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Graffiti/street art in Tokyo and surrounding districts

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Introduction

The history of graffiti and street art in Japan, and Tokyo, in particular, is interesting and colorful. It is bounded by particular developments that occurred among the artists themselves, the community in which it appeared, and local government reactions. This chapter explains these developments including the Sakuragichō neighborhood as a “Street Art Sanctuary,” one of the most important (but now dormant) locations for these activities.

In order to understand graffiti and street art in contemporary Japan, one must keep in mind that the country is regarded as a society that has already shifted from a “disciplinary society” to a “control society” (Deleuze, 1990). It is also seen as a post-modern “risk society,” “surveillance society,” and/or “dual society” associated with an audit culture, in which people tend to make rules by anticipating someone else’s challenge in advance in order to avoid risks. That means that those who do not adopt a risk-avoidance strategy are expelled from mainstream society or are seen as deviant people who struggle to find a way to relate to society. In such a society, graffiti writers and street artists as practitioners face difficulties in imaging and finding meaningful connections with society, positively or even negatively. Thus, the essence of the graffiti-creativity of deviation would be forced to branch off when the connection to society is refused. As a result, the energy of the writer works within the subculture for the maintenance of the relationship with their companions, or it works outwardly to sublimate graffiti into art, the only alternative being to quit as a graffiti writer. The following discussion reviews the history of graffiti/street art in Japan from 1990s through the mid-2000 to present.

Growth of graffiti/street art and its regulation

Developing stage (until mid-2000)

Graffiti expanded in Japan among young people in the 1990s and with the large-scale graffiti exhibition called “X-Color/Graffiti in Japan” held in 2005, graffiti was popularized among the general public to some extent. An online search of Asahi Shinbun (one of the largest and most prestigious newspapers in Japan) for articles containing the keyword “graffiti” and “graffiti damage” from the 1970s to 2000 generates the matrix as shown in Table 26.1.
The number of both keywords stayed low in 1970s and 1980s. However, they increased sharply in 1990s. This could mean that the amount of graffiti increased suddenly in the 1990s, or perhaps that people started paying attention to graffiti as a social problem in this period.

It was not until 1982 that the mainstream news media first considered graffiti not merely illegal activity, but as art (Asahi, June 26, 1982). Graffiti was seen as a leading-edge art scene at the time. In that context, in 1983, Wild Style, one of the most famous movies dealing with the graffiti scene in New York City, was released.

In Japan, writing graffiti without permission is illegal and the criminal law Article 260 (Damage to Buildings) or 261 (Damage to Property) can be applied. In those days, police regulation was not very strict, so everyone was able to write graffiti on walls inside and outside parks almost freely, even during daytime (Studio Voice, 2005: p. 38). Around 1995, the number of tags written by graffiti writers increased sharply (Asahi, November 21, 1995b). Around 1997, most of the street art on the wall of Sakuragicho changed to graffiti (Studio Voice, 2005: p. 38).

The great popularity of the graffiti movement was sustained by the influence of shops, magazines, and videos. In 1994, a graffiti shop named “Funk Crib” opened at Shimokitazawa, a district of western Tokyo known as a “town for young people.” The shop played an important role in forming an early graffiti scene in Japan, because it not only sold items for doing graffiti like cans of spray paint, but also provided a place for exchange of information among the graffiti writers. A Japanese subculture fashion magazine Fine published articles explaining how to write graffiti. In 1999, Kazemagazine, the first all-graffiti magazine (which is still in publication), was issued by the writer KRESS. Another graffiti magazine, HS magazine, (also still in publication) was issued by the writer VERY in 2004. Other subculture magazines, like Relax and Studio Voice, featured graffiti sometimes, though they did not specialize in graffiti, rather treating it as one of the various youth subcultural activities.

Also, many graffiti images were shown in promotional videos for hip-hop songs. Many young Japanese people saw graffiti through these videos and even though they did not have enough graffiti writing knowledge, some practiced by themselves using trial and error.

