



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in Economics and Administration of Arts and
Culture (EGArt)

Final Thesis

A Wall of One's Own: How gender impacts participation in Graffiti and Street Art

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Federica Maria Giovanna Timeto

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Matteo Bertelè

Graduand

Sara Dell'Isola

Matriculation number

887529

Academic Year

2021/ 2022

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Chapter 1	7
Graffiti and Street Art: an Overview	7
1.1 Ancient origins of wall writing and painting	7
1.2 Mexican Mural Art	8
1.3 The birth of Graffiti	9
1.4 Writing Style	12
1.5 From the “War on Graffiti” to the Commercialization	16
1.6 From Graffiti to Post-Graffiti	18
1.7 Street Art and its declinations	19
1.8 The Italian Scene	22
Chapter 2	27
Identity and Subcultures	27
2.1 What is a Subculture?	27
2.2 Women and Subcultures	33
2.3 Graffiti as a Subculture	35
2.4 Gender and Writing on the Wall	40
2.5 Gender and Street Art	46
Chapter 3	49
Public Space and the Gendered City	49
3.1 The Construction of Space	49
3.2 Public Space	50
3.3 The Right to the City	54
3.4 Graffiti and the City	55
3.5 A Feminist Right to the City	59
Chapter 4	66
The Italian Scene	66
4.1 The History of Graffiti in Italy	66
4.2 The development of Street Art in Italy	68
4.3 Geography of Graffiti and Street Art	69
4.4 How does Italy react to Graffiti and Street Art?	74
4.5 Street Art in Italy: between Urban Regeneration and Gentrification	77
4.6 What about girls? The case of the 00199 crew	81
4.7 Laika and Noeyes	83

Conclusions.....	92
Appendix.....	94
Interview with Laika MCMLIV	94
Interview with Noeyes.....	97
Bibliography	102
Sitography.....	109

Abstract

The topic of this work revolves around the presence of women in mainly male dominated subcultures that take place in the metropolitan environment. Women during the 20th century have started taking up spaces in cities, in various forms and through different means. A path chosen by some is the participation in one of the subculture movements that has more of a dialogue with public spaces: graffiti and, later on, street art.

In the first part of this work I'll try to analyze and discuss the notion of public space as opposed to that of private space, the idea of gendered city and the evolution and history of graffiti, pointing out the differences and similarities with the more widely accepted phenomenon of street art.

The second part will deal with questions about women's participation or exclusion in subcultures and specifically in the graffiti world, focusing on the significance deriving from taking ownership of a space that tends to exclude them. The work aspires to shed a light on how the practice of graffiti can serve as means to create an identity, and how much gender plays a part in the way women choose to represent and identify themselves on the walls. Relating to the differences between graffiti and street art I would like to explore if these differences can, in fact, result in some dissimilarities, for example in terms of numbers, in female presence.

The research will try to answer the question of how graffiti and street art can allow women to create an identity in public spaces, and in what terms this can happen, focusing in particular on the Italian scene. In order to carry out this study I will take advantage of the already existing literature on the topic mainly written by Anglo-American researchers, but with the addition of an empirical part consisting of interviews to some artists, not necessarily still active nowadays, operating in the Italian scene.

Most of the research on this field is carried out by theorists belonging to different fields of study, even though some of the major contributions on subcultures come from the field of Cultural Studies. I will thus adopt this approach to carry out my personal research as I find it most useful to focus on the gendered (as well as racialized and more) dynamics of power and resistance at work in representation and the way visibility can be used to affirm minoritarian identities.

Introduction

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1929, 7) wrote Virginia Woolf in her seminal work “A Room of One’s Own”, from whom I borrowed the title of this research. The room of the original title, identified by Woolf as both a physical private space and a mental one, here becomes a wall. Private space becomes public, external space. The reason lies in the focus of this work, that is not the literary world, but the artistic phenomenon of Graffiti and Street Art, which take place, as one could guess from the name, in the streets and in public places in general. The question central to this work revolves around the issue of how gender impacts participation in both Graffiti and Street Art. In order to give a tentative answer to this question I will start by giving an overview of the genealogy of Graffiti, the subculture that developed at the end of the '60s in New York and became one of the first, almost global, phenomena. The most significant aspect of this subculture was the use of writing names, or “tags”, on city walls or train cars. At first considered just mere vandalism, it later became evident that it could not be reduced only to its element of illegality. Graffiti raised questions about the legitimacy of the imposed city’s visual culture and the notion of public space, that it is assumed to be inclusive but in reality presents physical, economic and social barriers. With time, Graffiti suffered a process of commodification that led to some changes in the movement, in particular the emergence of a new form of artistic practice: Street Art. In the collective imagination, the term Graffiti and Street Art tend to overlap and form vague images, but even if they share some similarities, they are in fact two different artistic movements with different purposes and specific characteristics. Graffiti is a subculture with its rules of participation and stylistic imagery that is not clearly understandable to people not taking part in it. Writers are not interested in communicating to external audiences, the disruption and resistance against mainstream visual culture happens at the level of gesture and not at the level of meaning or message spread. Street Art, on the other hand, is a much less prescribed artistic form, which includes many diverse techniques and styles, and, most of all, does not center around the portrayal on walls of the artist’s name. Moreover, street artists feel the need to communicate with the audience and this is the main reason why they choose to use public spaces as they are “the most democratic art gallery in the world” (Laika 2023).

The differences existing between Graffiti and Street Art have effects and ramifications on gender-based inclusion or exclusion from the two, that will be discussed more in depth in the second chapter of this work. The notion of subculture and the gender related issues

stemming from Graffiti being considered a subculture are the central elements of the second chapter. Drawing especially on cultural studies scholars such as Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979) and McRobbie and Garber (1976), I will discuss the characteristics of subcultures and their intersection with matters of class, race, and in particular, gender. Graffiti, as a subculture, shares some of the peculiarities concerning gender-based exclusion of women from the subculture and in particular it has been analyzed as a site of construction of masculinity for young men (McDonald 2001). But when women participate in Graffiti, as they do, how does their gender play a part in the way they work and they choose to represent their names? With the help of some examples I will explain some of the coping mechanisms used by female writers to resist discrimination and invisibility in this subculture. The question is relatively different when dealing with Street Art: it is not considered a subculture, therefore the gender-based discrimination witnessed by women in this field is more similar to the one they experience in the institutionalized art world in general.

Following the discussion on subcultures, the third chapter deals with another factor that contributes to the exclusion of women from both Graffiti and Street Art: public space. The most characteristic dimension of Graffiti and Street Art is, in fact, the environment in which they take place: the city with its walls, billboards and train cars. The urban environment is where Graffiti was born and where it became the huge impactful phenomenon we know today. We cannot discuss Graffiti without mentioning their context, especially in relation to gender. Public space is supposed to belong to collectivity, therefore it is usually considered an inclusive space. But being a product of social relations, it tends to reproduce the values and hierarchies that are present in society. Therefore, public space can reproduce and sometimes reinforce patriarchal norms. That is why many feminist scholars have been particularly interested in analyzing the relationship between urban spaces and gender. Graffiti challenges some of society's assumptions on public space such as the "right to the city", not just the right to inhabit the city space, but to have a role to play in giving it form (Harvey 2006), which is not granted to the average citizen. Public spaces are exclusionary in particular towards minority groups, among which women can also be included. Streets are not considered safe, especially during the night. Therefore female writers find themselves at an intersection between the gender-based exclusion from Graffiti for its status of subculture and for its public urban setting. This partially applies even to female street artists, as they share with writers the same environment of action.

In the last chapter I use some examples to better illustrate the points made in the previous chapters through the subject's literature. After giving an overview of the history and peculiarities of the Graffiti and Street Art scene in Italy, I discuss the example of one

of the few known all-female crews in Italy and the example of two artists representatives of Italian Street Art, Laika and Noeyes. While for the writers, the 00199 crew, I will use materials mainly taken from their interviews carried out by Giordano and Dal Lago (2018), for the two above-mentioned artists I will employ the information I collected through original interviews that I conducted with them. Laika and Noeyes are very different artists: the first is mostly famous for her politically charged posters, while Noeyes research is focused on abstractism. Through these three examples I hope to give space to the artists and writers themselves to express their opinion and their own experiences on the field.

Chapter 1

Graffiti and Street Art: an Overview

1.1 Ancient origins of wall writing and painting

We go way back: drawing words on walls is a gesture that has always accompanied written culture. We can find examples in texts like the Bible, notably the prophecy in the Book of Daniel, or on the surviving walls in Pompeii.

But there is a form of wall inscription that dates even earlier than the first ancient cultures, before the invention of writing: cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic Age.

The famous caves in Lascaux, France, with vivid images of various animals running, or the one discovered in Patagonia, called “La Cueva de las Manos” precisely because of the hand prints that decorate the surface (that almost feel like an anticipation of the stencil technique), are famous examples of cave paintings and show the existence of numerous populations that used those techniques to describe and illustrate their everyday life, their relationship with nature and eventually, their identity.

But what do cave paintings and Graffiti or Street Art have in common? It could seem a stretch to start talking about a subculture born at the end of the 1960s in the United States from cavemen and the Prehistoric Age, because they probably do not have much in common, apart from the use of the same support, the wall. But, interestingly enough, the name Graffiti is used to indicate both the more recent subculture and these ancient paintings and engravings: the word, as a matter of fact, indicates first of all the etching technique (from the Italian *graffiare*) and was, subsequently, attached to the spray can works realized by young people in contemporary cities.

The way we conceive and relate to art nowadays is surely very different from the past: art was born as a social activity and the experience of the external world was shared in the community through the gesture of painting. In time we have progressively lost the idea of the artistic activity as a collective work, meant both as collective creation and as collective fruition. The ancient dimension of art is deeply different from the private-oriented dimension of today's world. As noted by Dal Lago and Giordano (2016), today's wall paintings and writings are very different from paleolithic Graffiti, but this form of art

is one of the few through which we can witness a new manifestation of art as public communication in the broadest sense possible.

Other examples of wall paintings are present in the most advanced ancient cultures, Egyptian and Greek for example, but the most significant ones are surely Romans. In Pompei we have examples of both highly advanced wall paintings and writings of different nature: advertisements of products, political slogans and indecent comments. In the Middle Ages we witnessed the fully artistic use of walls with frescos, that remained a favorite technique during the Renaissance until the changes in the art market during the XVII and XVIII century started favoring supports like canvases.

