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Graffiti art and the city

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Introduction

Graffiti and street art have received varying research treatment from artist, subcultural, ethnographic and crimogenic perspectives which are reflected in the literature on individual graffiti and street artists, gangs and genres, with a growth in art monographs and coffee table style pictorials. As Irvine observes: ‘street art is… defined more by real-time practice than by any sense of unified theory, movement, or message’ (Irvine, 2012: p. 235). The productionist dialectic between graffiti as vandalism and as ‘art’ (including in galleries) has not considered the wider aspects of the role and place of graffiti and street art in the city; responses from city authorities, local communities, visitors and property owners; and how different places and city cultures receive and react in different ways, including graffiti and street art now used in place-making, branding and destination strategies. This includes the growth of graffiti and street art commissioning agencies and organisations, often established by former graffiti and street artists employed by clients (e.g. retail, advertising firms, local authorities) and legitimised spaces and walls for safe experimentation. The cultural content of graffiti and street art also reflects local conditions and contexts, whether protest/political, territorial, vernacular (e.g. local events, history) or playful in nature.

Graffiti and street art now occupies an enduring place in the image of the city and our urban heritage:

The tour bus picked us up outside of the designer-hotel in Manhattan. Commuting office and shop workers, tourists, police and road diggers mingled in the chaos of downtown traffic. Across the Williamsburg Bridge we stopped to pick up our tour guide for the day, Angel Rodriguez, from an unsalubrious building covered in layers of posters, graffiti and grit. He was a Latino musician, a salsa drummer from the Bronx who proceeded to give the tour group the background to the area – ‘Bronx is burning’ (arson attacks on tenement blocks by landlords), old jazz and dance club haunts, Fort Apache – ‘the movie’ – the now rebuilt district police station self-styled to defend itself against the ‘natives’, (i.e. black/Hispanics), graffiti art of local rap stars (Figure 13.1), the massive American Mint building covering four blocks, where two thirds of all US dollar notes were once printed.
and now housing two community schools, artist studios and employment schemes; the local penitentiary with twelve year olds kept in shackles – before arriving at our destination, The Point. Here the graffiti boys’ operation base – once the crew that covered the New York subway trains and led to the mayor’s zero tolerance regime – have now gone ‘legit’, working for large advertising firms and department stores in Manhattan on large-scale shop displays and billboard art.

(Evans, 2007: p. 35)

Graffiti has thus come a long way from its modern roots in the 1960s ethnic ghettoes of New York and Los Angeles, signalling perhaps a commodification of this activity, as well as a widening of graffiti into other cultural forms such as music (e.g. rap/hip hop), fashion (e.g. street artist Mau Mau graduated from T-shirt design to graffiti art), film (e.g. animation, pop videos) and architecture/urban design, which collectively have extended its shelf life. Early forays of artists who first worked ‘on the street’ and in ‘street style’ into art galleries, such as the late Basquiat, has had less success, despite the rapid valorisation of particular artists’ work in recent years, notably Banksy, whose distinctive stencil murals have fetched over $500,000 (often to US buyers and celebrities). This reached a nadir in 2014 – from Banksy’s street-cred perspective – in an unauthorised retrospective of 1970 ‘works’ by the international auction house Sotheby’s in London.

Here however, the work has been first validated in situ (a fundamental element in its value and authenticity), and then removed, much like a historic mural, into a (private) collection.

Figure 13.1 Big Pun ‘memorial’, The Bronx, New York © the author
Graffiti has therefore largely resisted (art) museum-ification and thrives primarily in a museum-without-walls – but very much ‘on’ a city’s walls. The varying treatment and cultural significance of graffiti was also observed by Walter Benjamin, in his essay on the walls of 1920s Marseilles:

Admirable, the discipline to which they are subject, in this city. The better ones, in the center, wear livery and are in the pay of the ruling class. They are covered with gaudy patterns and have sold their whole length many hundreds of times to the latest brand of aperitif, to department stores, to the ‘Chocolat Menier’, or Dolores del Rio. In the poorer quarters they are politically mobilized and post their spacious red letters as the forerunners of red guards in front of dockyards and arsenals.