In 1996, the first graffiti exhibition in Japan, “Graffiti Expo ‘96” was held. The program included an event called “Graffiti Art Discussion” in which the participants argued about the graffiti scene in Japan and famous graffiti writers such as KAZZ and TOMI-E were criticized by writers who were proud to call their own graffiti vandalism, classifying works by KAZZ and TOMI-E as commercial (Fujita, 1996: p. 32). However, KAZZ once explained in an interview with Asahi Shinbun that his motivation was not a desire to struggle for power or to send a message to society; rather, he just wanted to stand out and create masterpieces (Asahi, November 18, 1995a). In this sense, the criticism of his graffiti-writing seems to miss the point slightly.

As the amount of graffiti increased in society, the values and motivations of the graffiti writers were challenged on the issue of the illegality of street art and graffiti respectively. In 2005,
however, a turning point in the Japanese graffiti scene occurred. During this year, a large-scale exhibition “X-Color/Graffiti in Japan Exhibition” (hereinafter called “X-Color”) was held in Mito City, Ibaraki prefecture, located in the northeastern side of Tokyo. At this event, the organizers did not treat graffiti as an underground subculture or as vandalism. They introduced graffiti as a new form of artistic expression. Kenji Kubota, the curator of the museum, explained that the aim of the show was “to introduce the present scene of graffiti in Japan” and to demonstrate “what graffiti is.” For this event, forty graffiti writers participated from all parts of Japan. During X-Color, in addition to the walls inside the museum, in order to change the negative image of graffiti among ordinary people, the management of the museum asked permission of local residents to use their walls as surfaces to paint graffiti on. The local citizens were happy to have their walls painted.

**Saturated stage (after mid-2000s)**

Since the mid-2000s, as more young people have taken up graffiti, the values of graffiti writers have diversified. Graffiti is no longer considered as part of an underground youth subculture anymore. The graffiti scene in Japan has reached its “saturated stage.”

Before, only the graffiti that was done illegally was considered authentic. However, now it became common for graffiti writers to have exhibitions at galleries as artists do. For example, in 2009, the writer QP who participated in “X-Color” had a one-man show named “Oykotkyoykot” at a gallery in Shirokane, Tokyo.

At the same time, even famous graffiti writers did not stop doing illegal graffiti. It is not only because they are fascinated by doing graffiti illegally, but also because they think that illegal actions form their identity. Therefore, graffiti fans would most likely criticize someone who does not act on the street illegally and yet calls himself a graffiti writer. Thus, nowadays, writers show a keen interest in legal acts such as exhibitions and live painting demonstrations, but they still base their identity on illegal actions.

Many writers around Tokyo form and belong to “crews.” The crews often make nocturnal raids for “bombing” their tags in downtown areas such as Shibuya, Harajuku, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro in Tokyo. They also go to the western suburb of Tokyo where there is more space left for doing graffiti and they can spend more time to make a “piece,” that is, more complicated and larger-scale graffiti designs without being bothered by the police. Usually after they have drawn a piece in the suburbs, writers post it on the web by using social network services like Tumblr or Instagram and share it with other writers. These social media connect writers even if they live far apart. Because of the development of internet technology, young people can easily access the latest scene of worldwide graffiti and then they can start their own career as a graffiti writer.