1.2 Mexican Mural Art

Skipping centuries we get to an eminent predecessor of Street Art, one of the most interesting experiences of XX century art: Mexican muralism. Strictly connected, at least at the beginning, with the Mexican Revolution (1910-1930), it was intended as a form of public art that took explicit inspiration from the traditional Pre-Columbian mural art, particularly Maya and Aztec. The most influential muralists, not coincidentally known as “Los Tres Grandes”, were Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Their form of art was characterized by a *naïf* and easily readable style, given not only by its social function, but also from the European art of the early XX century, that the artists had the possibility to admire and study during their travels. Moreover, there was an important component of educational purpose in mural art, that usually went hand in hand with communist and socialist political beliefs.

Contrary to Mexico, in Italy mural art was recognised as a powerful political tool by the Fascist regime and artists as Mario Sironi professed completely opposed political ideas to the Mexican Muralism representatives. Italian Muralism was historically and aesthetically a very important experience, as that of Mexico, but it could not, inevitably¹, reach the artistic scene in the United States, and was therefore not as influential in that sphere as the Central American one.

As a matter of fact, Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros worked in the United States during the New Deal Era promoted by Roosevelt. Rivera was designated by Edsel Ford, head of the Ford Motor Company, to paint in the Detroit Institute of Art the series “Detroit Industry or the Man and the Machine”, while Siqueiros created the mural “America Tropical” in Olvera Street, the Mexican neighborhood in Los Angeles. Orozco worked on the project

¹ During the Fascist regime contacts with the United States were limited by the government and Italian artists could not easily travel to the States.

“The Epic of American Civilization” between 1932 and 1934 for the library of the Dartmouth College. Most of the works realized by those artists faced multiple critiques for the portrayal of the United States as a colonialist and imperial power, to the point that some works were immediately covered or destroyed.

Nevertheless, the influence of this movement had a great impact on the rising American scene, evident in the formation of Jackson Pollock, pioneer of Abstract Expressionism. Pollock came in contact with the works by the muralists, and it is not a coincidence that a 1943 painting for Peggy Guggenheim is called “Mural”. The work shows a certain affinity with the use of colors and the style of Siqueiros and Orozco and is situated in the transition phase from figurative painting to Abstract Expressionism.

It’s safe to say that the influence of Mexican Muralism in the United States was explored more in terms of *emotions*, setting aside the very political and social grip that had characterized the experience in Mexico. Muralism, as we said, influenced Pollock, which in turn had a huge impact on Andy Warhol and Pop Art in the 1950s and 1960s. Pop Art was especially interested in the specificities of the contemporary world: advertisement campaigns, the star system and cities. In the XX century artistic movements progressed very rapidly and influenced each other in multiple ways. Pop Art eventually helped in tearing down some walls between what was considered high art and entertainment; as Norman Mailer (2009) noted, the evolution in contemporary art, from the Abstract Expressionism use of color to the Pop Art references, constituted the visual environment in which Graffiti developed.

1.3 The birth of Graffiti

It was in this environment, in the New York of the late Sixties², that Graffiti was born and developed, becoming a social and artistic phenomenon. But at the beginning it was just a small number of kids from the Bronx, Harlem and other neighborhoods that started bombing walls, trains and every reachable surface with their names, usually followed by the number of the building in which they lived in. It was not clear what these kids were doing and especially why, until a journalist of “The New York Times” wrote an article by the title “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals” (Unknown 1971). The day was 21st July 1971: from that point on the culture of Graffiti and its writers would start to be analyzed and studied by many scholars and researchers, fascinated by the commitment of the young writers.

² Some scholars, including Anna Waclawek (2011), note that Graffiti originated in Philadelphia, rather than New York. Nonetheless it was in New York that they reached popularity and became a phenomenon.

Taki 183 was not just one of the first writers to be named in a newspaper, he was also one of the firsts to try to explain the reasons behind the obsessive repetition of his name on public surfaces:

Taki is a Manhattan teenager who writes his name and his street number everywhere he goes. He says it is something he just has to do. [...]“I work, I pay taxes too and it doesn't harm anybody,” Taki said in an interview, when told of the cost of removing the Graffiti.

And he asked: “Why do they go after the little guy? Why not the campaign organizations that put stickers all over the subways at election time?” (The New York Times, 1971).

The researcher Attilio Bartoli Langeli (2003) identifies three different kinds of contemporary wall writings: the official one, that concerns names of streets and other functional information and the spontaneous one, that would include Graffiti and all sorts of (more or less) illegal signs. Both are the result of long historical traditions, as we have seen. “Communication” writings, instead, are a newer form of wall signs, typical of this age: advertisements, posters, billboards invade every corner of a contemporary city serving either commercial or political purposes, or, more often than not, both. However, it seems that we don't really perceive this invasion of our space anymore, as if it were natural because of the legitimacy and authorization granted by local authorities. This authorization is not granted, at least at the beginning, to the emerging subculture. The kids involved are considered vandals and frequently associated with gangs and criminality.

The journalist Adam Mansbach referred to the profiling of Graffiti writers

as "black, brown, or other, in that order," and vilified as sociopaths, drug addicts, and monsters. This was a fight over public space, and we would do well to remember that at the time the fight began, teenagers were also being arrested for breakdancing in subway stations, and throwing un-permitted parties in the asphalt schoolyards of the Bronx. Taken collectively, these three activities also represent the birth of hip-hop, the single most influential sub-culture created in this or any country in the last half-century. (Mansbach 2013, 2)

He also contextualized the phenomenon of Graffiti in the broader subculture of Hip Hop, a subculture born to respond to social injustices endured by minorities that soon lost part of its eversive charge in favor of the spectacularization, especially concerning rap and break dance.

In the New York Times article cited above we find an early theorization of a writer's action: the need to take up space and affirming their own existence, posing questions on issues such as property and its relation to public spaces. Something along the lines of: public space is yours, if you can pay for it.

As noted by Anna Waclawek (2011), even if the genealogy of Graffiti can be linked to different originating influences it shows a deep connection with the pervasiveness of

consumer culture. The act of writing illegally onto a city wall prompts a series of reflections made in the first instance.

First, it implies a desire to belong to a city's visual culture, which is theoretically inclusive but in practical terms exclusive. Second, it disrupts the corporate logic of naming by introducing unsanctioned, unknown names into the cityscape. To this effect, it uses an existing language as a basis for subversion. Third, it exposes a city's underbelly. The sanctioned names that circulate in the cityscape represent companies that employ thousands of unnamed people. By contrast, unauthorized tags represent real people. Fourth, it reclaims space for a more diverse public, essentially questioning the notion of public space. (44)

Being part of a city's visual culture is extremely hard for average people, what is represented on walls or billboards is not the reality, but an aspirational world embodied by advertising campaigns, a world people tend to but can never reach. Writing one's own name on a city wall means becoming a part of the cityscape and can mitigate the sense of frustration produced by consumerism. The practice of naming is something in the hands of a few people with political and economic power: streets and squares take their names from important people in history, people that need to be remembered or taken as examples, even if this, most of the time, takes into consideration only the Western history canon that contributes to the invisibility of minorities' histories. The fourth point is central to the development of this work: the question of whom the city belongs to³ and on what grounds a public space can be used by citizens are necessary themes to discuss in order to understand why Graffiti writers and Street Artists write on urban walls and why tags and murals are so widespread in the cityscape.

Obviously, that of writers is a pretty individualistic declaration of war against the legal city, characterized by a high degree of competitiveness, but nevertheless it is a sign through which kids are asserting their presence in the space of the city. This way of thinking is exemplified by a statement by the famous artist Banksy (2005), especially known for their distinctive satirical stencils disseminated all over the world:

The people who truly deface our neighborhoods are the companies that scrawl their giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. They expect to be able to shout their message in your face from every available surface but you're never allowed to answer back. Well, they started this fight and the wall is the weapon of choice to hit them back. (6)

Writers can compete both over quantity, writing their names in as many places and as fast as possible (*bombing*), or over quality, distinguishing themselves for larger, more colorful and therefore more time consuming, creations (*masterpieces*).

³ "Wem gehört die Stadt?" (who owns our cities?) is also the name of a famous German project developed by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation, that is fighting the lack of transparency and regulation in cities around Europe, visible at the link <https://www.wemgehoerdiestadt.de/en/>

The great diffusion of Graffiti corresponds to an even greater repression by local authorities: in 1971 New York's mayor John Lindsay declared a "War on Graffiti".



Picture 1 Taki 183's tag

According to historian Jeff Chang (2005) the early Seventies saw the politics of abandonment turn into politics of containment in communities of color. The "War on Graffiti" was strictly associated by the media to racial profiling and started an era of epic incarceration, zero tolerance policies, prejudicial gang databases, and habitual offender laws (also known as three-strikes laws). The "War on Graffiti" turned misdemeanors into felonies, community service into jail time.

1.4 Writing Style

It would be fitting here to add a digression explaining more in depth what we refer to as Graffiti, briefly touching on some nodal points such as the relationship between authorship and anonymity. Graffiti writing centers around the writer's name, or better their pseudonym, often the only known feature, even in the subculture itself. This name can be written in different forms, in particular: *tags*, *throw-ups* and *pieces*. The tag is the most elemental form of Graffiti writing, it's typically monochromatic and quickly executed; with time it evolved from a very easy and readable name into a personalized and incomprehensible logo. Sometimes this logo can appear as a nonsensical word, chosen just because the letters work well in sequence to create a visual flow and it could be

composed adding symbols and embellishments, like arrows, stars and quotation marks. The practice of name-switching is also common and allows a tagger to explore different combinations of letters while making it harder for police to track them. Overexposure is the advertising strategy employed by taggers and can assure credibility among other taggers but not necessarily in the subculture as a whole, where tagging is considered the least challenging of the possible activities.

Throwies, or throw-ups, are the development, in color and size, of tags: they usually consist of outlined, "bubble" letters grouped together and filled in with colors, written on trains or walls. They are typically composed of an outline, a fill and a glow, that can be differentiated also by the use of colors. Because of their size throwies are definitely more time consuming but at the same time they are considered not especially hard to execute, that is why, like tags, they are more about quantity and visibility than about style or quality. The opposite applies to pieces, short for masterpieces, that are large and colorfully elaborate works. Due to the stylistical challenge required, those are the works that earn a writer the most respect.