(1999: p. 135)

Indeed, it was the appropriation of the post-industrial city’s walls by what are perceived as undemocratic and unwanted advertising images that has provided the political impetus for contemporary graffiti artists such as Banksy.¹

Graffiti as vandalism

Until recently official responses to graffiti have placed it squarely in the criminal ‘vandalism’ sphere and early commentators fuelled this view: ‘graffiti disrespects private property and official notions of order and aesthetics’ (Lachmann, 1995: p. 100 on Ferrell, 1993). Early responses to the graffiti ‘epidemic’ in New York and Los Angeles saw criminal sentences increase and special tasks forces established, claiming that the order of the landscape had been disrupted, and clean-up costs were rising: more than $50m a year in both cities by the late-1980s. Today in the UK, clean-up of graffiti is estimated to cost £1 million per year and in Chicago alone $6m (see graffitihurts.org). English Heritage estimates that 70,000 heritage buildings and monuments are vandalised and defaced by graffiti while Network Rail spends £5m and London Transport £10m a year on graffiti clean-up. In 1960s/1970s New York, gang graffiti-ists were also enabled by the subway system that took their tags across all of the city’s boroughs and away from their local territories, with large ‘pieces’ covering whole carriages. (Transport police advise operators to take trains out of commission quickly to reduce this incentive). While the New York subway was successfully cleaned-up, transport still remains a key site for graffiti – attractive for its wide availability and high audience potential. For visitors to many cities, whether by road or rail, the first visual sign they will see is graffiti and tags along motorway walls and bridges, and on the approaches to railway stations. Despite the advent of CCTV and other surveillance, stations and bus stops receive both unwanted as well as commissioned artworks and tagging, for example in Stockholm Art on the Underground (Figure 13.2) and in London, an on-going programme of Art posters and Poetry on the Underground commissions.

Graffiti and street art have therefore been faced with a dual onslaught from different dominant cultures (police/city politicians and art curators/galleries) to remove or restrict its practice and impact. However, despite this, or perhaps spurred on by this marginalisation, counter-hegemonic discourses have emerged which in some senses have kept graffiti alive as both a cultural concept and a practice that is now evident in many forms internationally – that is, graffiti is now global cultural force. Lachman’s observation in 1988 is therefore still valid today: ‘Graffiti in some forms can challenge hegemony by drawing on particular experiences and customs of their communities, ethnic groups and age cohorts, thereby demonstrating that social life can be constructed in ways different from the dominant conceptions of reality’ (1988: pp. 231–32).
This challenge is evident in artists’ response to the art market itself, in the case of Banksy’s ‘mockumentary’ film *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010). Here a fictional filmmaker pursues the underground art scene in Los Angeles, New York, London and Paris, assuming the role of self-styled street artist hyping his avant garde ‘show’ in LA and creating an art world/underground buzz for the lucky few who could take part. Banksy thus, pokes fun at the contemporary art world and its hunt to unearth and exploit underground art scenes. The willingness to validate recycled art and popular cultural symbols, which are rendered empty if not meaningless, is revealed as undiscerning and opportunistic . . . whereby social critique is downplayed in the pursuit of print, poster, and postcard sales.

(Birdsall, 2013: p. 116)

The mobile value of his own street art has however fuelled a destructive market (another form of vandalism) which sees ‘public’ works cut from walls to disappear then reappear via auction. These sites continue to attract viewers and subsequent graffiti responses, and place branding through graffiti can therefore persist (including in memory) despite the absence of the artwork itself (Hansen and Flynn, 2014).