**Styles of Japanese graffiti**

Though this recent phenomenon improved the standard of Japanese graffiti, it has also brought a formalization of style. Here we will discuss two different reactions to this stylistic impasse. One is to seek a unique Japanese style of graffiti. For example, the writer DICE insists that Japanese people have to do graffiti written in Japanese and he usually uses katakana syllabaries to write his tags (Nagasawa & papier colle, 2007: p. 94). Occasionally, as in Figure 26.1, people will even write a tag written in kanji pictograms (see Figure 26.1). For other examples, the writer BEL×2 drew a Japanese monstrous being called a Youkai at “X-Color” and the writer SKLAWL is strongly influenced by Japanese Anime such as Gundam.
The other way involves expanding the styles of expression. Some of the graffiti writers feel bored by the formalized expression of graffiti and later on become street artists. For example, the street artist named JON JON GREEN says that he is interested in graffiti but at the same time, he feels it lacks uniqueness and seems boring (Nagasawa & papier colle, 2007: p. 79). During an interview with street artist O¯ yama Enrico Isamu, he mentioned that we should not define graffiti as an illegal act, but that we needed to explore the way that graffiti had adapted through time. So he is further developing his idea of “post graffiti.” In this idea, he is seeking an updated graffiti style which is not get involved in the consumerism but has a connection with the society.1

Ethnography of graffiti today in Tokyo

Where is graffiti found? Filling “the gap” of urban space

One of the most well-known places where graffiti has been located has been in Shimokitazawa, near Shibuya, Tokyo, where many trendy shops such as second-hand clothing stores, and night clubs attract young people (Yamakoshi, 2010). A contrast exists in this area between two adjacent areas – namely Kitazawa 2-chôme (city district), a commercial area, where many stores stand along the alley and where pedestrians enjoy shopping, and Daita 2-chôme, a quiet residential area. Despite the two areas being adjacent, far more graffiti is found at Kitazawa 2-chôme.

The most popular spot where graffiti is written is on the outside walls of stores. Much of this graffiti and tags tend to be written at spots concealed from pedestrians like drainage pipes and switchboard boxes. Other popular spots are public properties like telegraph poles, vending machines, bulletin boards, etc. At Daita 2-chôme, we can see graffiti and tags mainly on public properties and partly on the walls of old or abandoned private buildings. Graffiti writers prefer to put their tags on places of unclear ownership and on old places rather than on newly-built locations.

Motivation for writers: solidarity inside the crew

In 2010, during fieldwork in Chiba city, one hour away from Tokyo by train, Yamakoshi met a man named Takashi. Besides working for a hip-hop clothing store, Takashi also organizes a
graffiti crew along with his friends. When Takashi was fourteen years old, he saw a hip-hop music promotional DVD and was impressed by the graffiti written on the wall in the background. The next day, he went to the general store to buy cans of spray paint. When he was a high school student, he was arrested for writing a tag on the wall of the police station at Chiba city. Afterwards he went to Sakuragicho, where he met KAZZ by chance. Greatly excited, he swore to produce even better works than KAZZ and become the best graffiti writer in the land.

At the end of 2010, Takashi organized a crew named “ESC.” One of the members, Sōta, got to know Takashi through a social networking service. The other two members are Daisuke, who was working as a chef at an Italian restaurant, and a junior high school student Justin. They visited the shop where Takashi worked and got to know each other.

The values and purposes for doing graffiti are different from one writer to another, even within the same crew, but they often go out together for bombing. Takashi explained about his feelings when he goes out bombing his tag. “Yeah, it’s fantastic. I’m so concentrated; I often check where other writers’ tags are written.” Takashi also said that he wanted to get his name known by other writers. In fact, the perception of graffiti depends on each writer. One day Sōta said “When I go bombing, I am worried about someone informing the police so I often feel scared; I have never been excited.” From his comment, it sounded as if he was not enjoying or did not feel excited about bombing. He added: “It’s rather for myself. I want to write where I hang out, because I feel like my tags protect me.” For a non-writer, it is not easy to understand his feelings. However, it is clear that we should not interpret the purpose of the graffiti writers simply as resistance to society.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The place where tag was written</th>
<th>Kitazawa 2-Chome (A)</th>
<th>Percentage (A)/(B)</th>
<th>Daita 2-Chome (C)</th>
<th>Percentage (C)/(D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walls</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switchboards</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drainage pipes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of tags written on the stores</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switchboards</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of tags written on the apartment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public telephone booth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vending machines</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph poles</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire hydrant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community bulletin board</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carpark</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the others</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>合計</td>
<td>482(B)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27(D)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 26.2 A piece by Japanese writer BLES from ESC crew (photo taken by BLES)

Figure 26.3 Other pieces written by Japanese writers (photo taken by BLES)
Hanging out with a crew member is one way to avoid the risk of being arrested. The story below is about a day in 2013 when Takashi took Sōta and Justin out to go graffiti bombing together.

