Distributed in the U.S. by New Video, 2008).)

Figure 4.7:
Graffiti brightens a Capetown slum (Jon Reiss, Bomb It, (New York, NY: Docurama Films : Distributed in the U.S. by New Video, 2008).)

Figure 4.8:
Filippo Minelli, "FLICKR," 2007 (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 4.9:
Filippo Minelli, "MYSPACE," 2007 (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 4.10:
Filippo Minelli, "FACEBOOK," 2007 (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 4.11:
JR, "Face 2 Face," 2007 (JR, "Face 2 Face: Israel and Palestine," http://www.jr-art.net/projects/face-2-face.)
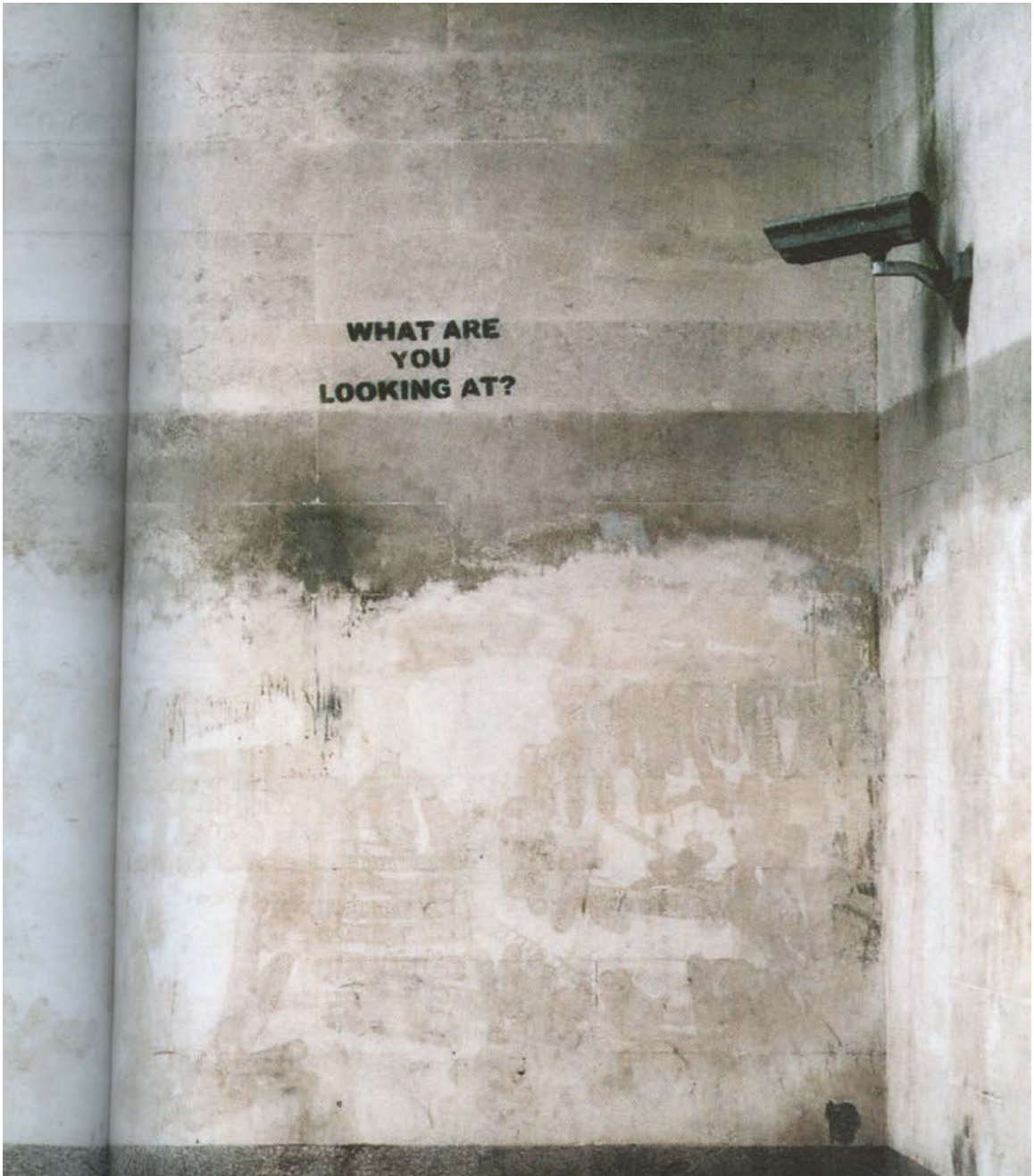
Figure 4.12:
One of Banksy's typical mockeries, 2004 (Banksy, Wall and Piece (London, UK: The Random House Group, Limited, 2006).)

Figure 4.13:
Banksy installs his own artwork alonside other pieces at the Tate Gallery, London, 2003 (Banksy, Wall and Piece (London, UK: The Random House Group, Limited, 2006).)

Figure 4.14:
Poster designed by Shepard Fairey that reached iconic fame during Obama's presidential campaign, 2008 ("Barack Obama Hope Poster," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Barack_Obama_Hope_poster.jpg.)

CHAPTER 5
CONNECTIONS TO HERITAGE

In Chapter 4, graffiti and street art were viewed as phenomena that
warranted more examination of their positive aspects. However, their three major
detractions are important to confront in order to fortify the argument for heritage
values: its perception as vandalism, ephemeral nature, and the schism between art
on the street and within a gallery. These issues can be addressed in such a manner
that an association as a cultural landscape becomes more apparent because of the
more predominant contributions to heritage values. Primarily, graffiti and street art
strongly embody social values, and can be considered in the less controversial realms
of public art and creative placemaking.

ISSUE: VANDALISM

Though graffiti and street art present benefits that are multifaceted, it is not without opposition in various respects – the most obvious regarding its illegal nature. Graffiti and street art certainly fall into the category of vandalism, as one of the main objectives is to beautify a space that is not owned by the artist. The artists do not discriminate against either public or private property, and so both are targeted as canvases. As examined in Chapter 3, graffiti that predated the New York subway pieces were largely associated with gangs and acts of violence. Criminologists James Wilson and George Kelling coined the "Broken Window" theory, in which a site in visible disrepair would become a magnet for graffiti, and convey the impression that such behavior would not be penalized. Subsequently, such an environment would be perceived as an area of blight and neglect.

These may have been the conditions from which graffiti originated, but Wilson and Kelling's theory seems to be the diametric opposite of the present situation that finds urban art squarely in the mainstream. Gastman and Neelon, in *The History of Graffiti* note:

> . . . the presence of a graffiti movement has simply ceased to be a harbinger of urban decline. The toughest neighborhoods of any given city are rarely those with the most name-based graffiti . . . North Philly and West Chicago are as troubled when clean today as they were when covered in tags twenty years ago.[1]

[1] Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon, *The History of American Graffiti* (New York, NY: HarperDesign, 2010), 397.

In fact, in neighborhoods where more renowned artists are still carrying out uncommissioned pieces, the property values are on a steady incline.[2] Banksy published an email he received, where the sender kindly asked him to start painting elsewhere: ". . . these days so many yuppies and students are moving here [we can't] afford to buy a house where we grew up. Your graffities (sic) are undoubtably (sic) part of what makes these wankers think our area is cool."[3] Likewise, Midtown Village in Philadelphia was in a state of decline in the 1960s, but with the assistance of developer Tony Goldman and his implementation of socially-aware street art, the neighborhood has transformed into an economically viable community (Figure 5.1).[4]

The Schillers remind us of the distinction between someone whose intent is to deface property, and someone whose intent is to beautify a space: "The solution is not to try to prevent graffiti, but rather to try to prevent vandalism . . . graffiti and vandalism are not mutually exclusive."[5] In a lecture given by Steve Powers in March 2014, he shared a story about how he was prosecuted on six felony counts of graffiti in 1999, to which he pled guilty to after a two-year long legal battle. That same piece of graffiti remains extant, 15 years later. Powers believes the prosecution of urban art is antiquated; transgression of public property automatically implies malicious

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[2] Shaunacy Ferro to CoDesign, 2014, http://www.fastcodesign.com/3022524/can-graffiti-be-good-for-cities#5.
[3] Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London, UK: The Random House Group, Limited, 2006), 130.
[4] Conrad Benner, walking tour with author, 2014.
[5] Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art* (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010), 312.

damage: "You can nail a diamond to the wall and it's prosecutable!"[6] His intentions, rather, are more disarming: "I never try to make a situation worse . . . Most of the time, I try to make something interesting. Interesting. Maybe not better, maybe not worse, but interesting; different. Different is the operative word" (Figure 5.2)[7] When the nation spends approximately $4-5 billion dollars on graffiti removal per year, and other measures such as vandalism enforcement teams, fines, prison time, and underage restrictions on the sale of spraypaint are enforced, it begs the question of why this movement has not yet been extinguished.[8]

ISSUE: IMPERMANENCE

Another problematic element of graffiti and street art is the question of impermanence. How can something hold value as cultural heritage if its lifespan is indefinite? But this ephemeral quality is one of the fundamentals of this movement, and part of what makes it so enchanting. An artist never truly knows how long a piece remains on display, and this uncertainty holds much allure for both artist and viewer alike. Swoon is a Pratt-educated artist who felt restrained by the conventional exclusivity of the traditional gallery, and began showcasing her work via wheatpaste

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[6] Stephen Powers, lecture to author's class, March 2014.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Schiller, *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*, 311.

(Figure 5.3).[9] Her interests have expanded to include performance art and

architectural interventions, but she addresses her intentions on the streets: "For me,

when I paste something to the wall, I'm sort of hoping that the object will be

ultimately destroyed. I want it to be outside and part of the city landscape and to rot

away, so that it's never going to stick around and be a permanent thing."[10] Schiller

reinforces this by noting that it is the act of creation, not possession, which many

artists are captivated by.[11] Furthermore, performance art and theater are of an

ephemeral nature, yet still contribute to heritage values as an accepted art. With

urban art, however, ephemerality is part of its very nature, not an element to be

"fixed" by conservation or curation.

Impermanence is beneficial to graffiti and street art because it allows for an

array of inspiration and creative adaptability. Vhils, a Portuguese artist, centers his

work around the theme of "ephemeral decay." As a teenager, he was profoundly

influenced by the expanding urban landscape that surrounded him – the only forms

of "art" were the decades-old murals of political figures, and the rapid proliferation

of commercial advertisements. He focuses on the dichotomy by carving portraits

into the billboards, and utilizing the many layers of advertisements as color and

texture:

[9] Callie Curry aka Swoon TEDxTalks, "Callie Curry Aka Swoon," in *TEDx Talks* (TEDx Brooklyn, 2010), 2:00.
[10] Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (New York, NY: Abrams Publishing, 2008), 141.
[11] The Wooster Collective, "10 Years of Wooster Collective Pt. 2: The Internet's Role in Global Street Art Culture," (2013), 5:15.

