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Jeffrey Ian Ross

How American movies depict graffiti and street art

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How American movies depict graffiti and street art

Jeffrey Ian Ross

Introduction

Since the turn of the last century, films, movies, and cinematic productions have become powerful methods of explanation and interpretation of contemporary phenomena. Not only can this medium assist viewers to understand these phenomena, but it can also influence and/or reinforce their opinions. Films establish expectations for the audience and often reflect dominant stereotypes (Monaco, 1977). They also promote and reinforce myths and misconceptions about people and activities, and may affect policy responses (Rafter, 2006, 2007; Rafter & Brown, 2011). In short, movies are conduits for framing issues that are dominant in social and political arenas (Yar, 2010; Welsh et al., 2011).

Since the advent of contemporary graffiti (i.e. post 1970s), numerous films have used graffiti/street art as backdrops or individuals who engage in graffiti/street art as characters to tell a story, while other movies have attempted to chronicle graffiti/street art and practitioners in different locations. These films, both fictional (also referred to as commercial, feature-length, Hollywood, and popular) and documentary, may contain images of graffiti and street art, as well as interviews with the individuals who either engage in or respond to this activity. Not only have many of these films been screened at movie festivals and local theatres, but they have also been available through television programing and various content providers on the World Wide Web. Despite the improved access to this medium, we do not have a good understanding of the information and themes that these movies have presented and portrayed, and to what extent they have been a reflection of reality or have created and/or perpetuated myths.

In order to correct this imbalance, this chapter analyses fictional/commercial and documentary movies that have been produced on graffiti/street art.

Method

A thorough search of the internet was performed in order to identify English-language, American-made movies that disproportionately focus on graffiti and street art. Once the films were selected, the researcher asked scholars and other experts who specialise in this subject matter if they could add to his working list of movies. While not all movies added by the experts...
focused predominately on graffiti and street art, or were easily accessible, the investigator was able to narrow down a manageable viewing list, and he then systematically watched these movies, paying careful attention to identify prevalent themes.

From 1979 to 2014, approximately twenty-two full-length English-language, American-made films depicting graffiti and/or street art and artists/writers were identified (Ross, 2015). Of this total, seven are fictional accounts (see Table 32.1), and fifteen are documentaries (see Table 32.2).

Once a potential theme was identified, the researcher established it as a category, and looked for its prevalence in all of the other movies. An attempt was made to watch these films in a chronological fashion. By viewing these films in this manner, the investigator hoped to witness the evolution of depictions of graffiti and street art. In some cases, it was necessary to watch these movies several times to better understand, categorise, and contextualise them. Finally, by limiting the framework to popular (i.e., relatively easily accessible) films and documentaries, the analysis was made more manageable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 32.1 Fictional/commercial films on graffiti/street art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreams Don’t Die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb the System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against the Wall/Quality of Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Graffiti Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimme the Loot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 32.2 Documentaries on graffiti/street art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stations of the Elevated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graffiti Verite 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piece by Piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Rash: Of Graffiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just to get a Rep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next: A Primer on Urban Painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatscru: Mural Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alter Ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful Losers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb It 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sly Artistic City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigilante Vigilante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Cool “Disco” Dan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeffrey Ian Ross
Discussion

Fictional films about graffiti/graffiti artists/writers

Introduction

Seven fictional movies featuring graffiti/street artists and themes were reviewed for this study: *Dreams Don’t Die* (1982); *Wild Style* (1983); *Bomb the System* (2002); *Against the Wall/Quality of Life* (2004); *The Graffiti Artist* (2004); *Transit* (2004); and *Gimme the Loot* (2012). The movies were analysed based on three categories: Characters, settings, and themes, and the quality of the movies was also taken into consideration.