When we were writing on a wall near a downtown intersection, someone reported us to the police. I was still writing when Sōta told me the police was coming. I grabbed my backpack and we ran away. A few minutes later, about four police cars and three police motorcycles came . . . and also about five policemen on foot. I drew their attention and let Sōta and Justin ran away while I dashed to a nearby field. There was a kindergarten and a bus was parked there so I hid under the bus. After a few minutes, I called Sōta and asked him if he was OK. Sōta told me that he asked his mom to pick him up (laughs) . . . his mom was very understanding about the situation. Afterwards my mom called me on my phone, and scolded me: ‘You did it again!’ (laughs) I left my helmet and wallet in the glove compartment of my motorcycle parked near the crossroads. So the police identified me. Yeah, it was terrible. Later, I washed my hands to clean the paint off and went to the police station with Sōta to take my wallet back.

The incident described by Takashi sounds just like a movie scene. The police pressed Takashi and Sōta with questions, but since the police did not see the scene of the crime, the graffiti writers narrowly escaped being arrested. The interesting thing is that each member has a role inside of the crew. In their case, Takashi is a leader and he protected the other two members. The tension through the graffiti practice associated with this kind of self-sacrifice develops a strong sense of trust and bonding among the members (see Table 26.3).

The reaction from society

Starting in and around 1995, because of the increase of this type of art in Tokyo, the local government began to crack down gradually on graffiti. As a result, many graffiti writers in Tokyo scattered to outlying areas around Tokyo. In Japan, illegal graffiti or street art is rarely protected by the community or the local government even if it has a high level of art skill. Any graffiti tends to be erased without distinction. The tendency of exclusion accelerated toward the 2010s.

In 2010, the Office for Youth Affairs and Public Safety in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government released a booklet “Case Studies of Graffiti Removal” to promote the voluntary efforts (see www.metro.tokyo.jp/INET/OSHIRASE/2010/03/DATA/20k3h300.pdf#search). According to the document, graffiti ruins the appearance of the city and increases the number of criminal activities. It is important to remove graffiti as soon as possible when people find it.

### Table 26.3 Profile of members from the ESC crew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Carrier</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Family situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Takashi</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Shop assistant</td>
<td>University dropout</td>
<td>Living with his grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sōta</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>Currently under way</td>
<td>Living with his mother and younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daisuke</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>Living with his parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Junior high school student</td>
<td>Currently underway</td>
<td>Living with his parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Tokyo Metropolitan Government recommended establishing community organizations in order to remove graffiti. Meanwhile they offered support like sending experts and supplies for graffiti removal. During the period from 2008 to 2010, the makeup of graffiti-removing teams was notable: Volunteers from among local residents accounted for 47 percent and far exceeded the 19 percent who were professional cleaners working for the local government, staff, and experts hired by the government, although the other 34 percent did not take any action. Moreover, ordinances to ban graffiti were enacted by some municipalities.

In Shimokitazawa, local residents made a voluntary group for the removal of graffiti in 2002 and they have been working at crime prevention activities. Setagaya Ward (the local authority) pays their expenses such as the cost of cleaning supplies. Their activities do not just involve cleaning up the town; they also have an event named “Shutter art in Shimokitazawa.” At this event, they ask art school students to paint on shop shutters to discourage graffiti.

On the other hand, some efforts for inclusion of graffiti are found. Since the 2000s, in order to protect high quality but illegal graffiti, a preservation movement has developed. The Nonprofit Organization KOMPOSITION launched a project named “Legal Wall.” In this project, they offer the opportunity of activities to young street artists who have skill and the will to create but little or no chance to do so. KOMPOSITION negotiates with the government and local residents in order to get a wall where the artists can draw. After that, KOMPOSITION offers the artists a budget to cover their expenses for painting on the walls.