'This obliteration of memory, of the past, which I've observed in Lisbon over time, often replaces one thing for another without regard for the meaning. I do a sort of symbolic archaeological work in order to recall those lost memories, which are integral part of who we are today.'[12]

Vhils' philosophy allows him to pay homage to past works – integrating their place in time with his later intervention (Figures 5.4, 5.5). The idea of peeling back layers of billboards, rather than covering over them, is a way of acknowledging the past as an integral part of progression, rather than a place that remains stagnant.

ISSUE: CROSSOVER

For some artists, however, the lack of permanence seems fruitless, and so they begin to dabble in the traditional art world. This crossover from trains to galleries began in the 1980s with some of the New York subway graffiti writers, quickly distinguishing "graffiti writers" from "graffiti artists"- of course, the monetary lure was appealing to a group of underprivileged teenagers, but some purists held fast to the non-commercial incentive of getting up on all lines.[13] This schism is still present in contemporary graffiti and street art, but artists like Banksy manage to straddle the line between commissioned and uncommissioned art, by

[12] Tristan Manco, *Street Sketchbook* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2010), 268.
[13] Tony Silver, Henry Chalfant, and Linda Habib, "Style Wars," (Los Angeles, CA: Public Art Films, 2004), 52:30.

commercializing his craft, while still executing furtive works on the street. Some may call this "selling out," yet others simply think of it as a conduit to a wider audience.[14]

Lucy Lippard advocates for art outside of the museum walls in *The Lure of the Local*: "The limitations of the hushed and pristine gallery . . .are stunting the growth of an art that dreams – however quixotically – of striding fearlessly into the streets, into the unknown, to meet and mingle with other lives."[15]

The crossover into the traditional art world creates tension between the different genres of those who work in the street. Graffiti writers feel that graffiti artists have betrayed their roots by taking their work indoors. Both graffiti factions are aligned in their belief that "street artists" are haughty, as they often boast a formal art education. As stated previously, street artists often simply use the umbrella term "artist" to describe themselves. Regardless of the semantics, Lewisohn notes, "[They] are by definition rule breakers, so if you attempt to categorise (sic) them, they'll simply go and break the rules that have been set to define them. It's their nature and it's the nature of the genre."[16]

This fragmentation between factions is extraneous in light of their vast similarities in intention and the urban environment in which they work within. Manco describes the attraction of street art:

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[14] Jareem Iman, "From Graffiti to Galleries: Street Vs. Public Art," *CNN Report*(2012), http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/03/living/ireport-street-art-public-art/.
[15] Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), 269.
[16] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 15.

> [It] is in the way it reflects the society around us. A canvas does not change, or does a piece of paper, but the world around us does; as the streets adapt to the changing socio-economic environment, so [it] becomes a constant commentary that evolves with the times. For this reason it will continue to stay relevant as a movement because there will always be new material to bring to the streets.[17]

After all, with such a vast community of those that commit uncommissioned art within a dynamic urban environment, can there really be just one overarching title? These matters of segmentation cannot, and should not, detract from the overall advantages of graffiti and street art.

CONNECTIONS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

The relationship of graffiti and street art to cultural heritage should be one in which it is simply acknowledged as such. The connections are there, yet there seems to be a disconnect in drawing this conclusion. In order to forge a viable connection between uncommissioned urban art with cultural heritage, one must examine the criterion in which such values are established. The umbrella of heritage is a large one, with various facets and components, and "conservation decisions . . . use an articulation of heritage values . . . as a reference point. Assessment of the values attributed to heritage is a very important activity in any conservation effort, since values strongly shape the decisions that are made."[18]

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[17] Manco, *Street Sketchbook*, 8.
[18] Randall Mason and Marta de la Torre, "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 5.

These values should be viewed through a variety of lenses: historical,

cultural/symbolic, social, spiritual, aesthetic and economic.[19] The challenge lies in the

different interpretations of these values; by that same token, it is these divergent

interpretations that give heritage values vibrancy. Likewise, there is a great deal of

crossover amongst these typologies. Graffiti and street art embody cultural and

social values the strongest. As examined in Chapter 4, urban art as the mouthpiece

of the public is not a new phenomenon. It is a bottom-up movement: done by the

public for the public, rather than a traditional commissioned work of art only for the

aristocratic. It is a reflection of society's commentary, and in an environment so

heavily laden with advertisements, it is refreshing to see a piece done by a human

being, rather than an anonymous marketing company. This practical, bottom-up

sense of authorship allows the piece to be universally enjoyed by the layperson.

Schiller comments:

> I think spontaneity is an incredibly powerful and humanizing thing. You
> can buy your way into being in somebody's consciousness through
> them experiencing it outdoors, you can buy a billboard, you can buy ad
> space, you can do all that, but the artist doesn't really have that ability,
> but at the same time wants to have the power that advertisers have
> and wants to have the ability to make an impact.[20]

Additionally, the development of "place attachment," where groups are built

upon the heritage characteristics of their environment, is another product of

[19] Ibid., 10.
[20] Alex Gomes, "Interview: 10 Years of Wooster Collective," http://green-label.com/art/interview-10-years-of-wooster-collective/.

embodied social values.[21] Surely, this is applicable to the entire graffiti and street art subculture, from graffiti crews, to bloggers, to the unsuspecting citizen who stumbles upon a piece in their neighborhood and forms their own interpretation.

Graffiti and street art are often done in response to the literal and metaphorical environment in which the artist occupies. As outlined in Chapter 2, the poor socioeconomic conditions of 1970s New York City had borne a movement of teenagers who wrote graffiti simply as a way to avoid the drug or gang scene. Urban art is a responsive and tangible reaction to existing conditions out of the artist's control; but these conditions are not necessarily out of their reach. Swoon speaks upon her motivation to maintain a connection to creative possibility:

> I feel like that kind of a space – the space where you believe in an infinity of possibility - is the place within ourselves from which we are able to make a positive change . . .even though we've seen the thousandth brutal ending, you're able to still say, 'No, I don't accept this as an inevitable outcome. I'm gonna (sic) re-imagine and regroup and try to make a new . . . path for these situations.[22]

It is within this intent that a connection to cultural heritage is evident – the intent to represent a faction of society that may be largely underrepresented within their environment, and the desire to enhance that environment instead of ignore it.

Social values can be "activities that do not necessarily capitalize directly on the historical value of the site but, rather, on the public-space, shared-space

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[21] Mason and Torre, "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," 12.
[22] TEDxTalks, "Callie Curry Aka Swoon," 6:30.

qualities."[23] Though graffiti and street art may sometimes not have direct ties to

history of a space, it is indirectly related in several ways. For example, in November

2013, the Mural Arts Program of Philadelphia (MAP) undertook a complete

restoration of a 1987 mural by famed graffiti-writer-turned-pop artist Keith Haring.

Entitled "We the Youth," it is the only extant collaborative mural done by Haring that

remains on its original site. The mural had fallen into disrepair, and MAP undertook

the restoration in an effort to maintain Haring's legacy.[24] In this instance, the mural

has added historical value because of the influence and acclaim of its original artist

(Figure 5.6).

Graffiti can also inform the historical narratives of a site - its social

commentary can provide clues as to the events of the time. As Samuel Merrill writes,

"Current heritage best practice aims to avoid strategies that focus solely on single,

often arbitrary periods or narratives in a site's history in favor of those that recognize

all of the site's layers of significance."[25] In the 1990 restoration of the Reichstag in

Berlin, Germany, architect Norman Foster opted to leave the graffiti intact as a

reflection of the building's storied past (Figure 5.7):

> I came to realize that the Reichstag's fabric bears the imprint of time
> and events more powerfully than any exhibit could convey. I was
> convinced that it should not be sanitized. Preserving these scars allows

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[23] Mason and Torre, "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," 12.

[24] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.

[25] Samuel Oliver Crichton Merrill, "Graffiti at Heritage Places: Vandalism as Cultural Significance or Conservation Sacrilege?," *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2011): 59.

the building to become a living museum of German history. (cited in Barnstone 2005:190)[26]

In both the examples of the Reichstag and of the Haring mural, direct correlations can be drawn to cultural, social and historical values of cultural heritage. These methods of historic preservation are a way of sustaining a legacy left not by traditional archival resources, but by marks made on a wall - which still provide insight to the past. The only difference is the physical artifact that is preserved; rather than books or architectural drawings, it is paint on a vertical surface.

Likewise, the sundry typologies of street art allow additional correlations to be drawn, albeit on a broader level. As far as contributing to an aesthetic value of cultural heritage, the crux of any art form is that its interpretations are subjective. The basic tag is what the public finds so offensive and an eyesore, but, as Lewisohn points out, that is like saying one enjoys rock and roll, but cannot stand a lone guitar.[27] Tags are perhaps the simplest type of graffiti, with the least artistic sensibility, but they are the foundations for the rest of the movement (Figure 5.8). Certainly not every piece of graffiti or street art is beautiful; not every artwork is a Mona Lisa. But the pieces that are bold, bright, colorful, those which induce laughter, inspiration, or contemplation – those are the pieces that resonate (Figure 5.9).

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[26] Ibid., 71.
[27] Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution*, 48.