**Mixed messages**

Today, this duality (vandalism or art) continues, reflected in prohibitory sentences – in the UK up to ten years imprisonment where criminal damage by an adult (18+) exceeds £5,000, and detention/training order of up to two years for 12–17 year olds. For ‘minor offences’, sentences are much lower and fixed penalty charges can also be issued (£80) without court proceedings, so there is some discretion over the response if found guilty/’caught in the act’. At the same time, art museums and galleries engage with graffiti as an international art form. For example, in 2008, Tate Modern’s Street Art commission and exhibition brought together six internationally-acclaimed artists whose work is linked to the urban environment. Sponsored by the Japanese car firm Nissan, this was the first major public display of Street Art in London. In order to give it artistic validation, ‘good’ street art in this case was distinguished from the more low-brow graffiti and tagging, thus seeking to ‘insert graffiti into its proper place and rob it of its denaturalising power’ (Creswell, 1996: p. 55). The link with sponsor Nissan was also significant since the Qashqai car it launched the year before utilised striking street art in its adverts. This also provides a clue to the current ambiguous place and relationship between graffiti/art and the city. In one sense this reflects the consumption and visual culture prevalent in the contemporary city environment – the merger of commerce and culture in highly visualised...
form. As Chang maintains, ‘saturated by images, the contemporary city has been theorised as a site legislated by the eyes’ (2013: p. 216), while street art today in Irvine’s view ‘is a paradigm of hybridity in global visual culture’ (Irvine, 2012: p. 235).

Lombard goes further in response to the question, has the governance of graffiti changed since its more reactive origins? She uses the concept of governmentality (Lombard, 2013) ('conduct of conduct' – Gordon, 1991) to analyse how graffiti is currently controlled, arguing that while there appears to be a softening of policy and responses towards graffiti, this does not mean that there is less governance, but that this marks a greater acceptance of graffiti due to the effects of a neo-liberal form of governance. Chang also notes the emergence of the counterveiling terms: post-graffiti and neo-graffiti, ‘signalling some kind of qualitative and stylistic shift in modes of inscribing the city. Encompassing multiple forms or urban inscription like murals, postering and sculpture that move beyond written text . . . [which] mark the spectacular nature of urban space’ (2013: p. 217). Here she critiques the work of artist Blu, who painstakingly paints and photographs over existing graffiti (representing a single film frame) then turns these into remarkable street life animations (see www.blublu.org). This is one example of graffiti being transformed into moving image while drawing and building on its everyday street art nature. This also represents an important cultural practice of capturing as well as creating graffiti art in a different non-ephemeral form – important with so much street art being time-limited and subject to clean-up, defacing and deterioration due to the weather etc. Archives of graffiti art also seek to document this work alongside publications and films, in a variety of media (DeNotto, 2014).

A governmental response to the ‘demand’ for graffiti by young people is also seen in various schemes which seek to offer a safe (from prosecution) opportunity for budding Banksy’s to practice their art with impunity. For example in Wales, the Heritage Graffiti Project helps young offenders ‘learn valuable lessons from their heritage’2 by introducing them to archaeological artefacts and explaining what they mean to the people who used them (e.g. Roman soldiers, miners, canal boaters). A mural was created: ‘Our Wales’, by the young people depicting their interpretation and experience that was documented and opened to the public. In the DPM Park in Dundee, Scotland, the longest legal graffiti wall in the UK (110 metres) is open for all to use at any time, and the council-run project holds workshops for local kids. How far these participants subsequently refrain from illegal graffiti activity is not however clear.

Attitudes of city residents towards graffiti and street art are also changing and ambiguous. These not surprisingly also vary within cities, with some neighbourhoods, sites and buildings treated differently in terms of surveillance, prosecution, protection – and celebration. For example, in the Colombian capital, Bogota, following the death of a young street artist shot by police in 2011, a new tolerance of street art has emerged. The city mayor issued a decree to promote the practice of graffiti as a form of artistic and cultural expression while at the same time defining surfaces that are off limits, including monuments and public buildings. City grants are available for selected artists with two, three and even seven-storey walls provided along the main thoroughfares as their canvases. The result is colourful displays with political and social messages. Everyday graffiti has also spread under this liberal regime including on buildings prohibited from writing. This indicates the difficulty of controlling graffiti in this way without rules being observed, and the appeal to marking untouched surfaces and public spaces. Lisbon is another city that has embraced street art, as it tries to move out of austerity and recession (GAU, 2014). Large scale pieces and murals adorn public buildings and industrial districts (Figure 13.3), which range from artistic to protest images and messages.