Characters

Graffiti writers shoplift, especially spray paint

Some of the graffiti writers engage in petty crimes, like shoplifting (e.g. food) and jumping turnstiles into the subway. To support their graffiti habit and sometimes to make extra money, most of the graffiti artists steal spray paint. In *The Graffiti Artist*, along with skateboarding and graffiti writing, Nick and Jesse shoplift spray paint and steal fruit from street vendors and shopkeepers. In *Quality of Life/Against the Wall*, Curtis and a friend invent a complicated ruse in order to distract the shopkeeper in order to steal spray paint. In *Gimme the Loot*, the movie begins with a major spray paint heist and closes with Sofia assisting Malcolm steal flowers. This kind of activity is consistent with scholarly research on the criminal activity of graffiti artists (Taylor *et al.*, 2012), which suggests that stealing spray paint is both part of the initiation and maintenance process of graffiti crews.

The primary characters come from lower socio-economic backgrounds

The majority of the main characters come from poor socio-economic circumstances. In *Dreams Don’t Die*, Danny comes from a working-class family, where his mother is trying to make ends meet. In *The Graffiti Artist*, Nick lives by himself and leads a hermit-like existence where he has little food in his fridge, shoplifts food, and does not have much money on hand. In *Transit*, Ritchie lives in a small, modest house with his mother. In *Against the Wall*, although Mikey’s father runs his own small business, he is not rich by any means. In *Gimme the Loot*, based on their street talk and the final scene, we know that Malcolm and Sofia come from a lower socio-economic status. In the end, Malcolm goes home to his mother’s apartment building, which appears to be in the projects. None of the protagonists are middle class, or come from the suburbs or from families of means. The class differences between graffiti writers and outsiders are highlighted in various scenes. For example, in *Wild Style*, Raymond meets gallery owners at a party who talk to him condescendingly. The partygoers are comparatively well dressed, disproportionately white, and show minimal interest in graffiti. A similar situation occurs in *Gimme the Loot*, when Malcolm spends time with Jenny and her college-educated friends, and they talk down to him.

Graffiti artists/writers are primarily young males from selected races/ethnicities

The movies typically feature males as graffiti artists/writers, and women (mothers and girlfriends) are relegated to secondary roles. This gendered rendering of the graffiti world is consistent with early findings (Macdonald, 2003). One exception is *Wild Style*, in which Rose, Raymond’s graffiti-writing girlfriend, plays a very minor role. In *Gimme the Loot*, Sofia is paired with Malcolm and is an equal, if not more dominant, graffiti partner. Finally, Alexandra, who is Anthony “Blest” Campo’s love interest in *Bomb the System*, is a street artist who unsuccessfully tries to convince him to join her in a cross-country street art adventure.
To these movies’ credit, the protagonists span a number of races. Some are white, like Danny (Dreams Don’t Die), Curtis and Mikey (Against the Wall), and Anthony “Blest” Campo (Bomb the System). Alternatively, other primary graffiti writers are Hispanic, like Raymond (Wild Style) and Ritchie (Transit). Finally, Malcolm and Sofia in Gimme the Loot, and Justin “Buk 50” and his brother Kevin “Lune,” Anthony’s two crew members in Bomb The System, are African American. There are no Asian or American-Indian graffiti writers featured in these movies.

Finally, all of the protagonists are young (i.e. teenagers), with few of them older than their mid-twenties. None of the perpetrators are middle-aged. This runs counter to Kramer’s work (2010) on post graffiti, which reveals how graffiti, especially that which currently exists in New York City, is created by individuals from all age groups.

Graffiti writers engage in graffiti primarily for fun and to build their reputations
In almost all of the films reviewed, the writers engage in graffiti primarily for fun, the thrill of the experience, and/or to build or maintain their reputations as skilled players. This is reflected in the dialogue and actions of the protagonists, and this is why the majority of the writers become upset when their graffiti is buffed over or crossed out by rivals. In Transit, Ritchie is worried about his graffiti being crossed out by rival graffiti crews, and this leads to a battle (i.e. competition) with a rival graffiti crew. In Gimme the Loot, Sofia’s graffiti is crossed out by a rival crew and this bothers her considerably.