In January 2014, a wheatpaste of Pope Francis appeared on an otherwise

unremarkable street in Rome. Instead of a critical depiction, the Pope was shown

with a white cape, one fist clenched proudly in the air as he soars above, the other

hand holding a briefcase with the word "valores," meaning "values" in Latin (Figure

5.10). The artist, Maupal, portrayed the Pope as a superhero because he felt he "is

the only world leader who stands on the side of the people."[28] The SuperPope made

international news, and the Vatican itself even shared a photo on Twitter. Could this

be categorized as spiritual heritage? When even the Pope is a topic of praise in the

graffiti and street art world, and its existence is validated in an official manner by the

Vatican, its relevancy becomes increasingly more apparent.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

In Chapter 4, the term "public art" was introduced to loosely describe socially

motivated art by graffiti artists in South Africa, Filipo Minelli's MYSPACE pieces, and

JR's photography project on the West Bank Barrier. Lucy Lippard outlines the

general framework for categorizing something as public art:

> Permanent and ephemeral, object and performance, preferably
> interdisciplinary, democratic, sometimes functional or didactic, a public

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[28] Sylvia Poggioli to NPR, 2014, http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/01/29/268361194/on-a-roman-street-graffiti-celebrates-superpope.

art exists in the hearts, minds, ideaologies, and educations of its audience as well as in their physical, sensuous experience.[29]

Lippard's description of public art touches upon several components of graffiti and street art that have been mentioned previously. Additionally, the recent introduction of creative placemaking as a model of urban revitalization comes at an opportune moment for graffiti and street art to make its debut as a viable form of cultural heritage. Creative placemaking is an initiative that utilizes arts-based activities as a means of urban revitalization while enhancing public space and streetscapes. It is in response to the urban blight resulting from white flight, deindustrialization, and discrimination in the mid-20th century, not unlike 1970s New York City and Philadelphia, where graffiti originated out of the same conditions. It focuses not only on physical beautification of space, but also the collaboration of diversified people, working towards a creative end goal.[30] Irene Berkowitz demonstrates the benefits for creative placemaking as a model for historic preservation:

> As preservationists working in the urban context, we cannot isolate the physical deterioration of the built environment from the socioeconomic conditions that surround it. If the preservationist is concerned with heritage, then it is necessary to design a holistic framework to address and amend the problematic urban heritage that we—all Americans—have been dealt.[31]

[29] Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 264.
[30] Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, "Creative Placemaking," (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010).
[31] Irene Berkowitz, "Preserving History by Making History: The Case for Creative Placemaking as a Model for Historic Preservation" (Univeristy of Pennsylvania, 2012), 10.

Berkowitz uses Wynwood, Miami, as a case study for creative placemaking. With the assistance of developer Tony Goldman (also responsible for the Midtown Village revitalization mentioned in Chapter 4), Wynwood transformed from an area of abandoned warehouses to a bustling neighborhood of artistic-minded people. Goldman is responsible for hiring street artists such as Kenny Scharf, Shepard Fairey, and Os Gemeos ("The Twins," based in Brazil) to paint large-scale murals on the derelict structures: "Wynwood's large stock of warehouse buildings, all with no windows, would be my giant canvases to bring to them the greatest street art ever seen in one place."[32] In this instance, the use of street art in combination with other community-building efforts contributes to the economic value of Wynwood (Figure 5.11). The historic fabric simply needed an infusion of creativity to restore its vitality.

Finally, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that Melbourne, Australia, recognizes graffiti as cultural heritage that contributes to the context of historical narratives. Tracy Avery, cultural heritage manager of the Australian National Trust,

> has stated that "graffiti is a unique part of Melbourne's urban fabric, particularly in our laneways, which attract a huge amount of visitors and contribute to the city's vibrancy". And she's right — a recent online poll conducted by *Lonely Planet* revealed that Melbourne's street art was voted the nation's most popular cultural attraction.[33]

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[32] "The Wynwood Walls," http://thewynwoodwalls.com/.
[33] Joshua Crouthamel, "Art or Eyesore: Should Graffiti Be Protected?," *NineMSN*(2011), http://travel.ninemsn.com.au/holidaytype/culture/655275/art-or-eyesore-should-graffiti-be-protected.

Perhaps being in the first time zone has pushed Australia forward in their progressive thinking regarding graffiti and street art, but it is about time the rest of the world catches up.

Because of these direct correlations between heritage values and the recent applications of uncommissioned art-based interventions in blighted communities, graffiti and street art is finally receiving the acknowledgement it rightly deserves. This positive attention is a shift from previous opinions, like Wilson and Kelling's "Broken Window" theory, and successful executions (several which are examined in Chapter 6) prove to be beneficial on social, economic, and cultural levels.

Figure 5.1:
Midtown Village's Fall Festival. Mural by Kenny Scharf for the Mural Arts Program, 2011 (Midtown Village Fall Festival to, http://press.visitphilly.com/media/4119.)

Figure 5.2:
ESPO/Steve Powers graffiti ("Espo," http://www.graffiti.org/espo/ws_hwy.jpg.)

Figure 5.3:
Swoon wheatpaste (Marc and Sara Schiller, "Wooster Collective," www.woostercollective.com.)

Figure 5.4:
Vhils street art (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 5.5:
Vhils street art (Translation: "I buy therefore I am") (Marc and Sara Schiller, and Carlo McCormick, Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art (New York, NY: Taschen, 2010).)

Figure 5.6:
Keith Haring mural "We the Youth," restored by the Mural Arts Program, 2013 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 5.7:
Graffiti at the Reichstag (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)

Figure 5.8:
The basic tag (Fiona McDonald, The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to
the Present (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).)

Figure 5.9:
Preservation of the graffiti at the Miami Marine Stadium is under consideration (Karen Nickless to
PreservationNation Blog, http://blog.preservationnation.org/2009/06/25/student-proposals-struc-
tural-analysis-study-for-miami-marine-stadium/#.U2HjF_ldWSq.)

Figure 5.10:
Maupal's wheatpaste of "SuperPope" Francis, 2014 (Sylvia Poggioli to NPR, 2014, http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/01/29/268361194/on-a-roman-street-graffiti-celebrates-superpope.)

Figure 5.11:
The Wynwood Walls, Miami, FL (Goldman Properties, "The Wynwood Walls," http://www.goldman-properties.com/Art-and-Culture/The-Wynwood-Walls.asp#.)

CHAPTER 6
CASE STUDIES

The following case studies outlined in this chapter provide examples of how graffiti and/or street art were utilized to beautify public space, foster an environment of social cohesion, and act as a springboard for economic stabilization. First, Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program employed former graffiti writer Steve Powers to impart messages of love on rooftops along an elevated train line in a project entitled *Love Letter* in 2010. Powers weaves together the all-inclusive theme of love with more specific community values and historical narratives, painting the murals in a style inspired by his graffiti-writing past. Secondly, 5Pointz, an abandoned warehouse in New York City, was converted to a legal wall space for graffiti writers. Known internationally as a "graffiti mecca," 5Pointz is an exemplary instance of place

attachment, where a community was formed upon their love of graffiti, and arguably strengthened when 5Pointz was suddenly destroyed. Lastly, Rice Mill Lofts, in New Orleans, L.A., is a former industrial site that was converted into residential apartments in 2011. Capitalizing on New Orleans's creative energies, the developer of Rice Mill Lofts opted to laud the remnant graffiti that was done when the building was abandoned.

LOVE LETTER

Love Letter was completed as an enterprise of the Mural Arts Program (MAP) of Philadelphia in February 2010. MAP has a very specific connection to graffiti in Philadelphia, as it began as the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network (PAGN) in 1984.[1] Headed by muralist Jane Golden, PAGN sought to eradicate the graffiti epidemic in the city by not only repainting the affected walls, but engaging the graffiti writers themselves in a form of community service. Writers had to sign a pledge to stop tagging, and then were utilized as manpower for the new murals as an alternative to fines or jail time for vandalism. Golden immediately recognized the raw artistic ability of these teenagers and sought to redirect their creative energy, while also offering them the structure and stability they so desperately needed.[2] Even Cornbread joined

[1] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.
[2] Ibid.

the crew.[3] The results were beneficial to both the writers and the city: "The murals

they created instantly added color, beauty, and life to an old, industrial city struggling

with decades of economic distress and population loss . . . the murals themselves

began to mend the aesthetic fabric of the city."[4]

In 1996 Mayor Ed Rendell restructured PAGN to become MAP, which was a

more accurate representation of what their original anti-graffiti organization had

grown into. MAP became "not so much an art program as . . .a civic program that

uses art as a conduit," says muralist Steve Powers.[5] Golden recalls her experiences

on site, when almost any passerby would ask a question or express their opinion on

the mural:

> Murals have this kind of personal impact. They engage you, stir
> questions, make you see things in new ways. I don't know whether it
> is their intense color, imposing size, or symbolic power, but they seem
> to be imbued with a mysterious energy that radiates outward,
> touching everyone who sees them.

Motivated by that energy, the organization evolved to incorporate and

empower more members of the community in an interactive way – even asking their

input on the mural designs.[6] Murals are perhaps one of the best-known ways to

convey historical narratives and commemorative sites, and as one of MAP's "Core

Values" states: "The sublime power of narrative drives our lives."[7] It is this sublime

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[3] Jane Golden, Robin Rice, and Monica Yant Kinney, *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell*
(Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), 35.
[4] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program", "History".
[5] Piers Fawkes, *Steve Powers: Psfk Conference New York 2010*, (2010).
[6] Golden, Rice, and Kinney, *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell*, 8.
[7] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program", "Mission".

power that acts as the venerable fuel for historic preservation. Engaging the

community as stakeholders is essential to making this connection successful and

pertinent within its temporal context. Philadelphia currently has over 3,600 murals,

and MAP's primary mission is to implement socially-engaged art in an effort to rectify

some of the city's crises.[8] These efforts include educational programs for at-risk

youth and inmates, and a partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral

Health in using art as a vehicle for the stabilization of mental wellness.[9] The success

of MAP reinforces the effectiveness of creative placemaking, similar to the methods

used in Wynwood, Miami (Figure 6.1).

But Golden was not exempt from the ambiguous boundaries of public art: "I

was grappling with the definition of public art – what it means. I thought, 'It's the

community's mural. It's their voice.'"[10] The concept of ownership is perplexing to

even someone who is the hypothetical "queen" of the City of Murals. Indubitably,

the notions of ownership, accessibility, and relevance have vague connotations

within the public realm.

As touched upon in Chapter 4, who owns public art? Is it the surrounding

citizens of the community? Those passing through? The artist(s)? How can "public

art" belong to each individual subset of the involved parties? The concept of

accessibility in art relates to how it is received by its audience, in both a spatial and

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[8] Ibid., "History".
[9] Ibid., "Programs".
[10] Jane Golden et al., *More Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 81.

conceptual sense. Is the artwork meant to have details imperceptible at a distance?

Does it address a narrow historical narrative that only specific stakeholders will

benefit from? Is the art relevant and responsive to its site? To its place in time? How

can it remain relevant for future generations? These issues are complex, and allow

for wide-ranging interpretations, but *Love Letter* excels in addressing many of them

successfully, by cleverly fashioning relationships in a creative, yet understated

manner.