Graffiti creates a unique dynamic between anonymity, as writers are not using their own real names, and authorship, as the very act of writing on a city wall implies authorship. The execution of the tag is a fundamental moment, both as an assertion of identity on the writer's part and as a symbol of membership within the subculture. The peculiarity is that writers are not interested in communicating with the general public, they are mainly concerned in the internal dialogue within their subculture. So, while they are protected from local authorities by anonymity when they write, they are also immediately recognizable by other Graffiti writers. As Waclawek (2011) writes: "In the development of letterforms that are illegible, sometimes even to other writers, the Graffiti culture has successfully constructed a visual language that, while performed in the cityscape, is reserved for and fuels the subculture"(46).

Subcultures have been considered and studied as social groups organized around shared interests and practices or, alternatively, as cultures within a broader mainstream culture with their own separate values, practices and beliefs (Herzog, Mitchell, and Soccio 1999). Haenfler defines a subculture as: "A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived "conventional" society." (2014, 16). This definition underlines some of the major factors that tend to constitute a subculture: first of all, it is a diffuse network, meaning that, on average, a subculture is a loosely bureaucratic and formal organization compared to other institutions like schools and workplaces. Secondly, participants share with one another



Picture 2 Example of throw-up by the writer Cre

a sense of identity that is conceived in opposition to mainstream culture. Moreover, people taking part in subcultures share values, practices and objects; they recognize these objects' meanings, which are usually different from widely accepted norms and values. Subcultures appear as a form of resistance against mainstream and dominant culture to varying degrees: some subcultures show an "intentionally antagonistic relationship with normal society" (Williams 2011, 3), while some hardly oppose dominant practices. Finally, they share a degree of marginalization in society, even if, sometimes, they are not structurally marginalized but rather prefer and choose this status.

Affiliation to subcultures is usually expressed and recognizable for external audiences through style. Subcultures like Punk or Goth are associated with two different styles of clothing, make-up and hairdo. Hebdige asserts that:

The communication of a significant *difference*, then (and the parallel communication of a group *identity*), is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures. It is the superordinate term under which all the other significations are marshalled, the message through which all the other messages speak. (1979, 102).

That said, of course, style in Graffiti is something that is applied in writing and not in clothes or in physical appearance. But the shared visual culture is what constitutes this subcultural affiliation, to outsider eyes these signatures on walls say absolutely nothing, have no reason nor meaning. For a writer their signature is everything: it asserts their existence, their belonging in an unwelcoming environment. Surely it is not a form of open resistance against what is perceived as the societal norm, something Graffiti has in common with other subcultures:

the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed (and, as we shall see, 'magically resolved') at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs. (Hebdige 1979, 17)

People in subcultures also differentiate within themselves and in doing so they create hierarchies of participation, knowledge and taste. Same goes for Graffiti: to be awarded the title "king" a writer has to prove to be accomplished and prolific or to be a master of style and technique. The term came to be used in the 1980s alongside the less used term "queen" that would identify a female expert. Usually the title has to be awarded by other writers to someone that has proven a good talent, but it is not uncommon for writers to claim the title for themselves, for example by drawing a crown above their names. The term "toy", instead, designates less competent or skilled writers, kids that maybe have just started writing tags. In the early days, these "toys" often apprenticed under more knowledgeable writers, helping with their projects and learning on the field. During the explosion of the "Graffiti in motion" on subway trains, toys were recruited to help in the less precise work of filling king's pieces. Writing groups, called crews, typically consist of writers with equivalent levels of skills and make the experience of writing a communal practice. As it is, on average, a loosely organized group of friends writing together, it is not uncommon for a writer to be associated with more than one crew.

A writer's goal is to be respected and famous within the writing community, but the process of acquiring status takes a long time: becoming famous through media coverage and not through peers approval means gaining "cheap fame", and it is not as respected as working hard to reach a good status in Graffiti's hierarchy. This subculture abides by a set of unwritten rules: the most critical one concerns the crossing out or writing over another writer's work. This is considered a disrespectful and aggressive act and could initiate a writing battle. On average, the rule does not apply to toys' writing, if their piece occupies a prime space it will probably be covered up by the work of a more skilled writer. Another fundamental thing to avoid is plagiarism, also called "biting". Since personal style is so highly prized in the culture, appropriating someone else's technique and innovations is considered forgery. There are rules to follow when it comes to placement of the work:

For example, when tagging, if writers paint their name directly above or encircle another writer's tag, they convey a sense of superiority. On the other hand, adding a signature, sometimes with a supportive phrase, next to another writer's piece is a sign of respect - a visual compliment. Whether positive or negative, this sort of visual exchange functions as a site of collective identity negotiation that is meaningful to those initiated in the subculture. The layering and juxtaposing of Graffiti at a given location

configure that space into an active site of communication. (Waclawek 2011, 28)

In the following chapter of this work the discussion on subcultures will be analyzed more in depth, with a focus on the issue of gender in relationship with Graffiti and Street Art.

1.5 From the “War on Graffiti” to the Commercialization

Signature writing had an evolution in style, means and commercialization in the decades from the 1970s onward. The first decade saw the most momentum and the flourishing of writing on subway trains. Those were the preferred surfaces to write on as they responded to every need, offering prestige, danger, communication and competition. Trains were a critical factor in the growth of the subculture, because they created a network between writers from every neighborhood and they gave the opportunity to writers to reach fame around the city. Getting up on a train meant evading guard dogs or police officers and the possibility of being caught and getting hit by a moving train. Characteristics of the moving Graffiti were the large letters, with bright colors, that were ideal to be read from a distance and in a flash⁴.

As we have anticipated, the reaction of authorities was the declaration of the first “War on Graffiti” (1971-73), which was mostly unsuccessful. However, the second attempt, led by Mayor Edward Koch during the years 1980-1983, resulted in the transposition of Graffiti from subway trains to city walls. The explanation behind the war on Graffiti was that:

Koch’s war on Graffiti characterized writing as a major contributing factor to New York’s elevated crime rate and general lack of civic order. The official argument against Graffiti rested on the notion that citizens were frightened by it because it represented an unlawful disruption of the urban environment, which encouraged other, more severe crimes. By getting rid of Graffiti, the city would emerge as the picture of law and order and raise the morale of New Yorkers. This campaign suggested that the mere appearance of order would improve the quality of life in the city. (Waclawek 2011, 54)

In the 1980s writing became an international movement and phenomenon, partly due to its marketed connection to Hip-Hop. Especially through Rap music Graffiti came to be associated with Hip-Hop: Rap required a form of visual representation that took place in

⁴ With time four main categories of pieces on train exteriors emerged: *top-to-bottoms*, pieces that covered a subway car from top to bottom but not for the full length of the car, a piece that extended the full length of the car but was not top-to-bottoms was known as *end-to-ends*, the merging of the two gave life to *whole cars* and then to *whole trains*.

the streets and was related to rebellious youth. Even though there were some significant factors that could be associated with both subcultures, as they blossomed at the same time in New York and shared a similar energy and impulsiveness, we could argue that the link between Graffiti and Hip-Hop is largely symbolic, and both cultures have distinct history, language and traditions.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, seeing the magnitude of the Graffiti phenomenon, the New York arts community tried to decriminalize it by framing it as art. The process involved Graffiti writers, gallery curators but also art dealers and gallery owners, that were very interested in the economic return.

The commodification began with the birth in 1972 of the United Graffiti Artists, founded by sociology student Hugo Martinez, with the aim of aiding writers in developing their creativity and to turn Graffiti into a legal and profitable enterprise. He encouraged writers to use canvases, that could be easily sold in art galleries. In the end, this organization alone could not cause large-scale changes, but it initiated a process, where other organizations were founded and some galleries started to exhibit Graffiti with a certain regularity.

In the 1980s, two were the most influential galleries that worked in this sector: the Fun Gallery, owned by Patti Astor and Bill Stelling, that was the first gallery space to give solo exhibitions to Graffiti writers; and Fashion Moda, founded by Stefan Eins, that became a gathering place for South Bronx writers, where they were encouraged to spray-paint directly on gallery walls as well as using canvases. This kind of approach by gallery owners made writers more comfortable with the idea of exhibiting their works in a more formal context and at the same time the shows allowed writers to experiment without restrictions.

One exhibition organized by Fashion Moda, the "Times Square Show" (1980) is usually considered as the official introduction of Graffiti to the high art world, even though it wasn't a purely Graffiti show and did not take place in a traditional gallery space. In those years the term "Graffiti Art" came to indicate many different styles, not just Graffiti writing. Representatives of the successful transition from Graffiti writing to high art are considered Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. Indeed, they both started with illegal Graffiti, but neither of them used the iconographical style and visual vocabulary typical of writing, or shared the subculture's ethics and associated themselves with any particular crew. They, nevertheless, contributed to the public opinion's change in perspective for what concerned Graffiti, at first considered merely vandalic acts, and now, through this association, regarded as art. They usually painted in public spaces and not on canvas because they wished to make art that was accessible to everyone and belonged to the collectivity, not just to a specific museum.

Haring used the subway walls of New York to express his creativity: his recognizable cartoonish silhouettes were not just a way to cover up empty space, they were a way to express messages and feelings. From the use of white chalk he went on to draw with very lively and bright colors, on walls all over the world. It is appropriate to remember that Haring's production was also characterized by a strong social and political activism, a characteristic that sets Street Art apart from Graffiti. In his works Haring dealt with themes like the Cold War and he generally showed deep support of the LGBTQ community especially during the AIDS epidemic, which caused his death in 1990.

Basquiat started as a writer in the 1980s and with his friend Al Diaz he created the tag SAMO, as in "Same Old Shit", that received a lot of attention from art gallerists. This helped him in the following steps of his career, when he stopped writing on walls and started working on more conventional supports. He still kept on trying to shake public opinion and to critique the traditional art system with his artworks.

But even if, as we have seen, these artists were not so interconnected with the subculture, in the context of art criticism they continue to be associated with Graffiti, at the risk of erasing part of the history and specificities of signature writing.