Most graffiti artists have one or more absentee parents
In the majority of the films, parents do not appear, are not mentioned, or provide minimal supervision of their teenagers/young adults. In Dreams Don’t Die, Danny’s mother works long hours in a sweat shop. Although she knows of his graffiti activity and even warns him that he will be arrested, she needs to work extra hours to pay the bills, thus she is not home when he returns from school. In Transit, we briefly see Ritchie’s mother twice: When she warns him that is going to get killed, and in the final scene, as she grieves his death. In Against the Wall, although Mikey’s father is present, we learn that his mother has left. In contrast, we never hear about or see Mikey’s friend Curtis’s parents. In The Graffiti Artist, we find out that Jesse has a mother, because apparently she has sent him money to visit her. In Gimme the Loot, although Malcolm’s mother periodically calls him on his cell phone and he steals flowers to celebrate her birthday, we never see either Malcolm or Sofia’s mother. Blest’s mother (Bomb the System), like Ritchie’s mother, has lost a graffiti-writing son to gun violence and warns her other sons against following in their brother’s footsteps.

Most of the fathers of graffiti artists are either absent or “missing in action”
In the majority of the movies, the fathers are either absent or they are not emotionally engaged. In Dreams Don’t Die, Danny goes home and observes his “good for nothing” father, who is lying on a bed smoking a cigarette and watching television with beer in hand. Later, it is implied that his father beats Danny’s mother. In Against the Wall, although Mikey’s father runs a painting company and is quite authoritarian in his treatment of his son, no mention is made of Curtis having a father. In Transit, we do not see Ritchie’s father, but he does have a mother and a girlfriend who warn him that he will be shot. The lack of a father is evident in Bomb the System. Although Blest’s mother is concerned for his son, his father is never mentioned.

Authority figures occasionally provide or suggest a path out of the graffiti lifestyle
In Dreams Don’t Die, Danny is caught by Banks, an African-American police officer, while he is painting on the subway platform. Banks offers to introduce him to a man who might help
him get a paid job as an artist. In Transit, an unnamed African-American college recruiter encourages Ritchie to fill out an application for art school in order for him to improve his artistic abilities and make a living by doing this. In Against the Wall, even though Mikey has a father, he comes under the more direct influence of Dino, an older friend, who works in a Buddhist temple. This relationship provides him with spiritual guidance in escaping the graffiti lifestyle and dealing with Curtis’s death.

Settings

Settings are limited to a handful of well-known big cities on either the West or East Coast. Whereas Against the Wall, The Graffiti Artist and Transit take place in West Coast locations, respectably San Francisco, Seattle and Los Angeles, Dreams Don’t Die, Wild Style, Bomb the System and Gimme the Loot are shot in New York City. Other large cities with thriving graffiti scenes, including Washington, DC, Chicago, Philadelphia and New Orleans, are absent from these movies.

Targets of graffiti

In the movies reviewed, graffiti is usually placed/written on subway trains, subway platforms, freight trains, police cars, rooftops, sides of buildings, walls and metal roll-down doors for retail businesses. Other places include phone booths, bus shelters and metal trash dumpsters. With the exception of Sofia in Gimme the Loot, who occasionally places a United States Postal Service mailing label sticker with her tag on a couple of places, and Alex in Bomb the System, there is little street art done by the characters in the movies.

Themes

The primary themes in these movies concern: The soundtracks; characters’ fears of selling out; and rivalries among graffiti artists/crews.

Soundtracks

Soundtracks help to locate the films during a period in contemporary American history. Most of the movies rely on rap and/or hip hop music played in the background. The only exception to this is Gimme the Loot where the majority of the music is rhythm and blues, with the occasional gospel piece mixed in. Wild Style uses overly dramatic music, and it often seems like the film is more of a celebration of rap artists than graffiti. In The Graffiti Artist, the soundtrack is dominated by electronic music based on Indian tabla music. In Bombing the System, the soundtrack is punctuated with Indian music, including Bollywood, during a scene in a nightclub.