   Love Letter is a series of 50 murals along the Market-Frankford line from 45th

street to 63rd street in West Philadelphia. It is loosely based on the tale of a graffiti

writer's efforts to win the attention of a young lady, with clever catchphrases as

"Your everafter is all I'm after," and "Meet me on Fifty-Second [Street], if only for

fifty seconds (Figures 6.2, 6.3)."[11] Powers, a graffiti legend hailing from West

Philadelphia, approached MAP with a proposal to paint on these highly visible

rooftops in an effort to restore some of the vibrancy that has since faded in a period

of urban decline. Powers credits his upbringing as part of his inspiration: "Growing

up in West Philadelphia, I felt attuned, and I felt I inherited a lot of powerful culture

and a lot of important history."[12] As a teenager, Powers used to do graffiti on many

of these same rooftops - their high level of exposure from the elevated train line

made them popular within the graffiti writing community. To pay homage to that

very integral part of West Philadelphia, Powers wanted to still convey the color, style

[11] Shira Walinsky and Jane Golden, class taken by author, 2014.
[12] Stephen Powers, *A Love Letter for You*, (Megawords Magazine, 2010).

and panache – the "good" of graffiti – without the "name and the ego . . .the conflicting feelings that people have about graffiti. We wanted to strip out all the negativity and replace it with positive energy."[13]

Love Letter uses simple diagrams and expressive typography to express a theme that everyone can relate to: love. What makes it unique, and more accessible, are its real-life messages, as opposed to overly sentimental, idealistic declarations of affection. For example, "I got daycare money and carfare Honey," speaks to the realistic financial expectations of building a life and family together (Figure 6.4). Powers coined a tagline for the project: "a letter for one, with meaning for all," that, in simple, concise terms, sums up the intent of the project.[14] Having such a broad theme of love aids in its accessibility to individuals outside of the community – a pertinent detail, as The Market-Frankford line brings many commuters through West Philly on a daily basis.

In addition to its theme of love being universally accessible, its visual accessibility plays an important role. All of the murals are best seen via elevated train line, and it becomes a playful interaction to "catch" each of them as the train speeds to each station. However, they are not exclusively enjoyed via train – many of them are visible from the pedestrian level as well. Most of MAP's other projects are site-specific, depicting an individual or event that is important to the immediate neighborhood and thereby (unintentionally) excluding any outsiders. Though the

[13] Cedar Lewisohn, Abstract Graffiti (London, UK: Merrell Publishers, 2011), 136.
[14] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program", Collection: Love Letter.

theme of *Love Letter* is overarching, and seemingly unrelated to the community,

Powers successfully creates ties in a creative and memorable way.

Powers is nothing if not a wordsmith, and he utilizes his talent exceptionally

to create totemic connections to West Philadelphia. Several murals depict images

that are representative of the businesses that are housed in the building the mural is

painted on. For example, a camera and photography store is home to the mural,

"Picture me, picture you, picture this [us]" (Figure 6.5). A pair of clippers and the

words "I'll shape up" climb up the wall of a barber shop (Figure 6.6). Additionally,

Powers includes specific individuals of the community, painting a mural of one

woman's necklace that reads, "I love you" (Figure 6.7)[15]

Love Letter is also relevant to its place in time. One mural is a tattooed arm,

pointing to the door of a tattoo parlor at the building's entry (Figure 6.8). The

tattoos are a simplified version of Philadelphia 76er Allen Iverson's tattoos. Iverson

was an iconic player on the 76ers from 1996 – 2006 and had several short stints with

other teams before returning to the 76ers in 2009, when *Love Letter* was in process.

To anyone outside of the basketball community, this detail would go unnoticed, but

this integration of a Philly sports icon effectively contributes to the mural's relevancy,

as Philadelphia is infamously known for its sports fanatics. Likewise, another mural

represents letter magnets on a refrigerator door that spell out "If you were here, I'd

be home now." A collection of unused magnets sits at the other end of the mural in

[15] Golden.

a jumble; but upon a closer look, the name "Michael Jackson" can be traced from the arrangement of letters, to commemorate the King of Pop's death in 2009 (Figure 6.9).

Powers is also sensitive to the historical narratives of the neighborhood. There are numerous ghost signs that are still visible, harkening back to Market Street's mercantile past. Powers, a sign painter by profession, was careful to not cover these, and in fact, used the same colors in the murals that were used in the original signs (Figure 6.10).[16] With regards to these same rooftops being canvases for graffiti writers in the more recent past, Powers dedicated an entire mural to the legacy of these writers, including all of their names on one wall (Figure 6.11). His nod to these writers paid off – none of the *Love Letter* murals have been tagged.

These gestures of acknowledgement contribute to the notion of shared ownership of the murals. "A letter for one, with meaning for all," rings true in several different aspects, from featuring specific members and businesses in the community, to recognizing important concurrent events, to respecting the "past lives" of those rooftops, while still maintaining a predominant theme that is inclusive to a broader audience. Powers speaks about incorporating the community of West Philadelphia into *Love Letter*:

> . . . It's not explicitly in the work that you see . . . but it's implicitly there, it's at every step of the way as we were creating the work. . .

[16] Ibid.

.But, at the same time, it's meant to live beyond those distinctions, and just be something for everyone, no matter where they're at. "[17]

The Mural Arts Program is a successful model of creative placemaking practices, and the *Love Letter* project is exemplary for its multifaceted abilities to address both large-scale and small-scale audiences. Its various connections to graffiti and street art demonstrate that it can be an inclusive, respectful act, and can be more relatable to the public than more traditional art forms. Powers displays his ability to creatively problem-solve to include the various stakeholders involved in this project.

5POINTZ

5Pointz was an extremely significant landmark within the graffiti community, not only in New York City, but worldwide. An abandoned factory located in Queens, New York City, 5Pointz has been nicknamed the "graffiti mecca," for its international acclaim as the largest legal outdoor graffiti space in the United States, boasting anywhere from 350-400 pieces at a time.[18] To emphasize its civic pride as the original "epicenter of graffiti," the building was named 5Pointz to represent the five boroughs of New York City uniting as one.[19] It is highly visible from several train lines, especially the 7, and has dominated the visual landscape of Long Island City since its

[17] Powers, *A Love Letter for You.* 1:53
[18] Riki Sakai, "Don't Bomb These Walls (5pointz Documentary)," (2013), 1:10.
[19] "5pointz Nyc: The Institute of Higher Burning," http://5ptz.com/.

inception in 1993. In November 2013, 5Pointz was completely whitewashed in preparation for its demolition as decreed by its owners, thus covering over all of the graffiti. This sudden and unexpected action has sparked a turbulent conflict between the graffiti community and the building's owners, as they battle to reach a compromise.

The building that 5Pointz called home was an 1892 factory building, formerly known as the Neptune Meter Company of Long Island City. In the 19th century, New York City was experiencing rapid expansion, largely due to the amount of immigrants forging a new life in America. As a result, the demand for housing, and, consequently, individual water metering devices increased. The Neptune Meter Company was responsible for the production of these devices, and at the turn of the 20th century, was part of the development of Queens as both an industrial and residential part of the city proper (Figures 6.12, 6.13).

The Neptune Meter Company relocated in 1972, selling the building to father/son development duo, Jerry and David Wolkoff of G&M Realty. The Wolkoffs leased the building to various "creative types," first to music production businesses, and then as studio spaces for artists for below market rents.[20] In 1993, Jerry Wolkoff was approached by a tenant who wished to explore the possibility of redirecting young graffiti writer's energies to working in a legal manner – much like the efforts of

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[20] Cara Buckley and Marc Santora, "5pointz, Queens Graffiti Shrine, Is Whited Out," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2013 2013; Michele Berry, "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca," http://www.newschoolfreepress.com/2012/10/24/the-fate-of-5-pointz-why-one-man-may-demolish-new-yorks-graffiti-mecca/.

Jane Golden the early days of Philadelphia's Anti-Graffiti Network. The building

became known as the Phun Phactory, and in 2002, graffiti writer Jonathan Cohen

("Meres") became curator. Wolkoff claims he has always been amenable to the art:

"'I get a tremendous amount of pressure from people who don't like graffiti in the

neighborhood . . . Any given day or week I could have taken the art off the walls. Any

time I wanted to. But because we like it, we've kept it there.'"[21]

Meres has dedicated an incredible amount of time and energy to the growth

of 5Pointz. It has become an icon amongst "graffiti hunters" – writers and admirers

alike. The building is five stories tall, and, at about 20,000 square feet, spans almost

an entire city block.[22] The exterior was completely covered, and the "overflow" of

graffiti spilled onto the sidewalks and facades of the neighboring buildings (Figure

6.14). It was an explosion of color and creativity; carefully curated by Meres to

ensure artists were given proper exposure. Each piece was required to be submitted

and approved before it was painted on the building, and – true to the ephemeral

nature of graffiti – some pieces were painted over periodically to make room for new

work:

> The most coveted locations are given to accomplished graffiti artists
> who create high-quality, conceptual work that displays great artistic
> detail, while the less visible areas are preserved for new and aspiring
> aerosol artists. The better the mural, the longer it stays up. Pieces and
> productions are typically left on display for anywhere from one day to
> two years, depending on the quality and effort of the work, as well as
> the pedestrian traffic level of its wall placement. Long-lasting,

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[21] "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca".
[22] Ibid.

prominently displayed productions require a rough draft and demonstrate creative vision, a high-level of craft, and originality.[23]

A 200,000 square foot industrial building that encompasses almost an entire city block, 5Pointz was a behemoth of aerosol art. Jackson Avenue flanks the north elevation, serving as the main access for pedestrians and vehicles, while the west and east elevations sit along Crane Street and Davis Street, respectively. Both of these access streets dead-end one block south of Jackson Avenue, into a train yard. A courtyard serves as the entry, or main gathering space at the southeast corner, opening onto Davis Street (Figure 6.15). The warehouse has several variations in story levels: the northwest and southwest corners of the building are 4- and 5-stories tall, respectively, joined by a 3-story connecting portion (Figure 6.16). The floor to ceiling height appears to be approximately 12-15 feet, judging by the large, arched factory-style windows, and every elevation is heavily fenestrated, especially along southwestern-facing Crane Street. The building appears to be brick and plaster construction, with minimal brick detailing at the cornice level.

Because of the vast scale and density of the artwork, it is truly an exercise for the eye's photoreceptors. Virtually every surface was covered with graffiti, with the exception of the windows and the decorative brick corbelling at the cornice. Because of ease of access, the lower 2 stories were more crowded; the pieces more elaborate, depicting wildstyle pieces and cartoon-like characters (Figure 6.17). Yet, numerous tags detailed every pier and spandrel, each author signing the giant canvas

[23] "5pointz Nyc: The Institute of Higher Burning".

that is 5Pointz. The higher the tag, the longer it lasted due to its difficult accessibility, and the very top spandrel of the courtyard area was commemoratively tagged with names of graffiti writers that have passed away (Figure 6.18). This courtyard was the main greeting and gathering space and therefore was the most dense, the graffiti spilling out past the threshold and along the other buildings on Davis Avenue (Figure 6.19).