Picture 3 Keith Haring drawing on subway walls

1.6 From Graffiti to Post-Graffiti

Graffiti is unique in three main regards: it is an art movement begun and sustained primarily by youth, a visual vocabulary whose subject is the signature, and a pictorial tradition that developed and continues to flourish illegally. Meanwhile, Post-Graffiti art practices, or the diverse forms of urban

art that have arisen since the 1990s as a result of Graffiti, have come to epitomize contemporary urban visual culture. (Waclawek 2011, 12)

The term Post-Graffiti Art, also known as Neo-Graffiti, Urban Painting or Street Art is used to identify “a renaissance of illegal, ephemeral public art production” (Waclawek 2011, 29): this doesn’t imply that Graffiti writing has been surpassed by this new form of wall painting, but that it still flourishes alongside Street Art.

Many Street Artists began their work as Graffiti writers, but then moved to new forms of expressions that were not solely based on the representation of their names. Post-Graffiti Art is, in fact, stylistically distinguishable from Graffiti writing, but, as the name suggests, it is embedded in that tradition, with the prefix “post” signaling a progression and a distance from the principles of signature writing.

The Street Art movement is characterized by a more inclusive and less organized membership, which makes it, according to scholars, not an actual subculture. But the dissimilarities between the two worlds are mainly recognizable in visual terms, as we have said.

Street Artists are more eclectic and tend to employ formal art techniques such as stencil, printmaking and painting to create mostly figurative works, instead of letters. And most of all, Post-Graffiti artists are interested in letting their message across, not only to other artists but to people in general, therefore their art is also less visually cryptic.

1.7 Street Art and its declinations

One of the most common techniques used by Street Artists is stenciling, made especially famous by British artist Banksy. Banksy is probably the name most associated with the word Street Art, and their works reached great notoriety worldwide, becoming a favorite even of mainstream art circles. Originally from Bristol, Banksy worked on stencils in countries like the US and Israel, where they spread their anti-war and anti-establishment messages, typically portraying figures of children, soldiers and rats. Part of the fascination surrounding this artist derives from the mystery of their identity, which Banksy keeps secret.

Banksy’s subversive and satirical imagery has become synonymous with Street Art and with stenciling in particular, but many artists favor this technique for the ease of reproduction and the efficacy in conveying impactful or comical ideas. Stencil artists often use cardboard, metal or plastic laminates that once cut can be used repeatedly and in this way operate like a tag, with the difference that stencils are usually more legible than signature Graffiti.

Individualized figures and symbols have also become a popular practice in Street Art production. Logos are useful as they represent the artist, while also communicating an idea. Some recognizable examples are: the “gouzou” character by the artist Jace, a small and yellow character always depicted in mid-action, the smiling fish by the Spanish artist Pez, and everyone of Space Invader’s creations, representing pixelated tile characters inspired by first-generation arcade games.



Picture 4 Space Invader in Rome, Italy

As it was the case for Jace, many ex-writers favor logos as they represent the artist just like their signature, but at the same time they can convey a message that could be understood by the general public. Logos can be characters, but with this term in the world of Street Art we usually refer to visually complex, life-size renditions of personas that are often accompanied by legible signatures, all characteristics lacking in logos.

Originally used by Graffiti writers in their work to further animate the name and make pieces more playful, they got detached from the signature by street artists, to create complex portrayals of people or imagined creatures. Examples can be found in the works by Swoon, the American artist that creates fragile characters with intricate paper cut-outs, or in the pieces by the Brazilian duo OSGEMEOS, the twins, with their signature huge yellow-skinned figures. These big paintings on walls are known as murals, and they

have a big impact on audiences, but many other techniques, more low budget, are commonly used by Street Artists, for example posters and stickers.

Stickers are, for example, broadly used and visible in every city around the world. They can present some political or social issue that the artist cares about (examples are stickers made against wars) and they serve their purpose: the capillary circulation of a message thanks to the ease in distribution and the rapid and simple intelligibility of the idea. Certainly, the larger the amount of stickers glued, the larger the possibility of a determined topic to catch people's attention. Being a very broad set of different forms of art, defining Street Art can be hard, because there's a permanent risk of narrowing down the movement and comparing it too strictly with Graffiti. It could be defined as the most widespread artistic movement, characterized by a constant evolution and redefinition, and by the fleeting, precarious nature of the works produced (Dogheria 2014) or as art that invades spaces, alternatively considered vandalism, rebellion, art and provocation: therefore it indicates every artistic form visible on the streets (Arnaldi 2014).

Clearly, contemporary Street Art is undeniably more socially accepted than Graffiti, but the relationship with public space and the city is still a complicated one. Because Street Art happens in public spaces it's part of the even wider category of Public Art, art realized to be in a public space to benefit the community. Even though both explore the meaning of public space we should not assume a complete overlap, as the nature of this interaction is different. But this aspect will be further expanded in the third chapter of this work. Nonetheless, it is necessary to specify that Street Art has socio-economic implications in urban areas: in neighborhoods such as Pigneto in Rome or Lambrate in Milan murals have contributed to the economic and structural requalification of houses and areas, but the correlation between Street Art works and the real estate increase in value can generate negative consequences, namely gentrification. This phenomenon consists in the process of class substitution of historical working class neighborhoods due to wealthier people moving in, causing the rise of housing costs and the displacement of the current inhabitants. This process is not unknown to Street Artists: Italian artist Blu decided to remove two works made in Kreuzberg (Berlin) to protest against the gentrification happening in the German neighborhood.

Many researchers frame Street Art in terms of development and evolution of Graffiti (Wacławek 2011), others pointed out that the separation between Graffiti and Street Art is partly arbitrary (McAuliffe 2012). In general I would agree that:

the concepts 'Graffiti' and 'Street Art' denote two closely related, partly overlapping, but at the same time different sociocultural contexts, encompassing a wide range of artistic tactics and practices. The separation is partly arbitrary, and to some extent Graffiti and Street Art share spaces and social worlds, but differ in their way of addressing the audience. They

also differ when it comes to sociocultural status: Graffiti carries a stigma that Street Art does not. (Kimvall 2019, 21)

I will keep using in the next chapters of this work the term Graffiti to indicate the signature writing that originated as a subculture at the end of the 1960s, while I will favor the term Street Art, or alternatively Post-Graffiti, to define the more articulated and diverse forms of art that address a wider audience.

1.8 The Italian Scene

In 1989, when the so-called “War on Graffiti” was declared over by the New York Mayor and the underground trains were all clean, the Graffiti virus had already spread to Europe, and stopping it would be an impossible quest. Big European cities like London, Berlin and Paris witnessed the emergence of first tags and throw-ups at the beginning of the ‘80s. Writers like Futura 2000, who was very active in the New York scene, started working together with music groups and, especially thanks to the work he did with The Clash for the album *Combat Rock*, he arrived in London in 1981 and started spreading the Graffiti language in Europe too. Moreover, just before 1982 the film *Wild Style*, destined to become a cult movie, was released. It was a film about the writer's world starring real writers such as Lee Quinones and was filmed in the New York subway depository. Another important documentary that helped in the spread of this subculture was the 1983's *Style Wars* that was shown in many film festivals all around the world. Graffiti, which in New York took more than ten years to reach a complete growth, came to Europe as an already established and formalized subculture.

In Italy the phenomenon spread during the ‘80s, partly thanks to the attention shown by the art and academic world. In 1979, in fact, the Medusa Gallery in Rome exhibited works by Lee Quinones, writer that we have already mentioned; in 1982, during the VI edition of the International Performance Week in Bologna, Francesca Alinovi, a young curator, organized “Telepazzia”, the first large Graffiti event in the country. Based on her project was also the exhibition held in 1984 in the Galleria d'Arte Moderna of Bologna named “Arte di frontiera: New York Graffiti”, that brought to Bologna American writers such as Futura 2000, Lady Pink, Daze, Toxic; but also artists like Keith Haring.

Writing became common first in big cities like Milan and Rome, but it easily spread around in smaller realities, going hand in hand with the growth of Hip Hop culture, which was supported by both radio and television. Around 1993 municipal institutions started realizing the issues related to the spread of the phenomenon and politicians worked to get, on one hand, legal walls to write on and, on the other, intensify harsher sanctions

for writers. A way of dealing with the problem that is still very used nowadays. Anyway, this form of repression did not serve its purpose and Graffiti became even more popular, moving from train cars to the walls, just as it had happened across the Atlantic.

Post-Graffiti spread just as easily as Graffiti did, and many international events have been organized in the years to exhibit Italian and foreign Street Artists in various Italian cities. The festival known as "Icône", started in 2002, was one of the first international festivals entirely dedicated to Graffiti and Street Art. Some of the first foreign guests invited were artists like french Honet and Olivier Stak, while thanks to the Italian artist Blu the festival obtained a certain recognition that allowed the opening of a permanent exhibition space that hosted numerous national and international Street Art shows until 2012. The festival is also the main reason why a relatively small cultural center such as Modena has an incredible amount of wall paintings disseminated all around the city. But the event that sanctioned the entry of Graffiti Writing and Street Art in the official art environment was the exhibition "Street Art Sweet Art. Dalla cultura Hip Hop alla generazione pop up", at the Pac (Pavilion of Contemporary Art) in Milan, curated by Alessandro Riva, held from 7 March to 25 April 2007. For a little more than a month the works by more than thirty artists were exhibited.



Picture 5 Giant squid by Ericailcane e Blu in Modena, Italy

Italian Street Artists use all the techniques typical of Post-Graffiti, the peculiarity, according to journalist Claudia Galal (2008) lies in the fact that Italian artists pay generally more attention to style than to the topic represented, meaning a deeper interest in the research of artistic perfection at the expense of civic engagement. Her tentative

explanation relies on the later assimilation of this movement in Italy compared to other countries and the historical distance between political engagement and visual art in the peninsula. I would agree only partially with this idea, because we will discuss further examples of socially active artists both here in this chapter and in the final section of this work through a couple of interviews.

If it is true that Post-Graffiti had a later development in Italy, nowadays it is not only a highly popular form of art, but some artists like the already mentioned Blu, or Ericailcane, TvBoy and many others, reached worldwide fame and recognition. Their aesthetic qualities and technical skills are recognized by the artistic community, even by the more institutional system of galleries. Some artists prefer to “stay true” to the specificities of illegal art, refusing to be part of the codified art system, while others pursue simultaneously both the street and the gallery career.