Displaying graffiti in galleries means that the artist/writer has sold out and/or been co-opted

In some of the movies, the protagonists confront the possibility that they could stop doing graffiti and could assume more legitimate/legal jobs or careers, especially through ceasing street-based graffiti activities and displaying of their work in galleries. In Dreams Don’t Die, Danny does not want to “sell out,” but he eventually gets a job as an apprentice graphic artist. In Wild Style, the notion of joining a union of graffiti artists is proposed to Raymond, but he is not interested. Danny is also introduced to a bunch of “squares” at a party, including the director of acquisitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, who does not take kindly to him. In The Graffiti Artist, Jesse suggests to Nick that he send photographs of his graffiti to a magazine called Underground Productions and try to have his work shown in a gallery. Nick says that he wants no part of this. In Bombing the System, Hazer, who was friends with Blest’s dead brother and at whose place Blest is staying, reveals that he is ready to display his work at a gallery. Blest, however, refuses to follow his example.
In short, for these protagonists, going legitimate is one of the most dreaded consequences to befall a graffiti artist and speaks of co-optation and/or selling out.

**Rivalries among graffiti writers and crews frequently occur.**

In order to keep the viewers engaged, the majority of the movies depict rivalries among individual graffiti writers and/or crews. *Wild Style*, for example, shows the rivalry between two graffiti crews. In *Gimme the Loot*, Malcolm and Sofia are up against the Westside Crew. In *Transit*, Ritchie’s West Coast Kings is challenged by the ABC Crew. This leads to the deaths of the ABC leader and Ritchie.\(^{12}\)

The characters, places and themes embodied in these movies reinforce stereotypes about graffiti writers and the conditions under which they operate. The films neglect the conclusions of contemporary research that are more nuanced with respect to who the perpetrators are, their motivations and the kinds of challenges they face in their lives.

**Quality of the movies**

*Most of the characters, scenes and stories (or selected aspects of each) are unrealistic.*

One of the most important issues that these movies can be criticised on is the degree to which they are a reflection of reality they are. Although they are understood to be works of fiction, in order to be believable, they must include substantial elements of reality. Unfortunately, many of these films undermine their legitimacy by including numerous unrealistic aspects as enumerated below. These movies fall short in their depictions of characters, scenes and stories.

Many of the characters appear caricature-like. In the movie *Wild Style*, from his clothing to his speech, Kirk, the juvenile drug dealer, bears little relation to actual drug dealers. He is seen being driven around town in a chauffeur-driven limousine while he does small-time drug deals and shoots at people from the comfort of this car. Similarly, in *Bomb the System*, from the food they eat to their dialogue, NYPD officers Cox and Shots appear to be caricatures of corrupt New York City police officers.

**Stories**

Some of the movies have gaps in the storylines, introduce questionable scenes or pose logical contradictions. In *Wild Style*, the movie moves from one scene to another without much logical sense. In *Dreams Don’t Die*, a senior NYPD detective allows Danny to look through a police file on a suspected criminal. Although this may have been permissible during the 1970s, today it would certainly compromise the integrity of a police investigation. In *Against the Wall*, it is unclear why Lisa would hang out with someone with as few professional prospects as Curtis. In *The Graffiti Artist*, although Nick does not have any money, he is able to afford an apartment, and survive on shoplifting. Not once does he go to a homeless shelter or a public food line, or use food stamps for food. Additionally, although Nick is initially locked up, when he gets out of prison, he still has an apartment. Although Nick takes pictures with a disposable camera and the police take Polaroid photographs, it is unclear why in 2004, the year the movie was shot and ostensibly set in, no cell phones or digital cameras seem to be in use. In *Transit*, just in case the viewer cannot figure out that the men interrogating Ritchie are police officers, one of them eats a doughnut. Although Ritchie lives with his mother in a modest house and qualifies for a financial aid scholarship, he somehow has money to rent a studio. At the end of *Transit*, when Ritchie is shot, the sequence looks very unrealistic. In *Gimme the Loot*, Malcolm goes to a basement “headquarters” underneath a bodega in the Lower East Side run by two middle-class, university-educated, small-time pot dealers. It hard to imagine, that individuals like this would be putting small amounts of pot into bags and selling them.
Scenes
In *Transit*, toward the end of the movie there is a fist fight between Ritchie and Alex while the ABC crew watches. The fight is poorly choreographed. This flaw is exacerbated by the sound that does not sync with the punches. In the majority of the movies, many of the most unrealistic scenes surround criminal activities.