Local artists such as Vhils (Alexandre Farto) are celebrated and combine the aesthetics of vandalism with social comment. Rather than spray can and stencil, Vhils carves into the render
of the walls of buildings using electric drills to produce large scale portraits, often of local community members, and also works on utility installations. As a sign of his acceptance into the city art establishment, his inaugural exhibition was held at the opening of a new art museum based in a converted electricity station, ‘Museu Da Electricidade’ (Figure 13.4). Lisbon University also hosted the first international conference on Street Art and Urban Creativity between 3 and 5 July 2014 (www.urbancreativity.org) with an extensive programme of papers from academics, curators and doctoral students.

Figure 13.3 Street Art, Lisbon © the author

Figure 13.4 Electricity museum and storage tank graffiti – launch of Vhils ‘Dissection’ exhibition, Lisbon, 4 July 2014 © the author
Elsewhere, commissioning of young artists to adorn corporate buildings presents an alternative to the usual public art installation. In Frankfurt, the European Central Bank HQ, a forty-five-storey building under construction is surrounded by a high protective fence. A local social worker approached the bank that agreed to allow him and the ‘troubled’ young children he works with, to spray paint a wooden fence that they erected around the site (costing €10,000). The graffiti depicts caricatures of ECB President and Chancellor Merkel (60 per cent of the works reflect the Eurozone crisis), to fighting cocks that will be displayed within the building when it opens this year.

Several of the graffiti artworks have been purchased (via the Under Art Construction programme), ironically, by bankers, although remaining works are not, apparently, for sale. The city mayor has called on other construction sites to emulate this project. Other ‘meanwhile’ sites are also the subject of sanctioned graffiti since these can on the one hand animate otherwise ugly hoardings and also prevent/dissuade opportunistic graffiti, as well as divert attention from permanent structures. For example in Madrid and in Amsterdam (Figure 13.5) where the former Royal Dutch Shell European HQ building awaits redevelopment and temporary occupation by dance event organisers. This northern part of the city known as Amsterdam-Noord also represents a new creative quarter, served by frequent free ferries from behind the main station, where a cluster of digital media workshops and arts and entertainment venues has replaced this industrial complex and working class district. In this case, graffiti art signifies transition, fun, creativity – rather than degradation and social unrest, as it would have done in the past.

The dichotomies between, crime-art, control-tolerate in practice are therefore played out in a continuum along which city authorities, the public, and graffiti and street artists move, as taste, opinion (including local and national media), city branding and development shift over time. This can represent a hardening as well as a softening and instrumental use of street art, as we have seen, increasingly used in city branding and place-making efforts and strategies. The public is of course no longer homogenous as major cosmopolitan cities and historic towns mix tourists and a range of business, education and leisure visitors with residents and commuting workers from many countries with differing aesthetic and moral positions. The perspective of a say, an overseas tourist to street art/graffiti may be one of attraction, branded image, signifier of a cool place – or one of fear, decline and poor aesthetic value/appeal. To a resident, the same images may form part of their everyday experience, represent local identity (theirs or others – good, bad or indifferent), or even align with the visitors view.

Figure 13.5 Construction hoarding, Madrid; Graffiti art on base of former Shell HQ, Amsterdam © the author
It is more likely, however, that the local resident will engage in a deeper, knowing way, depending on the length of time the graffiti has been there, where it is placed (i.e. on what type of building/structure) and its meaning to them, if any. Graffiti and street art are certainly increasingly identified with a ‘sense of place’ than was the case before – aside from the previous tags and territorial/gang variety which are more likely to be cleaned up by city authorities. The attraction of place to graffiti artists is reciprocal. Cities in flux such as post-reunification Berlin are perceived as a ‘graffiti Mecca of the urban art world . . . the most “bombed” city on Europe’ (Trice, in Arms, 2011). Here its acceptance/condonement has been associated with Berlin’s designation as UNESCO City of Design and as a growing cultural tourist destination, which is in part fuelled by this urban image of street creativity. This includes international artists, including graffiti artists whose work moves from street to gallery to street and of course, via social media. In cities such as Sydney, the creative class discourse (Florida, 2005) and policies towards public art has also provided ‘opportunities to resignify graffiti as productive creative practice’ (McAuliffe, 2012: p. 189).