The first project was a wall inside Miyashita Park in Shibuya. It started in 2004, through negotiations with Shibuya ward office to get permission to use this wall as a “Legal Wall.” However, it was not easy. Members of KOMPOSITION kept cleaning the park for a while. They finally got permission from the ward office, and street artists made a mural there.

In the same year, they also made a mural on a wall along the Shibuya River depicting a dragon god cleaning the water of the river. In 2006, they made a large scale legal mural called “Sakuragichō on the Wall” on the exterior of a commercial building in Yokohama. To date they have succeeded in creating more than fifteen works of legal street art. In 2014, however, KOMPOSITION announced that there would be no further projects. According to the group’s representative, Motokazu Terai, their experiences had shown that these projects require a huge amount of effort to sustain. For example, when they made a mural along the wall of the Shibuya River, local residents objected that the color tone did not fit the surrounding environment. And in another case, the artist refused to submit a sketch in advance. Also, the cost of making the murals far exceeded their estimates. Artists seeking freedom of expression tend to have a different aesthetic conception to that of local residents. Also, some artists and writers suspect that KOMPOSITION is trying to trick and manipulate them for the benefit of the local government. The attempt of KOMPOSITION to build a bridge between the government and the artists leaves many problems and is currently stagnant.

Rise and fall of the “sanctuary” of the street art/graffiti

The symbolic way of examining the above-mentioned history of graffiti and street art in Tokyo is by looking at Sakuragichō in Yokohama city (a city adjacent to Tokyo), a mere 30 minute train ride from Tokyo. Not long ago, there existed a “Street Art Sanctuary” where artists gathered to collaboratively create a series of murals. Sakuragichō was one of the best places to find street art in Japan. A large wall which runs beneath the elevated railway and continues all the way to Yokohama station provides an excellent location for both street artists and graffiti writers to do their work. A famous street artist by the name of Rocco Satoshi was allegedly one of the pioneers of this place. Rocco started creating street art using chalks in the late 1970s.
Until the late 1980s, Rocco worked alone. It was after the late 1980s that other artists started to join Rocco, crafting their own art alongside his creations. Finally, this place was filled with artists’ works and started to call a sanctuary of street art. The San Diego Contemporary Art Exhibition which was realized with the collaboration between artists from United States and Japanese held there in 1992. It was a symbolic event recognizing this street art sanctuary. This event was held for the 35 years anniversary of the sister-city relationship between San Diego city and Yokohama city. Artists from United States and Japan, as well as students of the local junior high school joined this event and made fifteen murals. The press reports helped to disseminate the image of the Art Sanctuary of Sakuragichō.

From the mid-1990s graffiti became dramatically more popular in Japan, and many writers, both Japanese and foreign, found their way to Sakuragichō to leave their work. People, therefore, began to refer to Sakuragichō as a “Graffiti Sanctuary,” rather than a “Street Art Sanctuary.” However, the development of graffiti was not appreciated by Rocco. He commented that “They looked all the same and there was no uniqueness,” and “It seemed to be somewhat violent, and it even looked ugly (see www.rocco-zoo.com/column.html).”

However, in 2008 the local government finally banned all street art and graffiti from the “street art sanctuary” and expunged all the existing works. Around the mid-2000s, the local government started to overtly control the activities of street artists and graffiti writers, although the local...
government had been concerned about the increase in graffiti since the mid-1990s. Their control methods changed from using art to combat graffiti, to complete removal. Before the complete removal, there were two notable incidents of control by using art. One was an event called “ART-16” held in 2004. This event brought Rocco, as well as a collection of other artists chosen by a contest, to paint over the illegally created graffiti, replacing it instead with a new, collaborative mural. Another was an event called “Sakuragicho on the Wall,” held in 2007, in which KOMPOSITION cooperated with local artists to create a new mural on the wall.