Most of the films appear amateurish
A little more than half of the films (i.e. *The Graffiti Artist*, *Bomb the System*, *Against the Wall/Quality of Life* and *Gimme the Loot*) received awards at various film festivals. Despite these accolades, many of the films looked very amateurish in terms of acting and production values. This is embodied in the poor and/or forced acting, the transitions from one scene to another, the lack of authentic costumes, the poor sound and lighting quality and the choice of the angles and shots. Most of these difficulties can perhaps be explained because these movies probably depended on students and friends or acquaintances to play the parts, rather than professionals. Sometimes it even sounds like the actors forgot their lines because they hesitate in the delivery.

In terms of production values, although the fictional films may have a documentary feel, it is not clear why. This is reflected in the quality of the pictures and sound. Even though the grainy video, which occurs when film is shot at night under street, poor and/or minimal lighting conditions, may add to the authenticity and artistry of the films, it is also a reflection of the low budget that these films had. Both the amateurishness and the uneven story lines are probably connected to the relatively meagre budgets that were allocated for these movies.

Summary
It may be too early to suggest that there is a genre of graffiti films. However, the graffiti movie may be a subgenre of the modern day gangster films, like *Boys in the Hood*, *Warriors* etc. (Berman, 1992; Przemieniecki, 2005). Despite the obvious acts of vandalism that the graffiti writers engage in, there is little discussion about the criminal component of their actions. In many respects, the graffiti writers are portrayed as anti-heroes or Robin Hoods (Campos, 2013).

Although some of these treatments of graffiti are accurate reflections of reality, there are numerous exceptions in the actual practice of graffiti (i.e. how graffiti writers engage in their craft), many of which have been identified in the scholarly literature. For example, although there are thriving graffiti (not to mention street art) scenes in New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle and Portland, almost every big city in the United States has a graffiti subculture. Each has different norms and key players. Thus to suggest that it only exists in the settings used in the fiction movies reviewed here is a bit narrow. Graffiti artists engage in graffiti for a number of reasons beyond fun and/or building a reputation (Taylor *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the notion that graffiti writers have one or more absentee parents – primarily fathers who are either absent or “missing in action” – does not bear out in the academic literature. Finally, while many graffiti artists accede to the belief that displaying their work in galleries is a form of selling out or being co-opted, no empirical research indicates that this is a widespread perception. Similarly, there are usually no authority figures who come around to suggest or provide a path out of the graffiti lifestyle. These last points are perhaps better understood to be part of the myth-creation process surrounding the practice of graffiti and graffiti artists that has been formed by the wider dominant society. Indeed, the field of graffiti studies is at a rudimentary level. As more scholarly research and knowledge accrues, we can better critique these films and suggest ways that they differ from reality. This information should be communicated to parents, social workers, the news media, municipal politicians, departments of public works personnel and criminal justice...
practitioners, so that they can better understand and respond to graffiti and those who engage in this practice.

**Documentaries**

For the purposes of this analysis the documentary genre consists of films with nonfictional content, the intent of which is instruction or the capturing of a part of the historical record. Full-length documentaries usually run between 45 and 95 minutes in length. In addition, numerous short films (i.e. “shorts”) (e.g. *Atlas: Los Angeles Graffiti Documentary* (2005) and *MUTO*, a wall-painted animation by BLU) documenting graffiti and street art have been made.

Many of these are accessible via YouTube or Amazon Prime, or third-party websites. The focus of this analysis, however, is on the longer and, in most cases, better known and easily accessible full-length movies. Thus the researcher has excluded what appear to be mostly unnarrated, self-produced/vanity home-style movies.13

In sum, the documentaries on graffiti/street art included in this review were all made between 1980 and 2012. Since the majority of these movies have been reviewed in other venues, this paper is not meant to be a collection of reviews. It seeks, however, to interpret their content and approach to their subject matter.

In general, documentaries on graffiti and street art can be placed into three categories: Movies focusing primarily on one graffiti/street artist and/or a particular graffiti crew; films that feature graffiti/street art in one particular location; and movies covering graffiti in different locations throughout the United States or around the world. The following is a brief review of the films using these categories.