For example Blu works mostly in public spaces and in his works he often tries to reconcile artistic research with social commitment. He is an enigmatic artist: he hides his identity, just like writers do, and he does not grant any interviews. The only known facts are that he grew up in the artistic environment of Bologna, where the Graffiti scene was really innovative and lively. He was initially part of this subculture, but after a few years he decided to switch to larger size figurative paintings, realized with paint applied by rollers. His subjects are monstrous and grotesque anthropomorphic creatures, derived from comics and cartoons. Blu's works are of remarkable size, often occupying the entire facade of the buildings, creating characters that result disproportionate compared to the support. His works are closely linked to the territory and the place where they are inserted and are usually placed in industrial or neglected areas. During his career, Blu has traveled to almost every continent and has been invited to various international festivals of Street Art. He has made the greatest contribution in Latin America, creating works in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Guatemala. In Nicaragua he taught local children the art of mural painting and in Managua he created one of his most famous works, the “Hombre Banano”, a work that represents a monstrous figure made up of bananas, which are turned into weapons that spray blood. The work is a clear protest against the banana corporations of the country and in favor of the struggle for workers' rights in those fields. Unfortunately the mural is not visible anymore today.



Picture 6 Hombre Banano by Blu

Blu is very active socially, in fact many of his works present a varying degree of critical approach to subjects such as consumerism and the state of degradation and corruption of society. Tanks, weapons, money and environmental issues are recurring subjects in his works: a classic example is the 2010 piece for the exhibition on Street Art organized by the MOCA in Los Angeles: Blu created a piece on the facade that represented the coffins of American soldiers with one dollar bills on them, instead of the classic flag. After less than twenty four hours the piece was censored and the wall whitened.



Picture 7 Dollar Bills 'N' Caskets by Blu

He worked with many different artists, but he has a history of collaborations with colleague and friend Ericailcane, another great exponent of the scene in Bologna. Ericailcane also debuts in the Graffiti scene and then moves on to figurative Street Art. If the style of Blu is characterized by monstrous anthropomorphic figures, Ericailcane specializes in figures that are equally monstrous, but zoomorphic. The paintings on the walls are always colored, impressively big subjects with human appearance and movements, but with animal heads. He works also on engravings and drawings, not limiting his art to the streets. Ericailcane and Blu have worked together on several

occasions, creating complementary and communicative works, with a perfect balance of composition. I already mentioned their collaboration for the “Incone” festival in Modena, but they also worked in London, South America and Palestine. In 2008 in Ancona, they realized a project within the event “Pop Up! Arte Contemporanea nello Spazio Urbano”. “Bottles”, this is the name of the artwork, allowed Blu and Ericailcane to paint on two large twin silos in the port of Ancona. The left silos painted by Blu represents a diver with a mortified face, with claws instead of hands, trapped in a bottle, while the right silos, painted by Ericailcane, represents a bottle, with a fish locked inside, wearing a sort of old admiral’s jacket.



Picture 8 Bottles by Blu and Ericailcane

An important support to the diffusion of Street Art worldwide comes, without a doubt, from the Internet. It constitutes a crucial factor to the creation of a network of artists, activists and aficionados, allowing the circulation of art works’ pictures of every size. In theory almost everyone can have access to these images, and to the messages the works convey. Most artists have their own website, but it is also easy to find sites created by Street Art enthusiasts where galleries of selected works are shown.

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the history of Graffiti and Street Art, of the main differences and similarities between the two and of introducing some of the themes that will be discussed further in the next chapters. In particular, in the following part it will be discussed the, partially anticipated, definition of subculture and how it can be applied to Graffiti or Street Art, and finally, how gender impacts the participation of women in both movements.

Chapter 2

Identity and Subcultures

2.1 What is a Subculture?

The topic of subcultures was already introduced in the first chapter of this work, but here I would like to linger and analyze this matter more in depth, focusing my attention to the issue of gender. In the first chapter I already quoted Ross Haenfler's definition of subculture: "A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalization from or resistance to a perceived "conventional" society" (Haenfler 2014, 16) because it gives a chance to analyze some of the defining aspects of what constitutes a subculture. Subcultures are diffuse networks with symbolic boundaries and a sense of shared identity that can be expressed through behavior and style. Participants in subcultures share ideas, practices and objects; and they feel a sense of marginalization from society. Moreover they understand themselves in opposition to what they consider mainstream culture. The following question would be to understand what a culture really is. Culture is a very broad term, Hebdige summarizes the question according to two trajectories. The first represents culture as "standard of aesthetic excellence" (Hebdige 1991, 6) and it derives from an appreciation of classic aesthetic forms such as opera, drama, literature and art. The second is rooted in anthropology:

a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture. (Williams, 1985)

The concept of subculture is strictly related to this latter way of understanding culture. To people that do not share its meaning and practices, subcultures can appear extremely strange, dangerous and mysterious, but this perception is often incomplete. A brief historical record of the contributions given by scholars on subcultures is necessary to understand how the studies evolved in time and on what aspects the specific schools of thought focused their attention on. Even if the Chicago School scholars never used the

term “subculture” as we understand it, their innovative approach to social problems, crime and deviance are still relevant to subculture studies today. They, in fact, theorized that crime and poverty were not the result of individual’s failings or deviant tendencies, but rather products of the social environment. Deviance was a symptom of social problems, especially the inequality produced by rapid social change at the beginning of the 20th Century, mostly in areas where disadvantaged groups were often forced to live. The idea that only by studying the social context in which subcultures exist we can then understand the motivations behind subcultures’ affiliation is still central in studies nowadays. Later on, some scholars underlined that the labeling of individuals as deviants or criminals lead to broader social stigmatization. The major contributions on this topic came especially from Howard Becker’s book “Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance” (1963) and Erving Goffman work on social stigma named “Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity” (1963).

The postwar economic expansion of the ‘50s and ‘60s was followed by a time of deindustrialization and urban decline in the ‘70s and ‘80s, with the neoliberalist governments of Ronald Regan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom leading the way in the dismantling of social safety nets and welfare state. During this time of transition, in the United Kingdom scholars associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, studied youth and the relationship with subcultures, such as Mods and Punks. Their academic focus was social class and they centered their research, with some exceptions, on working class boys and their adherence to subcultures as a form of resistance to class structure. According to these scholars, the dominant class in the capitalist society exercises control over workers not only through military power but mostly through cultural hegemony, creating an ideology that legitimizes the higher social position and wealth. For the CCCS subcultural identities and resistance were most visible through spectacular youth styles and rituals, as expressed in one of the most cited works on subcultural studies: Dick Hebdige’s 1979 “Subculture: The Meaning of Style”.

People in subcultures took ordinary items and transformed their meaning, for example the safety pin became for Punks a lip or ear piercing and style constituted, therefore, one of the most distinguishing features. Stylistic codes simultaneously served two purposes, to set participants apart from “normal” society and to establish a particular subcultural identity. Another important text from CCCS is Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson’s edited collection “Resistance Through Rituals” (1976), a research on various British subcultures, from Teddy Boys to Skinheads. The contribution of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber in this text, “Girls and Subcultures: An Explanation”, is one of the first

attempts to focus the attention on the exclusion of women from most subcultures while exploring the girl's bedroom cultures.

By the 1990s many subcultures like Skinhead, Punk or Metal were disappearing, replaced by the Grunge scene and a resurgence of dance cultures. The post-subcultural generation blended all sorts of music and fashion as individuals created their own styles, scholar David Chaney wrote: "The once accepted distinction between 'sub' and 'dominant' culture can no longer be said to hold true in a world where the so called dominant culture has fragmented into a plurality of lifestyle sensibilities and preferences" (Chaney 2004, 47). Some scholars (Bennett, 2005; Straw, 1991) have used terms like scenes or neo-tribes to better describe the phenomenon of people gathering intermittently, mostly to have a good time, but not sharing significant political views or values. Post-subculture theorists emphasize even more than the CCCS the centrality of consumption and leisure in alternative cultures; scenes reflect trends towards multiculturalism, commodification, and diffuse boundaries present in the larger world; subcultural participation is more a matter of choice than a result of structurally determined social positions; consumerism, rather than resistance, and pleasure, rather than politics, better characterize contemporary scenes; there is no coherent, identifiable "mainstream" culture, no clear boundary between scenes and a "hegemonic" social order. However, their focus remains almost exclusively on music subcultures in which participants signal their membership through their style of dress.

Contemporary researchers focus on the role of digital media, on the intentional involvement in subcultures as a reflexive strategy to react to personal or collective challenges and they put emphasis on how race, class, gender and sexuality shape the subcultural experience.

Subcultures main characteristic, as the name suggests, is the perceived deviation from normative standards of dominant culture. Other characteristics shared among subcultures extend from the use of a specialized vocabulary, that demonstrates belonging and insider knowledge, to the connection to particular styles broadly intended going from music to fashion. For example Graffiti writers have specific terms to identify their pieces that could sound meaningless to people that do not share its meaning and practices. Moreover, people in subcultures share a deep sense of their history, often written around people of significance or events that have become legendary, such as the Woodstock concert for the Hippie subculture. An important social aspect according to Haenfler (2014), is that subcultures, because of the marginalization experienced by individuals for being part of one, tend to serve as social support systems, where people feel accepted.

Conceptually, subcultures have much in common with social groupings such as gangs, social movements or fan cultures. Those are usually not considered subcultures for different reasons: they could be more socially accepted, more hierarchically organized or have more relations to dominant society than subcultures, even if each of them potentially has one or more elements of what constitutes subcultures.

Societies have always had some sort of subgroups, warriors or religious sects for example, but what we understand as subcultures emerged in the twentieth century, and especially accelerated after World War II. This can be read as an aspect of the modernization process the world has witnessed from the end of the 1800s onwards, and the social changes that it brought with it. Generally, modernization contributed to the possibility for people to experiment with a variety of identities, as those became less ascribed to the families, social classes and communities in which one was born. This process of individualization stressed the importance of self-realization at all costs. Modernization also facilitated the “expansion of youth into a life space” (Haenfler 2014, 30): the notion of youth is a relatively modern concept, born thanks to the introduction of child labor laws and public education rules that guaranteed a span of time between childhood games and the responsibilities of adulthood.