**Place branding**

Models of city and place branding generally draw their references from product and corporate branding as an extension of marketing strategies that address the product life cycle decline-renewal challenge (Butler, 1980). In this sense, towns and cities, and specific areas felt to be in need of regeneration and renewal that face post-industrial or other structural socio-economic change, have been presented with the branding option as a response to the competitive-authentic city dialectic. How this is achieved and sustained is the stuff of city branding literature with results reflected in proprietorial branding and related indices, league tables and measurement formula.

Here the various models attempt to disaggregate or ‘reverse engineer’ the key factors that provide the brand (marketing) mix – the elements that together present the brand value and power of a place. These combine hard and soft infrastructure with historical and cultural amenities and qualities – which themselves are hard to quantify and ascribe values to – values that also vary according to the viewpoint of resident, visitor, investor, media and politician. As Zenker maintains (2011), place identity (a wider concept than the ‘brand’) influences the perception of the target audience, however prior perceptions (and their historic and contemporary sources) also influence the identity of a place as seen both internally and externally, and these are often reinforced through images of cityscapes, including graffiti. In urban space, and therefore in place-making efforts, the ‘social production’ that Lefebvre conceived (1974) also stresses the essential experiential nature of the relationship with our everyday environment, and our identification with discrete places and spaces. In this sense we do not ‘use’ space or our urban environment as ‘consumers’ (e.g. of branded products), but we experience it individually, productively (i.e. work) and collectively, albeit with diminishing influence over the (re)construction of the public spaces we inhabit – including the presence of graffiti.

In city branding models, the cityscape (or ‘urban landscape’) is characterised in several ways, as ‘place physics’ (Anholt, 2006) and ‘spatial picture’ (Grabow, 1998). Kotler et al. (1999) prioritise design (‘place as character’) as distinct from ‘attractions’ in their place marketing approach, while Ashworth and Voogd (1990) first proposed a ‘geographical marketing mix’ to capture the ‘whole entity of place-products’ (Kavaratzis, 2005) with ‘spatial-functional’ measures one of four instruments in this mix. However, despite the physical imagery and changing cityscapes strongly associated with city and place branding and destination marketing, it is interesting to note that in Zenker’s analysis of eighteen place branding studies between 2005–10 (2011), architecture, buildings and city spaces were largely absent in the brand elements cited. The surveys on which
these studies were based tended to focus on generalised or intangible associations (culture, historical, buzz etc.) rather than specific physical or spatial attributes. What is becoming evident however is that graffiti and street art have become established visual forms which cities both adopt and project as part of their destination marketing mix. Street art is now an emerging strategy for place-making and branding particular areas, which takes it out of its crimogenic roots. An example of newly-branded creative industry quarters in London are therefore described here (and see Evans, 2014) – where street art both defines a particular district and destination and reveals its importance in effectively showcasing a range of graffiti artists.

**Place-making through graffiti art**

**Digital Shoreditch, London**

The pattern of technology districts adopting the prefix ‘Silicon’ has accelerated over the last decade. This is a case of place and ‘hard branding’ (Evans, 2003) through the hope value associated with emulating Silicon Valley or ‘Silicon Somewheres’ (Florida, 2005). Unlike the microchip and hardware manufacturing sectors however, these new media clusters are a digital-creative hybrid producing the cultural content that drives the numerous online platforms, web-based services and mobile devices. Clusters that have evolved more organically, to those envisioned through government investment and development areas, can be seen at various scales – both regional and in highly concentrated spatial geographies. Examples include Silicon Fen (Cambridge, UK) and Silicon Glen (Dundee, Scotland), to local hubs where ICT firms often co-locate with creative and other advanced producer and financial services. Examples of the latter include Silicon Sentier, Paris; Silicon Allee, Berlin; Silicon Alley, New York – and Silicon Roundabout or Digital Shoreditch, in East London. This latter creative-digital district (Foord, 2013) presents an interesting city branding case, located in a city fringe area historically non-descript, with a low income/deprived resident community, essentially a working area of the city untouched by the visitor economy or more conspicuous cultural consumption. Its cultural workspace tradition dates back several centuries to crafts (jewellery, metalwork), printing and publishing, and fashion and textile sweatshops, with an established artist community occupying cheaper studio spaces.