The best view of 5Pointz is from the 7 train, as it travels down Davis Avenue and curves along the southern face of the building. This elevation has no fenestration, but the highest level of exposure, and, in typical graffiti form, the names of the 5Pointz "key players" remained on this wall permanently, for passengers to see on their commute to Manhattan (Figure 6.20).

This massive structure, covered from top to bottom in expressive graffiti, was truly a sight to be seen, and had become an increasingly popular tourist destination; Meres gave over 100 tours a year to students alone, but the site was frequented by visitors from all over the world. This tourism, of course, has aided in boosting the local economy. 5Pointz had also become the backdrop for numerous music videos and photo shoots. In fact, its acclaim is so great, Meres brought on an additional volunteer, Marie Flageul, solely to handle their PR.

Not only was 5Pointz a site of incredible art, but also possessed the energy and liveliness of the community that it created. Artists could work in a relaxed atmosphere, without fear of being caught or arrested, and this freedom allowed for

their creative energies to flourish. 5Pointz was a site for graffiti writers that had

more of an interest in developing their art, rather than writers who only desired to

tag. Like Powers intended in *Love Letter*, Meres wished to create an atmosphere that

celebrated the positive aspects of graffiti, without ego or favoritism.[24] In addition,

the opportunity to collaborate with other writers and bond over their craft added to

the value of 5Pointz. It reads as one whole piece, rather than individual tags stitched

together (Figure 6.21).[25]

This community was completely devastated with 5Pointz's sudden whitewash

in November 2013. As Long Island City began to stabilize in the early 2000s, the fate

of 5Pointz became more uncertain. The Wolkoffs had been transparent about their

intentions to demolish the building when they saw fit, with intentions to build two

brand-new residential towers, and the 5Pointz team, headed by Meres and Flageul,

had been trying desperately to find a loophole. They first applied for New York City

landmark status, but were denied in August 2013, as the building is lacking

architectural distinction, and the art was under 30 years old.[26] A lawsuit was also

filed, citing the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA), which is a "federal law that allows

for preservation of art in the public interest."[27] VARA can be employed to protect

the moral rights of visual artists, if the work is deemed to be of stature, and created

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[24] Sakai, "Don't Bomb These Walls (5pointz Documentary)," 11:57.
[25] Ibid., 13:18.
[26] Santora, "5pointz, Queens Graffiti Shrine, Is Whited Out."
[27] John Marzulli, "Federal Judge Refuses to Stop Plan to Demolish 5pointz Graffiti Mecca in Long Island City," *Daily News*(2013), http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/judge-refuses-block-5pointz-demolition-article-1.1514628#ixzz2kX6ASsA0.

in a legal fashion.[28] Unfortunately, the injunction was denied on November 13, 2013,

in the interest of the rights of the property owner. In response, the 5Pointz

community held a rally on November 16, in which hundreds of devotees came in

support of the graffiti landmark - even Banksy posted a plea on his blog to "Save

5Pointz." [29,30]

This heated debate came to a head on November 18, 2013, when the building

was whitewashed overnight, without any notification to Meres or the 5Pointz

community (Figures 6.22 – 6.25). Shocked and dismayed supporters gathered that

evening at a candlelight vigil to mourn the loss of a place they formed such an

attachment to. The general opinion was that of anger and betrayal – the clandestine

manner in which the building was painted was perceived as underhanded. Author

and graffiti/street art enthusiast Eric Felisbret said, "the fact that they destroyed the

art before they razed the building, it's a really big slap in the face."[31] Another

supporter and artist known as Just described his reaction as "'Heartbreaking . . . This

is not just about graffiti – it's about the unity of people who met here from all over

the world . . .That's what really hurts.'"[32] The demolition date for the building is

presently unknown.

[28] WNYC, "Can the Visual Artists Rights Act Save 5pointz," in *The Brian Lehrer Show* (2013).
[29] Artists Gathered This Weekend to Save 5pointz to Brownstoner Queens, 2013,
http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/11/artists-gathered-this-weekend-to-save-5pointz/.
[30] Santora, "5pointz, Queens Graffiti Shrine, Is Whited Out."
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

This again brings up the question of ownership. In this instance, 5Pointz was formally owned by the Wolkoffs, but the art and environment were owned by the 5Pointz community. Could a compromise have been reached that would have behooved both stakeholders? On one hand, Meres had aspirations to turn 5Pointz into a graffiti museum, which, based on the tourism that 5Pointz attracted, may have proved profitable to the Wolkoffs while still keeping the artists' network, and its cultural significance, intact.[33] Unfortunately, a museum was clearly not as financially appealing to the Wolkoffs as a brand new residential building in a gentrifying neighborhood. Flageul voiced her opinion on Long Island City's population influx: "People who have lived here all their life, yes they want the neighborhood to progress, but that doesn't mean at any cost."[34]

The owners, however, do not appear to be unsympathetic to the artists. Jerry Wolkoff opted to whitewash the building suddenly because it was "the humane thing to do . . . and, he said, watching the art-covered walls be pulled down piece by piece would be 'torture.'"[35] He has made several attempts to compromise with the community, by offering designated areas on the new building for the artists to work. The design calls for the construction of two towers, housing over 1,000 rental units to accommodate the recent influx of newcomers to Long Island City, and over 30,000 square feet of retail space.[36] Additionally, he has agreed to create 1,000 union jobs in

[33] "5pointz Nyc: The Institute of Higher Burning", "About".
[34] Berry, "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca".
[35] Santora, "5pointz, Queens Graffiti Shrine, Is Whited Out."
[36] Berry, "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca".

the construction of the building, designate 209 apartments as low-income housing, and make a conscious effort to rent to current Queens residents.[37]

Despite these olive branches, 5Pointz supporters remain outraged at Wolkoff's actions, more so because he seemed to turn a blind eye to its cultural significance (Figures 6.26, 6.27). Sociologist Gordon Douglas writes, "It's a little surprising, in this day and age, in this city, that the property owner there didn't recognize the cultural value--that kind of implies economic value--in something as famous and hip as 5Pointz."[38] According to Flageul,

> "Graffiti and street art is the most relevant art movement of the 20th century . . . It's an art form that has been practiced by every culture, every religion, and every color…You're about to erase the Chrysler Building of the biggest art movement of the 20th century."[39]

In addition to its contribution to the graffiti movement, its demolition is indicative of a potentially unnecessary reaction to a socioeconomic shift. In March 2014, a former 5Pointz contributor named Gilf! wrapped a yellow banner, similar in appearance to "Caution" tape, around the building that read "Gentrification in progress" (Figure 6.28). The artist claimed that razing the building, and what it had created amongst its followers, was the wrong course of action: "'If New York wants to stay a cultural hub, we're going to have to start examining our communities

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[37] Jeanmarie Evelly to DNAinfo New York, 2013, http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20131003/long-island-city/developer-pledges-more-than-double-affordable-units-5-pointz-plan.
[38] Shaunacy Ferro to CoDesign, 2014, http://www.fastcodesign.com/3022524/can-graffiti-be-good-for-cities#5.
[39] Berry, "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca".

differently instead of indiscriminately bulldozing everything to meet the housing

demand.'"[40] (Wolkoff opted to leave the banner up until demolition.)

Presently, the fate of 5Pointz remains to be seen. Some of the artists have

been invited to participate in commemorative gallery shows – most notably, one

named "Whitewash" at the nearby Jeffery Leder Gallery, curated by Flageul (Figure

6.29). This exhibit serves as a therapeutic release for the artists:

> It's a story of . . . an art community and its home coming apart under
> the pressure of economical trends and waves of gentrification . . . The
> artists in Whitewash share a medium known as graffiti or aerosol art,
> and all contributed multiple murals at 5Pointz. Their raw feelings will
> emerge from the work on view, coupled with a renewed belief in art as
> a healing tool through their favored medium of communication.
> Starting with the violent images of the once colorful building, turned
> white, the show itself and its creative process serves as catharsis for
> the artists, and as a crucial push to move forward. Different views and
> emotions emerge from the works on view, leading to renewed belief in
> art as a tool for mythmaking.[41]

Meres believes that vandalism will result on the new building as retaliation

against Wolkoff's actions.[42] Although the owners are within their legal rights, and

are amenable to recreating a relationship with the 5Pointz artists, the community

that has grown from this site has suffered an enormous loss. Only time will tell how

they convalesce, and what will manifest with the construction of the new towers.

[40] Tobias Salinger, "Exclusive: 5pointz 'Gentrification in Progess' Artist Speaks," *Daily News*(2014),
http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/5pointz-banner-artist-speaks-article-1.1717082.
[41] Marie Cecile-Flageul, "Whitewash," http://www.jeffreyledergallery.com/whitewash.php.
[42] Berry, "The Fate of 5pointz: Why One Man May Demolish New York's Graffiti Mecca".

RICE MILL LOFTS

Rice Mill Lofts (RML) is a 69-unit apartment building along the Mississippi

River in the Bywater section of New Orleans, LA (Figure 6.30). Constructed in 1892

and formerly the largest rice mill in North America, RML was purchased by real estate

developer Sean Cummings in 1993 (Figure 6.31). Cummings held back on actively

renovating the building until 2010, in the interest of timing; he had previously labeled

Bywater as a "green banana," or an area just on the brink of tipping towards

stabilization.[43] Additionally, the building was in dire need of roof and structural

repairs after extensive damage from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and had been

condemned by the city.[44]

The devastation in New Orleans after the storm was widespread, and severely

affected the physical and socioeconomic makeup of the city. However, this did not

dampen the pride or energy; in the years since 2005, New Orleans has made

exceptional leaps towards recovery. Cummings, a native of the area, has been an

instrumental part of this revitalization, developing over 18 projects in the hopes of

maintaining New Orleans' "boutique city" status.[45] He describes the growing

popularity of the city: "New Orleans was once unappealing to many investors

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[43] Mimi Read, "Where the Walls Do Talk," *The New York Times*(2012),
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/07/greathomesanddestinations/in-new-orleans-a-building-where-the-graffiti-takes-center-stage.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=1&adxnnlx=1384737716-S6wJ2L6AlXFW31joiicCnA.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Nadja Brandt to Bloomberg, 2013, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-27/new-orleans-rolling-in-cash-sees-rebirth-real-estate.html; Oscar Raymundo to BBC Travel: The Passport Blog, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/travel/blog/20130207-new-orleans-rebuilds-as-a-boutique-city.

because it was thought of as a giant bar . . . Today, more and more people choose the

city for its quality of life. New Orleans has a lot to offer. It's sexy, it's vibrant, it's full

of life."[46]

This resilience has worked to its advantage: the population was an estimated

369,000 according to the U.S. Census data of 2013, from a low of 209,000 after

Katrina.[47] The steady growth has perceptibly affected the commercial real estate

market, up 41% in 2013 from the previous year. One benefit of such obliteration is the

opportunity to start anew from a blank slate. Cummings "prefers to think of a raw

building as his blank canvas or unmarked musical score; a place where he can be

expressive."[48] Though the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings to residences is not

a new innovation, Cummings' creative approach seems to be serving New Orleans

well.