Even if subcultures are not exclusively a youth’s domain, we can safely say that subcultures thrive in this age group. The Twentieth Century witnessed a huge improvement of people’s standards of living, unfortunately accompanied by deep inequalities. The rise of subcultures responded to these contradictions: for example, Skinheads valorized the working-class life and values even if that way of life was declining due to globalization and deindustrialization. Young people were the most affected by the discrepancies between what society said to offer, equal opportunities and class mobility, and the reality: “The gap between the expectations created by an individualistic culture and the reality of a declining middle class is especially acute for the younger generations” (Moore 2010, 17–18).

Scholars have tried to understand the motives behind the adhesion to subcultures: putting aside the psychological explanations that stem mostly from prejudice and see people in subcultures as psychologically disturbed, we can find an explanation in difficult backgrounds. Social disruption was identified by the Chicago School and by strain theory as the main reason to participate in subcultures. Those then became spaces for disadvantaged youth to come together: Skinheads are, again, a good example as they were economically marginalized, but nonetheless they glorified their working-class roots and used aggression and toughness as hallmarks of real manhood. But, even if it is true that some subcultures could be considered particularly attractive to socially marginalized people, many young people coming from stable communities and having normative

backgrounds still find meaning in subcultural participation. In addition, “subculturists may be *deviant*, but they are not always *delinquent* or criminal” (Haenfler 2014, 36). Some subcultures, and it is the case for Graffiti Writing, involve, or better revolve around a criminal activity as writing on public property, but it is not always the case for subcultures in general. The issue with the identification between subcultures and criminality or anti-social behavior leads to reinforcing the prejudice that there is a “normal” society, where normality is a synonym for good and functional, whereas subcultures represent dangerous and socially disruptive behavior.

People that take part in subcultures usually profess some sort of resistance to mainstream culture: they attempt to subvert inequalities of power by challenging dominant social ideas and practices. Hegemony can be both political and cultural, the latter makes power seem invisible and it is realized when people come to believe and enforce the ideas of the powerful. Subcultures engage in forms of protest that are less revolutionary than political protests but they are still practicing forms of resistance against cultural hegemony. The Birmingham School identified subculture’s styles and rituals as means of rejection of middle-class values and lifestyles. We could say that “working-class subcultural youth were semiotic warriors, meaning they challenged the status quo through their signs or symbols” (Haenfler 2014, 45). However, according to the Birmingham School, such resistance was largely illusory, changing little and often reinforcing the very status hierarchies they presumably tried to undermine. In “Resistance Through Rituals” (1976), Hall and Jefferson point out that subculture participation does not have an actual effect on participants lives because they cannot escape their original class belonging, therefore the resistance in place is merely symbolic:

The problematic of a subordinate class experience can be ‘lived through’ negotiated or resisted; but it cannot be resolved at that level or by those means. There is no ‘subcultural career’ for the working class lad, no ‘solution’ in the subcultural milieu, for problems posed by the key structuring experiences of the class” (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, 47).

According to J. Patrick Williams (2009, 2011), we can identify three dimensions of resistance: the first distinguishes resistance as passive or active, depending on participants’ intention to resist; the second asserts two levels on which resistance can occur, the micro level, that could be made of peers, and the macro level, which could interest political bodies; finally, resistance can be overt or covert based upon whether the members of a subculture intend for their actions to be interpreted as resistance and if outsiders do in fact recognize resistance as such. Anyhow, resistance is a complex matter: subcultures can both resist and reinforce dominant social relations and

inequality, like issues of class, race, sexual orientation and gender. Social scientists pay significant attention to race, class, and gender because these characteristics fundamentally influence our experiences and opportunities as human beings. For example, in many countries, one's race or ethnicity has profound consequences on one's educational opportunities, health, and even life expectancy. Because these forms of subjectification play a central role in everyday lives they become contested terrain and subcultures can play a part in challenging social inequalities.

There are a variety of subcultures that express racist ideologies, like White Power Skinheads, and, on the other end of the spectrum, there are subcultures that emerge as expressions of homology, like Hip Hop, that is deeply linked with African American history. On the other hand, some subcultures, such as the subculture of Graffitiists, can offer spaces to disrupt racial norms. The same happens with issues of gender: men seem to dominate subcultures, both in terms of numbers and of influence. In the next paragraph I will explore some of the reasons behind the exclusion of women from subcultures and the power relations that can occur in these environments.

Like women, the LGBTQ+ community has often had to fight to be recognized in existing subcultures as, despite the image of sexual permissiveness, most subcultures were, and many still are, homophobic. Many perpetuate heteronormative values and actively marginalize queer people. In response to social and subcultural discrimination the community started to participate in certain subcultures that are inextricably queer. We can make the example of Ball culture (Bailey 2011, Baker 2011), composed mostly by black and latino gay or transgender individuals, that compete dressed as drag kings or queens. Queer subcultures call into question the centrality of young, white, working class and straight men in subcultures' histories.

One central aspect regarding subcultures is the ways in which the concept of authenticity is constructed. We should start by saying that authenticity is a social construct, it varies its meaning based on the people that are using it, it is not an objective set of criteria. Pursuing, performing and judging authenticity is a central part of many subcultures: it is strictly related to the real meaning behind the adherence to a subculture. Specialized knowledge on music or the subculture's history, the collection of objects like records, or specific clothes, together with great perceived commitment to the subculture, is what constituted the so-called subcultural capital on which authenticity is often measured. Another point worth making is that authenticity is an ongoing process, not an achievement. Whoever engages in a subculture has always something to prove, even if they have already achieved status and success: authenticity is situational, dependent upon the people and their interactions in a certain time and place. This is extremely relevant in the context of Graffiti and Street Art, as many writers have been accused of

selling out when they started being recognized by artistic circles and being represented by galleries. Additionally, authenticity constitutes part of a larger process of internal hierarchy and external boundary making, since subcultures usually do not have strict hierarchies and have to supervise participants' motives behind participation.

To take advantage of subcultures market space, corporate marketers started a process of commodification and commercialization of subversive scenes into marketing niches. The Birmingham School scholars recognized this and Dick Hebdige in "Subculture: The Meaning of Style" (1979) saw commodification as the death knell of Punk. Hebdige also describes two forms in which subcultures can be incorporated into mainstream culture, reducing their threat. The first is ideological incorporation and it is a domestication of subcultures by cultural or political authorities, reducing them to their spectacular styles and eccentric behaviors. The second is known as commodity incorporation and involves the mass marketing of subcultural symbols, styles and music: in this way their subversive purpose is turned into a commodified, less upsetting good. This incorporation can lead to either a slow disappearance of the subculture or to the upswing of the original subcultural ideals. The gathering of young people into self-conscious collectives has been perceived as an empowering act that gave the possibility to develop a distinctive group identity and express a critique about their marginalization. Subculture theory shows how young people resist authority and do not passively accept the culture and roles imposed on them. Subcultures are active, creative, and resistant and subculture theory has been foundational to work on young people's cultural and political action because it is centered in the notion of resistance and focuses on young people's cultural agency.

2.2 Women and Subcultures

Some subcultures appear to attract more men than women: Skinhead, Punk and Metal for example; but, even in Goth, Emo or Indie, that are supposedly more anti-sexist scenes where there is a higher number of female participation, we can still see an imbalance (Haenfler 2014). Therefore the question would be: why are women not consistently involved in subcultures? There are different explanations: the first one suggests that, because of the tendency of subcultures to reflect dominant social patterns of society, especially concerning gender, subcultures are fundamentally patriarchal. According to many sociologists (Brake, 1985; McDonald, 2001) subcultures are spaces where manliness and masculinity are glorified: when women take part in these subcultures they do so as second class citizens and they are usually heavily sexualised

by their male peers. Moreover, especially in the past, patriarchal values were reflected on income disparities between men and women, ensuring that women, especially the working class ones, had less possibility to spend their money on concerts, records or motorbikes. At the same time, because of the different rules they were subjected to, girls were granted less freedom from parents to go out to clubs or streets at night.

In "Girls and Subcultures: an explanation" (1976), Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber add that scholars have tended to overlook women's participation in subcultures or to limit their roles as just men's accessories:

Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings in general. [...] When they do appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar [...] or they are fleetingly and marginally presented (209).

McRobbie and Garber express the idea that the position of girls in subcultures is structurally different from that of men. This happens because they are "marginal" to the culture of work, yet they are central to the family sphere:

Similarly, 'marginality' of girls in the active, male-focussed leisure subcultures of working class youth may tell us less than the strongly present position of girls in the 'complementary' but more passive subcultures of the fan and the fan-club" (211).

They identify in bedroom cultures, like the Teeny Bopper, an alternative way for girls to participate in subcultures.

The Teeny Bopper phenomenon of the '70s was directed to a specific market: young girls around fifteen years old that were too young to know the Beatles or the new heavy Rock of Deep Purple. The market in those years focused on this segment as it had a quick turnover potential and offered the chance of great profits. These girls followed with extreme attention the latest fashion, both in clothes and in pop music and they usually bonded over their love for the same singers or actors. The reasons why this subculture was so popular among girls revolve around the ease of participation. It did not require for example to go out in the streets but, instead, took place at home; it was easy enough to join, not requiring much competence or money. Moreover, it could be seen as "kind of defensive retreat away from the possibility of being sexually labelled, but also as displaying a high degree of self-sufficiency within the various small female groupings" (1976, 220). Even if the culture of Teeny Boppers has represented an interesting and important way for young girls to create their own space, it must be noted that this space and the strategies correlated with the subculture symbolized a futural general subordination, a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (1976, 212) of their role in the house and in the marriage, as well as a present one. Bedroom cultures are still relevant for girls

nowadays, it is sufficient to make the example of fan fiction. Women do constitute a majority in this subculture that takes place in the home space thanks to a computer or mobile phone (Mendelsohn 2022) But contemporary girls and women face fewer constraints than their counterparts of past generations, taking a much more active role in many scenes. Fan fiction, but also other subcultures that overtly challenge patriarchal expectations of women, represent tools of cultural resistance and networks of support in societies that try to cast women as each others' enemies. During the '50s and '60s the world witnessed an incentive towards less restrictive sexual rules and conducts, with the diffusion of the Hippie culture and the secularization of institutions. However, free love mostly afforded straight men more sexual freedom, while girls were left to question the "virgin/easy girl" dichotomy that they were raised to believe. Bedroom cultures gave them the possibility of experimenting freely with sexuality without the fear of being judged by their male peers.