This low cost cultural economy provided crucial elements in the area’s transformation to one of the most vibrant creative quarters in the world. This now contains a high concentration of new media and digital firms, alternative clubs and venues for music, art and independent retail outlets and a high concentration of digital creatives. This profile and reputation has created a demand for hosting key design and digital events and festivals from the London Design Festival to the week-long annual Digital Shoreditch Festival which was first held in 2011 attracting 2,000 participants/visitors rising to 15,000 in 2013. The image of this neighbourhood combines post-industrial use of workshops and factories, with small crafts and retail outlets, social and warehouse loft apartments and extensive graffiti art on this historic mix of buildings and walls. This has offered an effective graffiti street laboratory within which aspiring artists such as Banksy and Stik have first experimented (Figure 13.6).

A new ‘destination’ has thus been created – several boutique hotels have opened in recent years including the ACE hotel, the first outside of the USA (originating in Seattle), designed with materials produced locally from specialist bricks, tiles to lighting and with photographic references in bedrooms to the building’s music hall past. As an indication of the importance of street art, several companies provide guided Shoreditch Street Art tours, with online galleries and listing of artist/artwork profiles: ‘in Shoreditch art is an open air affair. From huge murals
on buildings [see “Bees” Figure 13.7] to tiny stickers you’ll spot everywhere, the streets are fair

game. Who knows, you might even spot a new Banksy’ (Shoreditch Urban Walkabout, May–

November 2014).

Specialist galleries and agencies also provide commissioning services for clients wishing to

hire graffiti and street artists for temporary or permanent work – such as Graffiti Life and Graffiti

Kings. The emergence of the professional graffiti artist has therefore arrived. The strategic

importance attached to this sub-regional cluster and its role in the new digital industries was

also recognised in 2010 when the UK government designated the wider area anchored in the

city fringe by this creative industries quarter, as ‘Tech City’ – a swathe connecting this quarter

further east to the Olympic Park, representing the physical the legacy from the London 2012

Summer Games. The event site, now designated the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park which
re-opened in Spring 2014, is spatially and socially divided between the new Stratford International City quarter leading to the Olympic stadia and newly landscaped park, and its canalside neighbour, Hackney Wick, a former industrial workshop district with social housing and waterside heritage.

**Hackney Wick, London**

At Hackney Wick, a high concentration of practicing artists work from studios, among temporary gallery spaces and a cluster of industrial buildings and canal infrastructure. This concentration has been accelerated as studios have been demolished to make way for the Olympic facilities and park and new housing in the post-event legacy phase, and as the cost of workspace has increased in other parts of east London (priced out by commercial housing and hi-tech markets) – including Shoreditch. This landscape and industrial canvas has provided an opportunity for graffiti artists to create large scale works and also to express their displeasure at the gentrification of this neighbourhood, which may also lead to their eventual displacement (Figure 13.8).

The area hosts an annual arts festival, Hackney WICKed, and is promoted as a visitor destination by the local authority, the Canals and Rivers Trust, and the Olympic Park authority, who see their mission as ‘stitching together’ these divided neighbourhoods and communities: ‘through design quality to create a unique and inspiring place for events, leisure, sport and culture, a hub for enterprise and innovation, and diverse sustainable communities’ (LLDC, 2014: p. 5). The agencies that control and legitimise this newly promoted district have also commissioned graffiti artists to adorn local buildings as part of a curated project which engaged international (as opposed to local) artists – for example the Canal Project (Figure 13.9)

This project was however met with outrage by local (graffiti) artists and residents, following what had already been a graffiti clean-up of the area prior to the 2012 Olympics. To add insult to injury, several artists from Brazil, The Netherlands, Sweden and Italy were funded to produce artworks on these same buildings. In the words of the funding agency: ‘we unashamedly wanted to showcase the best international artists and transform this part of the canal into a destination for street art – I hope people will come on boat tours to see the work’. But as local graffiti artist Sweet Toof says: ‘with the commercialisation of street art it’s becoming pay-as-you-go wall – every surface sold off to the highest bidder’ (Wainwright, 2013). Place-making which adopts graffiti as a distinction and vernacular expression will therefore need to develop strategies which treat such work as part of the area’s built heritage and community culture, as Smith observes: ‘It’s as if the street art has been given the responsibility of preserving the Wick’s...”