**Conclusion: rethinking the challenge of street again**

In a present “control society,” there is no doubt that embattled graffiti writers and street artists face difficulties in finding meaningful connections with society positively or even negatively. This means that urban streets are almost perfectly controlled by the administrative units such as a metropolitan government. In other words, the street almost all lost its creative feature based on resistance, deviation, violence, and mobility, the code of which is different from the home-oriented code of decency. This stagnant situation has made graffiti writing in the street lead to involution. Where has streetness gone? In this connection, we once again need to remind the vivid 1990s’ scene in which street art challenged against the controlling power and streetness was living.

In the 1990s, there were many cardboard houses made by homeless people in the underground shopping area of JR Shinjuku Station West Exit, following the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government regarded cardboard houses as obstacles to pedestrians and made regular efforts to remove them.
In this situation, Také, an art school student at the time, got together with some friends to paint colorful illustrations on the walls of the cardboard houses. According to him, he did not have any conscious aim at the beginning of his action, but later realized that as the project progressed, the increasing number of paintings had started to enrich the atmosphere of the cardboard houses.

In 1996, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government forcibly removed the cardboard houses on the pretext that they impeded the construction of the moving walkway. They were moved to another square, also within the precincts of Shinjuku station (Mōri, 2009: pp. 155–157). The authorities also set up “Art objects” to prevent the re-construction of the cardboard houses. Reacting to it, Také placed other objects he had made over the existing “Art objects.” But security guards removed them within a few hours. On August 19, 1996, he painted directly on the “Art objects,” and got arrested for property damage. On February 7, 1998, a fire occurred at “the cardboard house village” and two people died. Using the fire as justification, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government removed all the cardboard houses from the square (Mōri, 2003: p. 172). Since then, most of the homeless people there have moved to other places.

In an interview with the magazine Gendai Shiso (Contemporary Thought), Také mentioned his memory of the government announcement on the removal of the cardboard houses that he heard at the underground shopping area of JR Shinjuku Station at the time. It said “We will remove the obstacles to return the street to how it should be.” However, Také wondered “Originally the street has various functions like spending your time, people passing each other, meeting or chatting to stop and so on, doesn’t it?” (Také & Ogura, 1997: p. 59). He believed that removing the cardboard houses was taking the area away from the original purpose of a street, rather than returning it to some kind of “original” condition.

It should be noted that this unique resistance of Také as a street artist happened just at the time when graffiti was becoming popular in Japan. The awareness that Také raised in the interview gets right to the kernel of the discussion about graffiti and street art. It tells that the distinction between illegal graffiti and legal art does not matter that much: What matters is the real aims of those practices and activities, which lie in the deeper dimension of what the street is.

As Také mentioned, the street inherently embodies hybridity. Since we are living in an era when there are no bright prospects in the movement to “reclaim the streets” and the neoliberalist tendency towards “killing the street” is steadily gaining in strength (Davis, 1999), seeking the inherent nature of the street in terms of hybridity and ambivalence (Sekine, 2009; Salzbrunn & Sekine, 2011) may sound impossible and anachronistic. As Ferrell points out that the exclusionary controls and commercialization often destroy the history of alternative culture (Ferrell, 2002: p. 191). The contemporary society precisely because of that repressive direction, we must rethink deeply once again the features of the street. Thus, the necessity of rethinking and reclaiming the street is intensifying. The dilemma of current graffiti writers and street artists is our torn dilemma in general. There is an iron law that new creativities are born only in the liminal domain of predicament. To live the ambivalent process before asking for results or to uninterruptedly continue “becoming the street” (Sekine, 2014a, 2014b) is all we can do and should do from now on. The deep ambivalence of the death of street is the new starting point for reclaiming the street today. At that point, the core group of graffiti writers will have to hold onto the principle of illegal graffiti drawing.

Notes
1 Personal conversation November 9, 2009.
2 Personal conversation September 19, 2013.
References

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