A considerable amount of resources have been invested in the shooting, editing and directing of these movies. It was no easy feat to track down many of these individuals who spent a considerable portion of their lives engaging in graffiti/street art and evading detection. Also, in many cases, these documentaries required the directors and their crew to travel to both domestic and foreign places to capture the footage they wanted. This introduced additional logistical challenges. The conditions under which some of the films were shot, evidenced by grainy video and night shots under street, poor and/or minimal lighting conditions, is testimony to the directors’ perseverance. It was also very resource intensive to track down the archival footage and photographs that were included in some of the films.

In the main, the documentaries on graffiti/street art are informative and professional looking. This is noticeable in the range of subject matter that most of these films cover, the editing and the quality of the shots. Viewers get to see inside the world of graffiti/street art and the people who do this sort of thing. The audience learns about how and why graffiti artists/writers are attracted to this activity, as well as the process of graffiti/street art, the difficulties between various writers/artists, and the work of anti-graffiti activists and vigilantes. These interviews and images are accompanied by music that is disproportionately drawn from the hip hop and/or rap genres.

The audience is presented with a considerable amount of time-lapse photographs and grainy colours, and the interviewees’ faces are frequently pixelated to disguise the identity of the artists/writers. Time-lapse photography shows graffiti artists and crews installing new pieces on walls or other surfaces and/or how the walls/surfaces have changed over time as different writers/artists have placed their graffiti/street art there. Over the thirty-five-year period these movies span, the films reflect an increasing technical sophistication. In an indirect manner, most of these films attempt to confront popular myths and misrepresentations of graffiti writers and street artists as lacking respect for private property and as mindless anarchists. Some of these movies are very good at pointing out the hypocrisy of various situations. For example, in *Vigilante*...
Vigilante, the buffers who go around town painting over graffiti are also committing vandalism. We also learn about how public space has been increasingly taken over by corporations advertising their goods and services, and how this has an effect on the urban visual landscape.

On the downside, these movies can be criticised for a number of reasons. First, although tags, throw-ups, pieces and paste-ups are identified, rarely are the differences among the various types of graffiti/street art explained to the viewer in an easily digestible manner. Nor are the advantages and disadvantages of these various techniques explained to the audience.

Second, while the majority of movies review graffiti artists and the graffiti/street art scene in big cities, both in the United States and elsewhere, other large cities with thriving graffiti/street art scenes, including Cairo, Shanghai and Toronto, are absent from these films. With the exception of some footage in South Africa, none of the movies touch upon graffiti/street art in Africa and the Middle East. Also underrepresented are places in Asia.

Third, with notable exceptions (e.g. Exit Through the Gift Shop, Vigilante, The Legend of Cool “Disco” Dan), most of the documentaries resemble each other mainly because they repeat the same information, interview the same graffiti writers and street artists, dwell on the same kinds of issues and rarely go beyond these themes/tropes. We learn about the history of graffiti/street art, the major players, debates regarding whether it is art or simply vandalism and if this activity is still legitimate once the principle activity is moved from the streets to the gallery. The viewer of these films may ask what new information each new movie offers. Overall, these films sort of run together and get a little boring because they are so similar. With each new documentary movie, it becomes a case of diminishing returns. The films tend to repeat the same basic information without presenting any new interpretations and/or theories. In short, it does not seem like the directors did their homework by reviewing the other movies that were produced before embarking on their own films. To the directors’/producers’ defence, it may very well be that at the time that many of these movies were produced (mid-2000s), the other films may not have been as widely accessible as they are today. Perhaps these movies were primarily playing in the independent film festival circuit.

Fourth, most of the narratives lack an argument and/or easily identifiable chronology. Some of the films (e.g. Bomb It 2) seem to simply be collections of vignettes with no central argument or point. They bounce around from one location to another, and from one graffiti/street artist to another. In some cases, the movies defy logic in terms of the choice of why certain cities and themes are included. For example, in early scenes of Next: A Primer on Urban Painting, we see shots of a spray paint manufacturer, but there is no logical reason why these are included. Other than the fact that graffiti had its historical origins in New York, and the movie starts and ends with shots of graffiti in that city, the viewer is not certain what the director’s intent was in this case.