Cummings' development company is named Ekistics, Inc., meaning "the study

of where and why people live where they do in an urban setting."[49] Part of his vision

aims to establish Bywater as a hub of creative placemaking:

> 'New Orleans has a chance to reassert itself at the very forefront of
> American creative culture, and we want to do our part to encourage
> the cross-pollination of ideas in this vibrant, creative neighborhood and

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[46] Brandt, Bloomberg.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Doug MacCash, "In a Bywater Warehouse-Turned-Apartment Building, Raine Bedsole Finds a Niche for Her Art Studio," *The Times-Picayune*(2011),
http://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2011/11/in_a_bywater_warehouse-turned-.html.
[49] "Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ricemilllofts.com/home.html.

among its remarkable educators, talented artisans and top tier craftspeople.'[50]

He effectively implemented this attitude at RML, while integrating a preservation-conscious approach to the building's remaining historic fabric. The interior masonry and remaining timbers were left exposed, and all new materials were chosen in a sensitive, yet distinctive fashion. The results of this juxtaposition are airy, light-filled apartments with a hip, industrial vibe that is trendy in the residential market (Figure 6.32). In addition, Cummings employed the talents of local artists in the building's interior décor. Metalwork, cast glass, and sculptural mailboxes are indicative of the overall premise that good design promotes healthy human responses.

Where the historical narratives of RML fuse with the design-centered approach is in the extant graffiti Cummings chose to leave on the brick walls, for the sake of preserving its "rebel spirit" (Figures 6.33 – 6.35)[51] Colorful abstract pieces don the walls, in addition to abstract figures and phrases that describe Bywater's location in the "9th Ward" of New Orleans (Figure 6.36). A quote from a 1912 Vaschel Lindsay poem entitled "The Congo" reads "Boomlay, Boomlay, Boomlay, Boom," perhaps in acknowledgement of New Orleans' slavery trade in the 19th century

[50] Ekistics Inc., "Projects: National Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ekisticsinc.com/projects/national-rice-mill-lofts.
[51] Katherine Flynn, "Banksy in Bywater? Nola's Rice Mill Lofts Remixes Its Industrial Past," *PreservationNation Blog*(2013), http://blog.preservationnation.org/2013/10/30/banksy-bywater-nolas-rice-mill-lofts-remixes-industrial-past/#.UolrpCqF887.

(Figure 6.37).[52] From 1993 when Cummings acquired the building, to the start of its

renovation in 2010, it sat mostly vacant; an open invitation to squatters and graffiti

writers who so often tag abandoned sites. The RML website affirms, "The

improvisational riff of text and images tells both tales of caustic discontent, as well as

stories of sacred archetypes, heroes and mythmakers."[53] At one point in the early

2000s, Cummings had leased it to young adults as a furniture refinishing studio. To

his surprise, he discovered an article on the building, praising it as the best

underground rave club in the nation.[54]

Cummings recognized this unique history and centered his entire marketing

campaign on it. His savviness proved fruitful: RML reached full occupancy within five

months, and a wait list exists for those apartments with the most distinctive graffiti

pieces.[55,56] Additionally, in 2012, RML was the highest per-unit residential building in

New Orleans, with prices ranging from $1,100 for a studio to $4,000 for a three-

bedroom apartment.[57] In a somewhat ironic twist, there is even a lease addendum

that prohibits the removal or defacing of the graffiti.[58]

The most notable piece is on the exterior of the building, where the words

"You are beautiful" are painted across the top of the building (Figure 6.38).

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[52] "The Congo: A Study of the Negro Race, by Vaschel Lindsay (1912),"
http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/176812; "Rice Mill Lofts".
[53] "Rice Mill Lofts", The Story.
[54] Read, "Where the Walls Do Talk".
[55] Brandt, "Bloomberg."
[56] Read, "Where the Walls Do Talk".
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Cummings says this piece is admired by residents and neighbors alike: "'"We hear all the time from river boat captains how much they enjoy seeing that, making their run through the city.'"[59] It appears that RML is a catalyst for change and Cummings' is using this momentum to carry the redevelopment of the 6-mile riverfront that RML flanks.[60]

The success of RML is heavily attributed to its creative marketing techniques and appreciation of its unusual past. The recognition of anonymous, unsolicited graffiti, outside of a gallery, has resulted in a profitable return on Cummings' investment and an extremely trendy and popular environment for its residents. Its spontaneity and esoteric messages offer an alternative tale to be woven, marrying contemporary art with historical industry.

The purpose of presenting these three case studies is to illustrate how graffiti and street art can effectively be used in ways that embody cultural heritage values. Whereas it was generally frowned upon in the late 20th century, there is a perceptible shift in opinion as the urban art movement progresses forward into the mainstream. This shift is indicative of its importance to the cultural landscape and can no longer be ignored within the field of historic preservation.

[59] Flynn, "Banksy in Bywater? Nola's Rice Mill Lofts Remixes Its Industrial Past".
[60] Raymundo, BBC Travel.

Figure 6.1:
James Burns' mural, "Finding the Light Within", dedicated to suicide prevention, 2010 ("City of Phila-delphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 6.2:
"Your everafter is all I'm after," 2010 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 6.3:
"Meet me on Fifty-Second, if only for fifty seconds," 2010 ("Mural Locator," http://murallocator.
org/2010/11/love-letter-miss-you/.)

Figure 6.4:
"I got daycare money and carfare, Honey," 2010 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.
muralarts.org.)

Figure 6.5:
"Picture you, picture me, picture this," 2010 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.mu-ralarts.org.)

Figure 6.6:
"I'll shape up," 2010 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 6.7:
"I love you," 2010 ("Mural Locator," http://murallocator.org/2010/11/love-letter-miss-you/.)

Figure 6.8:
Allen Iverson's tattoos, 2010 ("Mural Locator," http://murallocator.org/2010/11/love-letter-miss-you/.)

Figure 6.9:
"If you were here, I'd be home now," 2010 ("City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.)

Figure 6.10:
"Miss you too often not to love you," 2010 ("Mural Locator," http://murallocator.org/2010/11/love-letter-miss-you/.)

Figure 6.11:
Graffiti writer "shout-out", 2010 ("Mural Locator," http://murallocator.org/2010/11/love-letter-miss-you/.)

NEPTUNE METER COMPANY, LONG ISLAND CITY, N. Y.

Figure 6.12:
Historic image of the Neptune Meter Company, 1912 (Mitch Waxman to Queens Brownstoner, 2013,
http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/12/when-the-5pointz-warehouse-was-home-to-neptune-meter/.)
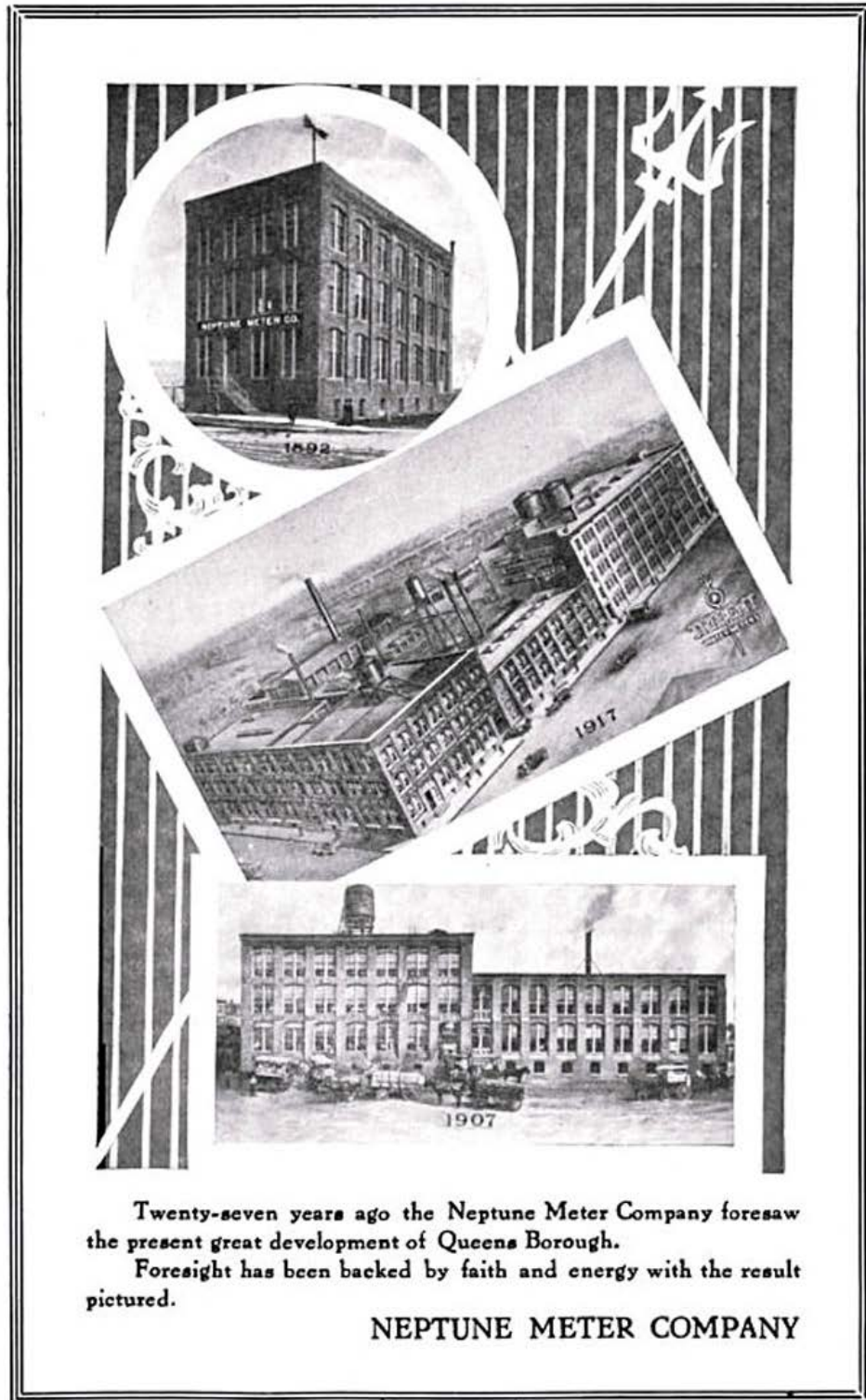
Figure 6.13:
Historic image of the Neptune Meter Company (Mitch Waxman to Queens Brownstoner, 2013, http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/12/when-the-5pointz-warehouse-was-home-to-neptune-meter/.)