We already touched upon the issue of authenticity and gender is often considered one of the discriminant criteria for inclusion or exclusion, together with class belonging and race. In many subcultures men have an advantage when it comes to being perceived as authentic adherents, even in more gender-neutral subcultures such as Goth. Women, on average, have more to prove, especially that they are not part of a subculture just in the role of someone's girlfriend.

2.3 Graffiti as a Subculture

Before starting to analyze how the Graffiti subculture is organized and its features, it is important to point out that Graffiti is not a spectacular subculture in the tradition of Punks or Goths. Writers are not usually associated with a particular way of dressing that is easily recognizable to outsiders, mostly because they do not tend to showcase their real identities to the world (Haenfler 2014). Writers are cautious and try to remain anonymous around outsiders. But, we should keep in mind that writers have a deep connection to Hip Hop culture in general and they could be sometimes associated with the same clothing style made of baggy and loose-fitting clothes. A famous Italian online store, "Spectrum", is, for example, specialized in the retail of streetwear, sneakers and Graffiti tools. By the way, we could affirm that, on average, style in Graffiti is applied more in the writing techniques than in physical appearance (Waclawek 2011). Graffiti was one of the first global subcultures, but from the '70s onward it has been largely ignored in subculture theory. According to Gregory J. Snyder (2016) scholars have worked towards updating subculture studies into the Postmodern era, but most literature still tends to focus on

music consumption and styles' based subcultures, leaving behind cultures like Graffiti. Graffiti is a highly structured subculture, most participants follow a sort of career path where fame and respect represent the main driving forces. Graffiti, at least at the beginning and in its illegal form, does not offer a financial reward but translates this into symbolic capital. We could, then, use the term moral career, defined as "available structure in a youth culture for the establishment of self" (Rosser, Harre, and Marsh 1980, 64), to identify the objective and the steps taken to reach Graffiti's status. Nancy McDonald, in her work "The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York" (2001), asserted that:

What differentiates it from many other youth groups or subcultures is its explicitness, its open recognition of its own point and purpose. Fame, respect and status are not naturally evolving by-products of this subculture, they are its sole reason for being, and a writer's sole reason for being here (68).

And it is interesting that while writers prefer not to be known as artists, what they look for in this subculture is a sort of artistic recognition, granted not from cultural institutions, but from other accomplished writers.

The subculture revolves around the names, or tags, Graffiti writers decide to use on walls or subway trains. As they are so important, they are carefully chosen: they can be both words with meanings, such as Prime, or just letters that go well when written together. As Graffiti is an illegal activity almost everywhere, writers do not use their real life names and they are usually known in the subculture with their nicknames. Copying another writer's name is generally severely discouraged, but it could happen that a young writer adopts the name of an older member that has become inactive. In that case a number is put close to the name to signal that it is not the original tag. Another exception occurs when a writer is in prison or is momentarily inactive for different reasons and other writers use his or her tag as a sign of respect.

The second most important thing in Graffiti, apart from the tag, is the style. The way you write your name, the letters you use, their shape, flow and form, the colors you choose, all these things go into making a writer's style. And writers judge each others' work, often harshly, on this basis. Graffiti is a craft and like any other it comes with its own range of techniques, skills and procedures. Writers need to familiarize themselves with the tools of their trade; what marker pens to use, which are the best sprays and pens for making stains with, or which spray brands are suitable for which jobs.

At the beginning, in the '70s and '80s, it was really important to show some inventiveness; nowadays, even if stylistic innovation is valued, it is not demanded. Writers are even expected to source from the subculture's established collection of lettering styles such as bubble or wildstyle. When a writer reaches a high level in the subculture's status

hierarchy, the pace of writing starts to decrease. At this point a writer, who has now reached an age where responsibilities start to increase, has two options: he or she could retire from the subculture or turn to legal work. The latter consists of a mix of different activities that do not contribute to the risk of being arrested. A writer can make an income from doing commercial Graffiti work like mural commissions, selling gallery pieces or perhaps designing tee-shirts and clothing prints. But clearly the choice of becoming a sanctioned writer in the mainstream art world is not always approved by other writers because of the belief of “selling out” the very essence of the subculture, namely the challenge towards society’s rules and moral values.

Highlighting the fact that Graffiti has, despite what one can initially think, a structure and a goal, makes it clear that this subculture is not just constituted by a group of socially deviant and problematic people. The purpose for doing Graffiti is self recognition and a creation of a strong self concept, something that people strive to achieve in their everyday “normal” lives. Therefore we could even say that Graffiti represents an alternative path of self realization to the socially accepted job career one. McDonald (2001) identified some important distinctions between the Graffiti and a legitimate career: mainly the average younger age of writers, that leads to a shorter career and the fact that Graffiti does not involve, for the most part, a financial gain. But because of the personal confirmation writers gain in the subculture, many are very reluctant to let go of this career and decide to pursue both the deviant and legitimate career paths.

We have seen that scholars of subculture theory pay particular attention to discriminants of class, race and gender. Regarding the first two aspects it is important to stress that Graffiti is not a monolithic culture: writers come from all different backgrounds, marginalized communities and middle class; they range across many ethnic groups, they share different political values and they are spread around the world. But even if writers are not bound together by appearance or class, what binds them together is the history of Graffiti and the process of doing it. In fact, one of the reasons to take part in a subculture is trying to find a sense of community: according to Gusfield (1975), this happens on two levels, the first being relational (the sense of belonging) and the second territorial (the sense of place). Sense of belonging is visible when communities share parallel interests or similar values. In the case of Graffiti this is especially true for crews:

by providing the archetypical types of social capital support resources (e.g. reciprocal trust, information sharing, social engagement networks, camaraderie and protection) crews provide their members with an increased sense of purpose, self-worth and group identity” (Taylor, Poley, and Carragher 2016, 196).

Usually young writers are invited into one or more crews when they have attained a certain level of recognition. Being in a crew means getting the support you need in times of adversity, especially in times of increased police control. In relation to the police, the Graffiti community observed a strict “no snitching” code, especially at the outset of the subculture, during the “War against Graffiti” in New York. The sense of place, instead, is connected to what has been discussed in the previous chapter: tagging surfaces affirms on three levels, emotional, behavioral and perceptual, that said space belongs to the people that have claimed its ownership, even if it is not technically owned by them. Class-based resistance of the Birmingham School suggests that working-class youth turned to subcultures in societies that did not offer equal opportunity and tended to produce deep inequalities. We could read Graffiti as a response to the contradictions of urban space, as we will mention in the next chapter of this work. Modern cities are supposed to be the pinnacle of civilization, yet they can also be sterile and discriminatory places. Subcultures emerge to resist, even if the resistance is only symbolic, against tensions or problems in society, so they represent a warning light on the issues that society is facing.

The discrimination of gender is particularly important in Graffiti as one of its important features is the predominantly male membership. This fact raises questions concerning the attraction towards men and not women, but especially regarding why men decide to participate. McDonald’s research (2001) underlines that for young males being part of Graffiti represents the possibility to construct and confirm their masculine identities. Masculinity is not an essence that one naturally exudes, it is something that gains its meaning through a process of construction and display. This does not mean that there is a prescribed set of rules to which one has to adhere but instead gender construction is a negotiation or articulation of identity through the use of many different resources and discourses. James Messerschmidt wrote that “crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity” (1993, 85) and illegality is a natural trait of this subculture: there are writers that work in galleries, but it is not extremely common, at least at the beginning of a career. Moreover, the excitement of doing something against the law plays a big part in catching the attention of new writers. According to McDonald : “This subculture could not function as a site of masculine construction if its activities were legal” (2001, 105). Meaning that illegality, used as a masculine resource, allows writers to test themselves, resulting in the development of a sense of identity or character.

Risks and dangers connected with the pursuit of a Graffiti career are usually identified as the main reasons for women's absence from the subculture. Even when the reasoning behind is that women are not inherently adverse to danger but they are raised to act in

a more sensible way, there is still a stress put on female incapacity. Instead McDonald asserts that:

The absence of girls from subcultures is not very surprising. These subcultures, in some form or another, explore and celebrate masculinity. Boys may therefore get something out of Graffiti that girls do not; namely, a relevant and meaningful identity. In which case, girls may be brave enough, but not sufficiently interested. (2001, 100)

Bravery, resilience and fortitude are the defining elements of masculine identities for writers, and Graffiti could be seen as a rite of passage for young boys. But obviously the claim to this identity must be supported by peers, if not it just does not carry the same value. Gaining other writers' respect is fundamental and writers "do not earn recognition and respect for any old endeavour but, more specifically, for their 'masculine' endeavours – those that incorporate a display of daring and courage" (Macdonald 2001, 104). As we said when discussing the stages of a writer's career, the most vital part of the process and the reason behind doing Graffiti is status and approval. Masculinity depends on competition and sports are the best example of this as they are sites for the construction of the self, especially among young men. The difference in Graffiti is the attention reserved also to mental abilities like bravery and craftiness together with physical strength.

Graffiti, like many subcultures, has encountered a process of commodification, and corporations started marketing Graffiti style in fashion and advertisement, neutralizing the subversive nature of this subculture. At the end of the '90s, Graffiti saw the development of the phenomenon of Street Art. Even if Street Art originated from Graffiti, it is not normally considered a subculture for the loose organization structure and for the artistic freedom reserved to participants. Moreover, Street Art does not follow specific career paths like Graffiti and has a lot in common with institutionalized art. At the same time, Graffiti and Street Art share some characteristics: one is the relevance of authenticity. Street Artists such as Shepard Fairey and Banksy became famous for their subversive works, the "Andre the Giant" stickers and the sarcastic stencils of policemen and children, painted or pasted in public places without permission. Their fame translated into financial success and institutional recognition as they both have numerous works exhibited in the most important museums of the world. With this, they received accusations of making art to sell to big institutions and not for public enjoyment, as they did before. Authenticity isn't a permanent, objective status one gains and then enjoys forever, however, perhaps both artists can gain back a certain level of street credibility by continuing to spread anti-authoritarian messages and, in the case of Banksy, remaining anonymous.