Finally, although a handful of the graffiti/street art documentaries also interview citizens, law enforcement and politicians about their reactions to graffiti and street art in their cities, almost all of the movies disproportionately rely on interviews with the artists/writers. Nonetheless, these individuals appear to be one-dimensional caricatures. Interviews with politicians, anti-graffiti activists and law enforcement officers seem tacked on like an afterthought. The almost singular approach to interviewing graffiti writers and street artists unnecessarily privileges the perpetrator’s voice, placing them on pedestals and portraying them, in some cases, as super heroes (Campos, 2013).

It would have also been helpful to interview scholars of graffiti/street art to get a sense how they interpret this activity, and, with the exception of Style Wars, the families and loved ones of the graffiti/street artists to understand how they feel about this activity. The films fail to integrate the contemporary scholarly research on graffiti/street art that is more nuanced with
respect to who the perpetrators are, their motivations, and the kinds of challenges they face in their lives.

Because of these drawbacks, many of these movies provide superficial analyses of their subject matter.

Conclusion

Feature length movies and documentaries that focus on graffiti/street art are important on varying levels. There is a wealth of information that has been captured and translated to the viewer. That being said, in some respects, it would be more interesting for viewers to learn about how graffiti artist/writers and street artists go about making choices with respect to the types of images, paint, colours and methods of application and location. Other questions could include: What was their intent and meaning for the piece, if there was one at all? How much, if any, planning went into the pieces that they created? These sorts of questions are not answered well in the documentaries produced in this field.

Additional insights might have been drawn about these films if the investigator had interviewed the writers, directors, producers and/or graffiti/street artists featured in these movies. At the very least, the researcher could have asked questions about the rationales behind their productions. However, the investigator did not have the appropriate resources, nor did he think that the additional information would contribute much value to the findings presented here. This study only included English-language, American-made movies. Additional insights about the film medium may have been drawn and/or different results may have been achieved if foreign documentaries had also included in the review. However, this would have required a higher level of resources than the researcher had.

Over time, and in conclusion, these movies tend to repeat basic information and themes (i.e. the terms, the illegality of graffiti/street art, and well-known individuals who engage in graffiti). This constant repetition serves as the biggest encumbrance to this body of work in moving beyond superficial analyses and portrayals to more complex situations.

Notes

1 This chapter builds upon Ross (2015).
2 It would be useful to include fictional movies on street art, however, the researcher could not locate any.
3 As of this writing, the website www.graffitimovies.weebly.com, lists 206 films on the subject matter of graffiti, most of which are uploaded to that site. On closer examination, many of these movies are self-produced “home movies” of minimal quality. Moreover, many of these films do not appear to have a distinguishable narrative.
4 For example, only a small portion of Beat Street deals with graffiti, and the movie Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure is an animated movie connected to a computer game that uses graffiti.
5 Since most of the films were produced in the United States, it makes sense to focus on this type of film.
6 The researcher uses the term “graffiti writer/artist” interchangeably throughout this chapter.
7 Some may question the exclusion of Exit Through The Gift Shop, Robbo v. Bansky, and RASH. These films, however, are foreign-produced films.
8 Given that the origins of graffiti and street art are American, an argument might be made for the importance of movies that originate from the United States.
9 For reasons unknown to the writer, this movie has been released with two different titles.
10 In all likelihood, there are numerous movies made by film students that are of a fictional nature; however, the ones reviewed here are well known and have, in some, respects achieved a cult status.
11 Closely related to this trend is the graffiti writer who despite his attempts to go straight, has friends who pull him back into the game. For example, in *Transit*, Shifty encourages Ritchie to continue writing, despite being on parole and his inclination to stop.

12 My comment is not to dismiss the importance of conflict in a graffiti writers’ career (e.g. Snyder, 2011), but to question the dominance of this element and why it is included in almost all of these films.

13 These films include, but are not limited to, Cope2 – Kings Destroy; 5 AM Part 1; 5 AM Part 2, State Your Name and Fuckgraff #1.

References