Figure 6.14:
Courtyard, 2013 (by author)
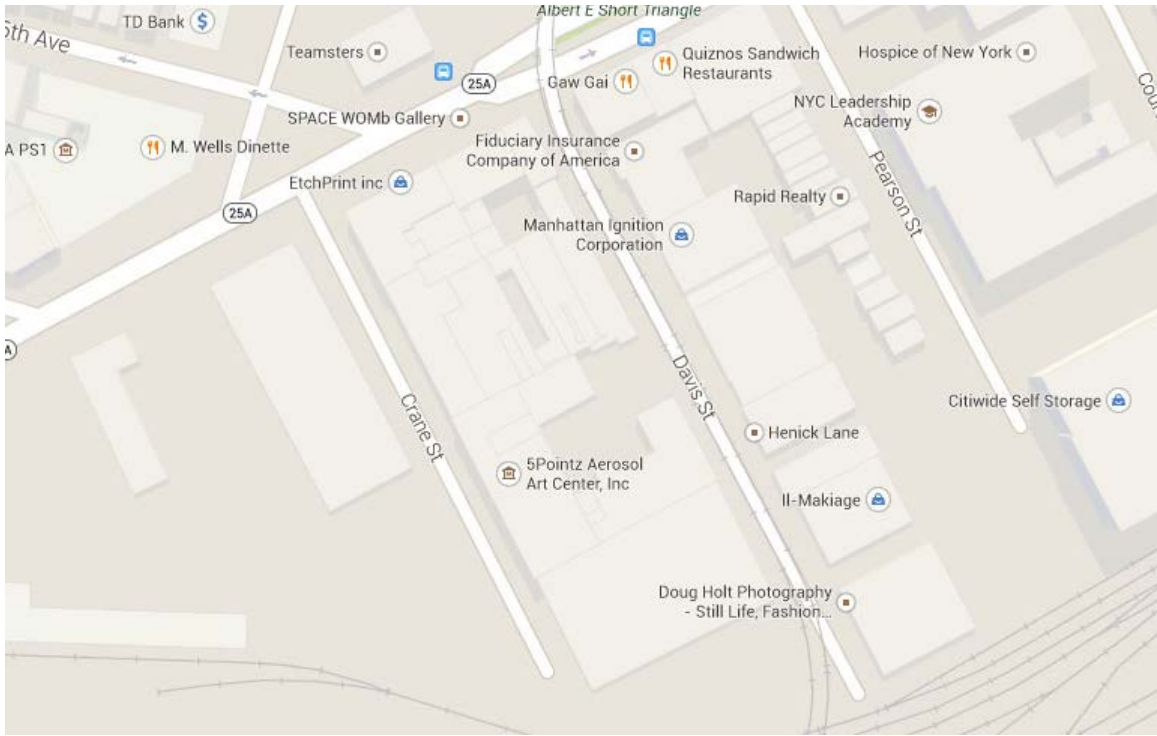
Figure 6.15:
Surrounding area (Google Maps)

Figure 6.16:
Crane St. elevation, 2013 (by author)

Figure 6.17:
Crane St. elevation, 2013 (by author)

Figure 6.18:
Courtyard depicting memorial tags at the cornice level, 2013 (by author)

Figure 6.19:
Davis Ave., 2013 (by author)
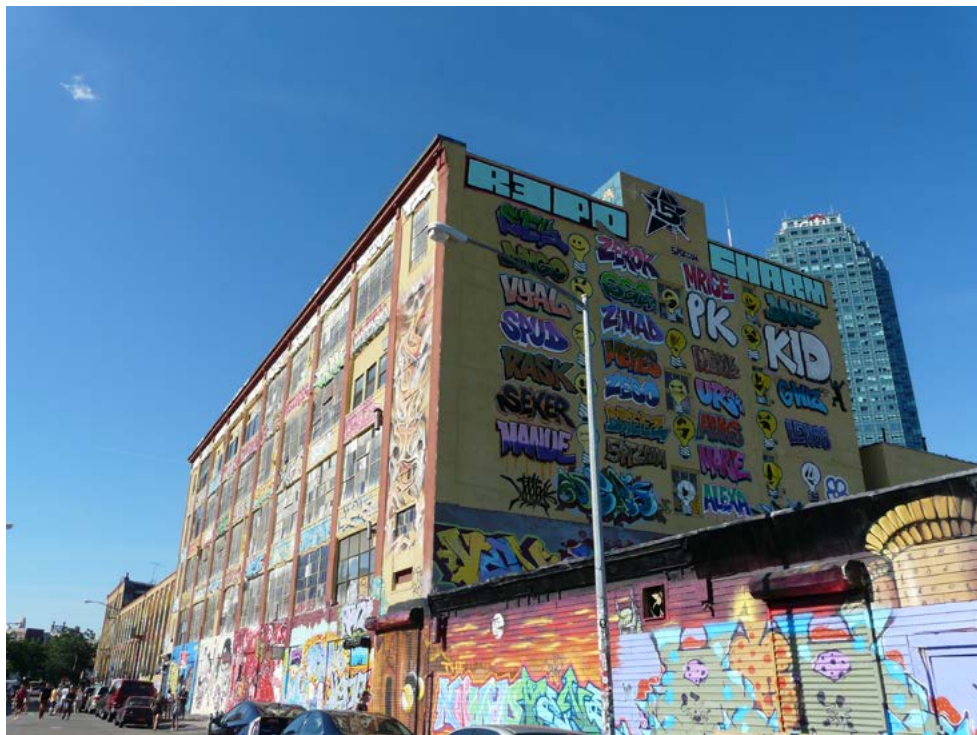
Figure 6.20:
South elevation, 2013 (by author)
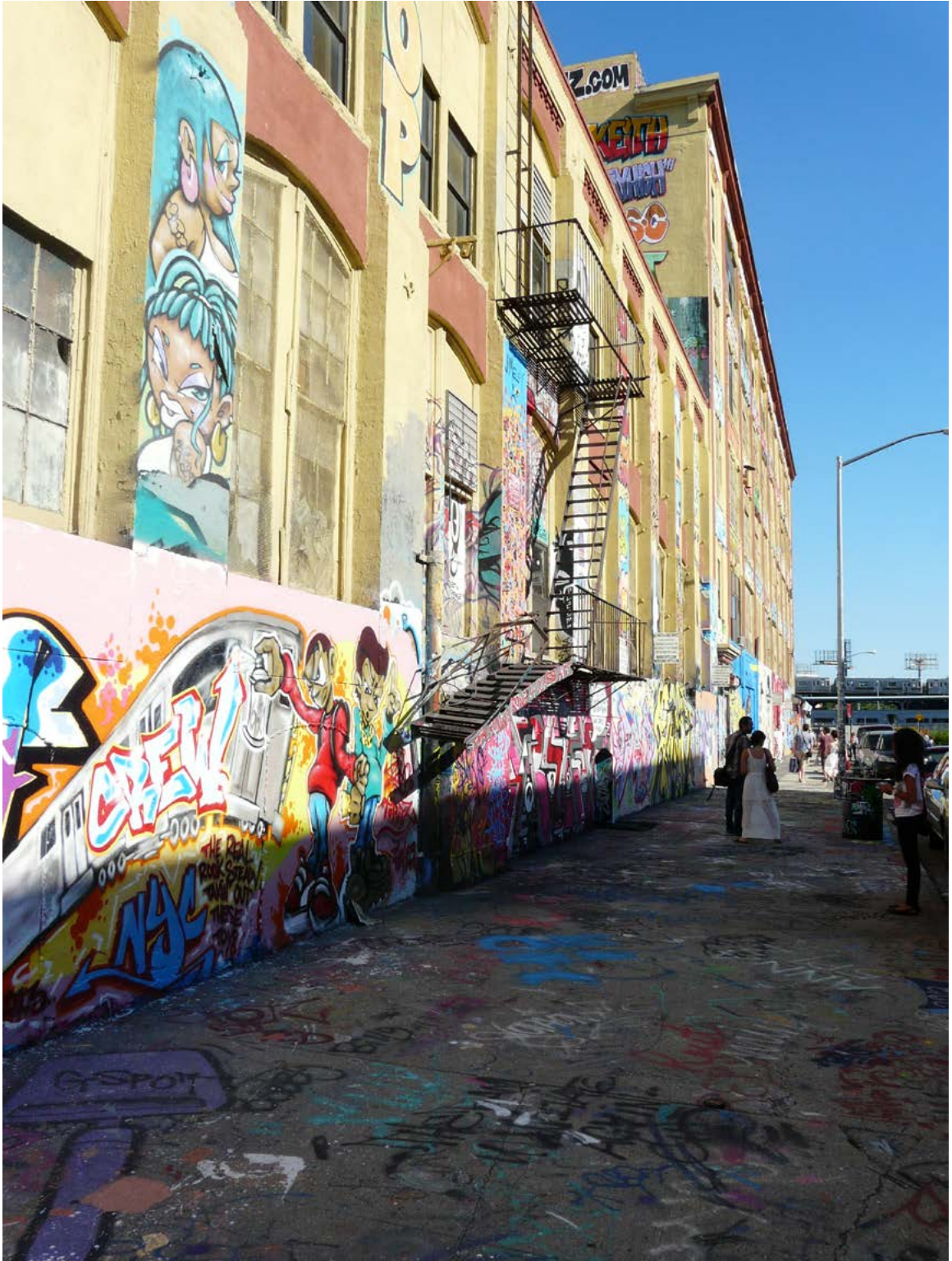
Figure 6.21:
Crane St. elevation, 2013 (by author)

Figure 6.22:
Whitewash in progress, 2013 (Breaking: 5pointz Warehouse Painted White by the Wolkoffs to, ibid., http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/11/breaking-5pointz-warehouse-painted-white-by-the-wolkoffs/?ic_source=ic-featured-frontpage-top.)