Figure 13.8 Graffiti art, Hackney Wick © the author
soul as it’s squeezed on all sides by colossal tectonic pressures of redevelopment’ (Introduction, in Lewisohn, 2013: p. 5).

**Conclusion**

Graffiti and Street art has a complex and ambiguous place in the city. Clearly a duality now exists between ‘high’ street art and ‘(un)popular’ graffiti. Technically an illegal activity unless fully commissioned and authorised by property owners and other stakeholders (e.g. transport and local authorities), condonement of street art is evident in cities and areas of a city where either control has diminished or a general laissez faire situation exists. This is evident currently in cities where economic decline and socio-political fragmentation has reduced the power and resources for clean-up or enforcement (e.g. Athens – see Avramidis, 2012, and Madrid). Here the vacuum this has created is also fuelled by political response/resistance to the governance deficit and economic impacts, (e.g. unemployment, debt, cuts in services). Other cities equally affected by the severe economic recession have adopted a more creative approach, such as Lisbon, reviewed earlier.

Attitudes of local police are also variable and their stance on graffiti and street art can be determined by a number of factors. In the USA, research on a mid-Atlantic police department found that the race of police officer and the shift (e.g. night) effected the attitude towards graffiti crime, and therefore towards perpetrators and enforcement (Ross and Wright, 2014). Safety Neighbourhood Teams in London also follow a priority crime regime, as a form of resource efficiency and policy/political targeting (e.g. burglary, mugging), leaving graffiti deprioritised unless literally ‘caught in the act’ or in response to complaints. This contrasts with the British Transport Police who operate a zero tolerance regime, recording and attributing tags/pieces to identify subsequent offences and provide evidence to support prosecution of what they term ‘serious vandals’. However, in areas undergoing transformation or interstitial zones (often post-industrial), where landowners are distant or unconcerned (and property values not threatened), graffiti and street art flourishes, as in Hackney Wick, London. More cosmopolitan
neighbourhoods such as Beyoğlu in Istanbul also provide a concentration of street art in a more liberal, if contested, area than permitted elsewhere in the city (Erdogan, 2014). In other cities, areas such as Amsterdam’s main university district, is subject to extensive graffiti, indicating a combination of tolerance, complacency and place-making by its student residents. This is also evident in more protest-oriented university zones in cities such as Athens, but this also extends to areas around government buildings and conflict zones, including sites where the death of protesters has occurred (Avramidis, 2012). Elsewhere, street art is seen in commercially-driven commissioning, installations and contemporary art interventions in downtown, retail and in other locations undergoing regeneration (e.g. Dumbo, Brooklyn, New York), particularly in temporary sites. Graffiti still persists however, as a dominant image in derelict sites and in ‘accessible’ transport facilities, and is associated in this case with decline and redundancy. In other areas, street art reflects a creative quarterisation of a neighbourhood and effectively helps to add value to its image and distinctive brand.

Street art has thus on the one hand joined the canon of contemporary art, and the art market (if treated with caution by graffiti artists themselves – Brighenti, 2010) and been appropriated in commercial advertising and media, and on the other hand graffiti in its basic form, continues to inhabit the everyday city environment as a low level ‘noise’ and nuisance for many, as well as an endless canvas for its producers. An indication of graffiti and street art’s arrival and enviable status is provided by established contemporary British artist, Grayson Perry, on the launch of the Art Everywhere scheme which seeks to place selected artwork images over 30,000 billboard and poster sites across the UK: ‘given that street art was everywhere these days, it was nice to put gallery art on the streets’ (Brown, 2014: p. 11) – or if you can’t beat them, join them.

Notes

1 Cronin suggests that outdoor advertising and graffiti should be studied together, in terms of their ubiquity and visual impact (2008).
3 The curator of the Canal Project was Cedar Lewisohn, who also curated the 2008 Tate Modern Graffiti Exhibition.
5 Merrill goes further, suggesting that graffiti and street art should be perceived as an example of ‘alternative heritage’ whose authenticity might only be assured by avoiding the application of official heritage frameworks (2014).

References

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