Figure 6.23:
Whitewash in progress, 2013 (Breaking: 5pointz Warehouse Painted White by the Wolkoffs to, ibid., http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/11/breaking-5pointz-warehouse-painted-white-by-the-wolkoffs/?ic_source=ic-featured-frontpage-top.)

Figure 6.24:
Whitewash in progress, 2013 (Breaking: 5pointz Warehouse Painted White by the Wolkoffs to, ibid., http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/11/breaking-5pointz-warehouse-painted-white-by-the-wolkoffs/?ic_source=ic-featured-frontpage-top.)

Figure 6.25:
Whitewash in progress, 2013 (Breaking: 5pointz Warehouse Painted White by the Wolkoffs to, ibid., http://queens.brownstoner.com/2013/11/breaking-5pointz-ware-house-painted-white-by-the-wolkoffs/?ic_source=ic-featured-frontpage-top.)

Figure 6.26:
"Slum Lord," 2013 (Richie Siegel, "Whitewashed: Destroying the Graffiti Mecca," Seersucker Magazine(2013), http://seersuckermag.com/whitewashed/.)

Figure 6.27:
"Art murder," 2013 (Richie Siegel, "Whitewashed: Destroying the Graffiti Mecca," Seersucker Magazine(2013), http://seersuckermag.com/whitewashed/.)

Figure 6.28:
"Gentrification in progress," 2014 (Tobias Salinger, "Exclusive: 5pointz 'Gentrification in Progess' Artist Speaks," Daily News(2014), http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/5pointz-banner-artist-speaks-article-1.1717082.)

Figure 6.29:
Aerosol painting by Meres as part of the "Whitewash" Gallery Show, 2014 (Marie Cecile-Flageul, "Whitewash," http://www.jeffreyledergallery.com/whitewash.php.)
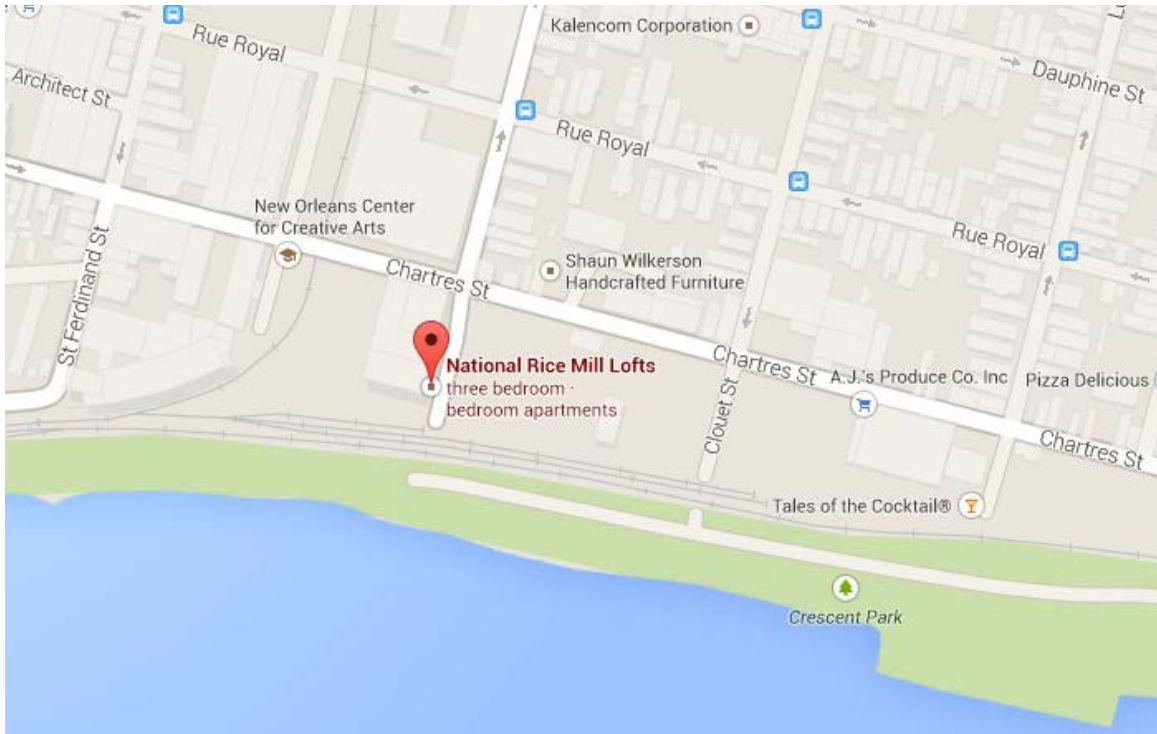
Figure 6.30:
Surrounding area (Google Maps)

Figure 6.31:
Exterior, 2011 (Mimi Read, "Where the Walls Do Talk," The New York Times(2012), http://www.ny-times.com/2012/06/07/greathomesanddestinations/in-new-orleans-a-building-where-the-graffiti-takes-center-stage.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=1&adxnnlx=1384737716-S6wJ2L6AlXFW31joiicCnA.)

Figure 6.32:
Apartment interiors, 2011 (StudioWTA, "Rice Mill Lofts," http://studiowta.com/project/rice-mill-lofts/.)

Figure 6.33:
Extant graffiti, 2011 (Ekistics Inc., "Projects: National Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ekisticsinc.com/proj-
ects/national-rice-mill-lofts.)

Figure 6.34:
Extant graffiti, 2011 (Ekistics Inc., "Projects: National Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ekisticsinc.com/projects/national-rice-mill-lofts.)

Figure 6.35:
Extant graffiti, 2011 ("Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ricemilllofts.com/home.html.)

Figure 6.36:
Extant graffiti, "9th Ward," 2011 (StudioWTA, "Rice Mill Lofts," http://studiowta.com/project/rice-mill-lofts/.)

Figure 6.37:
Extant graffiti, "Boomlay, Boomlay Boomlay, Boom," 2011 ("Rice Mill Lofts," http://www.ricemilllofts.com/home.html.)

Figure 6.38:
Extant graffiti, "You Are Beautiful," 2011 (Oscar Raymundo to BBC Travel: The Passport Blog, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/travel/blog/20130207-new-orleans-rebuilds-as-a-boutique-city.)

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The case studies examined in Chapter 6 are indicative of three instances where urban art manifested cultural significance and proved itself as a viable consideration of historic preservation. They can each be considered a course of action when considering graffiti and street art as worthy of conservation thinking.

The *Love Letter* murals adroitly convey messages of affection – a topic that can sometimes be trite – by using witty and pragmatic language, thus allowing it to be relevant to all. But its incorporation into the cityscape of West Philadelphia, while subtly acknowledging historical narratives, community members, and its temporal position, successfully handle some of the issues of ownership and accessibility that are apparent in public art. Powers' respect of the ghost signs harkening back to West

Philly's mercantile history and, in the more recent past, the rooftops that were once

graffiti writers' territory, is commendable, as are his efforts to apply the positive

aspects of graffiti to the project in the forms of color and inventive typography. The

Mural Arts Program, in general, should be lauded for its philosophy that "art saves

lives," whether it is harnessing the raw talent of graffiti writers and channeling it in a

more constructive manner, or empowering disadvantaged individuals to "break the

cycle of crime and violence in our communities."[1]

5Pointz, even with its complex "David versus Goliath" story, is an example of

how a tightly-knit community can be formed around a place or craft: "activities that

do not necessarily capitalize directly on the historical value of the site, but rather on

the public-space, shared-space qualities."[2] Providing graffiti writers and street artists

a creative outlet could prove beneficial to both writers and the surrounding

neighborhood. If art does, in fact, lead change, as exemplified by Tony Goldman's

efforts in Wynwood, Miami, and Midtown Village, Philadelphia, a struggling

neighborhood has the potential to see an economic boost.

Rice Mill Lofts is indicative of a forward-thinking method of celebrating

historical narratives. The layer of extant graffiti, painted on the "bones" of an 1892

structure, offers a unique dichotomy of a gainful industrial chapter with one borne

out of a period of decline after Hurricane Katrina. Realizing the graffiti held artistic

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[1] "City of Philadelphia: Mural Arts Program," www.muralarts.org.
[2] Randall Mason and Marta de la Torre, "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 12.

value and celebrating its distinctiveness has earned the building notoriety, as well as 100% occupancy.

Urban art as a countercultural movement is widely documented in print and, more so, on the web. It has matured as an art form, and one aspect of this is its being drawn into the spheres of heritage and conservation. Not only does it serve an individualistic desire to leave something of oneself behind, it also piques our interest, as the audience, in forming our own interpretations. The former phenomenon is one that has been evident since prehistoric times, and remains incredibly present. The latter has sparked controversy: the debates over vandalism and ownership of public space are most prominent.

Yet, urban art remains a tangible part of the cultural landscape. The graffiti and street art movements are not fading. They are not decreasing in popularity. In fact, searching Google for "graffiti blogs" fetches over 86,400,000 hits. An absurd amount of time, money, and energy has been put into its eradication, to no avail. What started as restless, yet creative energy amongst impoverished teens in 1970s Philadelphia and New York has grown into a worldwide epidemic. Graffiti writers and street artists are often simply yearning for their art to be acknowledged - to fulfill their sense of belonging, to take a stand against something they oppose, to reclaim and beautify public space. It is not solely about vandalism or the defacement of private property.

Is destruction a goal for some of these writers? Certainly. But what must be considered are those who seek a higher purpose, aside from vanity and accolades. What must be taken into account are those works of art that seek to enhance, rather than destroy; to improve, rather than degrade; to empower, rather than inhibit. These intentions and their results must be prioritized as values of conservation.

We celebrate paintings in a gallery, performances in a theater, and sculpture made out of household materials as forms of "Art." We acknowledge archival records, books, and maps as sources of historical information. We appreciate murals and sculptures as public art within our urban fabric. When so many similarities can be drawn between the essential qualities of these accepted art forms and the qualities of graffiti and street art – why have graffiti and street art been yet to be acknowledged as a valuable form of cultural heritage? The urban art movement has been around for centuries, with no signs of waning and every sign of growing relevance. In fact, graffiti and street art have more than proven its adaptability under duress. Under such circumstances, perhaps it is prudent to finally accept the presence and meaning of urban art, and focus on its many contributions to the cultural landscape.

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