2.4 Gender and Writing on the Wall

The stereotype of a writer is assumed to be urban, financially struggling, minority, and most of all, male. That is why we associate Graffiti, that is an anonymous practice, with our biases and stereotypes of the subject responsible for the act. According to this view, women who make Graffiti are not taken into consideration. Pabón writes:

Graffiti history was not written from (or even inclusive of) the perspective of girls and women, nor did it consider the condition of gender difference within the subculture. There were exceptions who instead of being marginalized, were tokenized as unique representatives in canonical works” (Pabón 2016, 79).

She gives the examples of writers active from the early stages of the subculture development such as Lady Pink, Abby, Barbara 62 and Claw. Lady Pink wrote with her male peers during the train era in the 1980s and in the years she has achieved legendary fame. Claw has dedicated herself to street bombing with pieces, throw-ups and tags all over the city of New York. She reached fame and recognition as confirmed by the book, “Bombshell: The Life and Crimes of Claw Money” (2007) and the film in which she is featured, “Infamy” (2005). She now runs her own business, a successful clothing line that features her iconic claw with the three finger nails.

Pabón points at early works and studies (Mailer and Naar, 1974; Banes, 1981) as the establishers of sexist ideological conventions that would influence both how we perceive writing, but also who we imagine as a writer. But if we have seen why men are attracted to and engage in Graffiti, what could, on the other hand, mean for a woman to be part of this subculture? And what is it like to be a woman in a male dominated subculture? One of the first scholarly works centered on this subject matter is “The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York” (2001) by Nancy Macdonald, that we have previously mentioned. She focused on understanding the subculture’s male dominance and women’s struggles in becoming Graffiti writers. In 2006 a photobook, “Graffiti Woman: Graffiti and Street Art from Five Continents” by Nicholas Ganz gave some visibility to women as Graffiti writers, after they had been completely overlooked in the previous book by the same author, “Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents” (2004). In the 2006 book, Graffiti writer Swoon recalls her story and her experience as being one of the few women in the subculture, from the amount of attention she received just from being female, that made her feel alienated and objectified, to the patronizing attitude of her male colleagues.

In the following years the visibility and the presence of female writers in the subculture has skyrocketed, thanks primarily to a new element that contributed to shaping our

everyday life: the Internet. Before that, sharing news and events depended largely on print media: photographs were sent to people publishing fanzines and magazines, resulting in more isolated scenes and in the reposed gender imbalances that characterized the subculture as a whole. The Internet has dissolved such boundaries of time and space, and has made it possible for women to manage their stories and images, without external mediation. In 2013, Pabón writes that:

The shift to the Internet is definitively reordering the dynamic of participation and visibility for female Graffiti writers. With the availability of the Internet, female Graffiti writers are not only performing their countercultural identities and demonstrating their belonging, but they are also building and sustaining their communities and crews through the openness enabled precisely by the technology itself. (12)

The point stressed here is not just the question of visibility and status, but, more importantly, the sense of community derived from the interaction, support and engagement with other women active in the Graffiti subculture. The experience of women in this subculture can be an isolating one, therefore the creation of a support and creative network that is not bound to one specific and physical place is an interesting way to create a sense of community.

One crew worth mentioning is the duo formed by Claw and Miss 17 in the '90s in New York, whose name PMS (Power, Money, Sex) mocks the assumption of inherent masculinity in Graffiti as it reminds of premenstrual syndrome. They became an iconic duo, bombing together and leaving their signature tags, the numeral 17 and the three fingered claw, respectively, paired together on walls all over New York.

Founded in 2003, Stick Up Girlz, is one of the most famous transnational all female crews, with members from New Zealand, Spain, Japan, Australia, India, Switzerland, Germany and Portugal. The founder, the German writer Sinae, created the crew inspired by her then-husband Cantwo's crew, Stick Up Kidz. She wanted to form her own crew of women, because she did not know many female writers and wanted to create a space where they could come together, despite geographical distance to perform their belonging to the Graffiti community. She traveled to New Zealand to meet Lady Diva, Oche and Fluro and the crew was later contacted by Shiro, from Japan, Spice, from Australia, and Sax, from Spain. They organized meetings to paint together in Melbourne, Auckland, Sydney and other places every year, interrupted only by the recent Covid pandemic. The creation of an all-female crew in which both the individual writers and the group are equally visible and important is proclaiming the potentiality of familial ties among female writers and this is still a quite rare phenomenon in the Graffiti panorama:

Against a hailstorm of sexist stereotypes portraying women writers as isolated, unmotivated visitors to Graffiti culture, SUG provides a counter image of the female writer, a non-hating, hard-working woman in a group of women of equal tenacity” (Pabón 2013, 15).

Crews, therefore, work not only as support systems, but as a way for women to challenge each other and push other girls interested in Graffiti to take part in this culture. The continuous and broadly accessible circulation of information provided by virtual space fosters participation and interaction with those who have historically been excluded and made invisible by larger publishing institutions, in this case, especially women. Writers have expressed both positive and negative effects of Graffiti being online. For older generation’s writers the excitement of coming across something or someone unexpectedly has been replaced with the assumption of finding who or what you are looking for online. At the same time this underlines the relative ease now possible thanks to the Internet to communicate across geographical borders enabling writers to connect. The Internet has benefited female writers, showing their capacity and dedication, helping to reappraise the popular sexist belief system and to address its values and principles: “Graffiti culture’s online presence manifests itself by challenging the patriarchal order, breaking down sexist boundaries and building new relationships among those formerly marginalized writers” (Pabon 2013, 7).

But what is it like to be a woman in a male dominated subculture? Pabón (2012), in her TED Women lecture, makes a fitting example of one writer, RenOne, that she assumed to be a woman because she painted the “o” as hearts. Asking to some writers who she was, she was told: “she wasn’t a real writer, her boyfriend did Graffiti for her”. For many women, signaling your gender makes the artwork susceptible to judgments based on that rather than on skills, that is why many writers prefer to use more masculine or gender-neutral tags. This is certainly not an exception in the cultural world, where for centuries women have had to disguise their gender with male pseudonyms or through men's clothing just to achieve recognition. Renowned examples in the literary world are those of the Brontë sisters, who signed their novels with male names, or George Sand, pseudonym of Amantine Aurore Lucile Dupin, who also dressed as a man. Her corresponding example in the artistic field would probably be Rosa Bonheur. Painting mainly animals at the end of the 19th century, she used to wear trousers to be more comfortable while working and, unlike the suitable fashion of that historical moment, she wore her hair short. The disguise of gender identity in their works applies more to women writing Graffiti than to street artists as the tag is a central component of their work. As Lady Echo, another Graffiti writer, explains:

A girl who is into painting Graffiti has to work three times as hard as a guy to be considered as good, and even after that someone will try to use personal information to the detriment of your reputation. I have had many negative experiences, to the point that I considered quitting. In the end, those people who tried to bring me down have made me tougher and taught me not to put much emphasis on what people say about me. (Ganz 2006, 11)

Similarly, sexual rumours about women within Graffiti are usually spread to distract other members from their achievements. The same does not apply to male writers, whose reputation is based solely on their ability and craftsmanship, not what they choose to do, or not, with their body. This is one of the strategies, according to Macdonald (2001, 2016) used to exclude women from this subculture, together with the issue of accountability. What this entails is that boys are expected to prove themselves and make it on their own, while female writers can experience attempts of support from their male peers: painting, helping in reaching dangerous places etc. This can appear as just a nice gesture, but it is also commonly used as a way to attribute a woman's achievements to whoever helped her. However, these strategies are recognized by women, who find their ways to undercut them. Pink, for instance, found her way of dealing with this, admitting: "I went piecing deliberately with different groups so that everyone could see I could actually paint this stuff and I'm not having some guy do it for me" (Macdonald 2001, 144). The most important challenge for a writer, as we have previously seen, is proving total dedication to Graffiti. For women it gets harder: because they are a minority in the subculture, they arouse interest and are more likely to be noticed, therefore gaining quicker and easier access to fame. This shortcut is deeply criticized by other writers and does not legitimize the effort and hardwork women put in Graffiti. In the end they do not benefit from quicker fame and can cease to be considered true writers by their peers.

Because of the choice of gender anonymity it is somehow difficult to understand the real numbers of female participation in this subculture, the only female writers known to outsiders of the subculture are the ones that overtly declare their gender. There are some writers who actively choose to publicize their gender specifically through signification. The paradox is that for gender signification to perform, so to do the work of identification and representation, it must use the very same gender conventions that feminists have traditionally worked to suppress. The marginalization of women in Graffiti and Street Art has produced an aesthetic hierarchy that sees at the bottom of the pyramid the imagery that is considered "feminine".

According to Graffiti writer Freedom: "female writer Lady Pink had to quit painting flowers in order to be accepted in the crew: she had to paint like a guy" (Macdonald 2001, 130). A common litany even in the institutionalized art history, where female painters were mostly relegated to less considered genres such as portrait painting and still life,

considered more suitable for their skills, while history paintings were reserved to men. As an act of deconstructing and rejecting the sexist structure these artists and writers decide to mark their letters with embellishments associated with female gender, for example bows, references to popular heroines like Poison Ivy, or the title of “Miss”. Other artists use their painted characters as statements against sexual objectification. Street artist DanaPink uses all shades of pink and purple in her works, exploiting the highly gendered nature of these colors to be recognizable in this panorama. She fights invisibility using the least likely aesthetic: cute, pink and joyful characters. Cuteness is not conventionally associated with powerful and revolutionary values, but writers are actively working to dismantle this stereotype.



Picture 9 Shiro's Mimi

Shiro, a Japanese writer, follows the tradition of playful and seductive female doll-like characters initiated by artists such as Miss Van and Fafi in the mid-'90s. Her characters, known as Mimi, are usually hypersexualized and voluptuous. The question raised is why would a female writer or street artist reproduce an aesthetic that contributes to the sexualization and objectification of women? Shiro writes that: “Mimi has deeper meaning beyond the surface, she is emblematic of strength and femininity” (Shiro, 2021), to which Pabón adds: “Shiro creates her Mimi characters as agents of communication between women of varying identities and experiences – not as passive objects to be gazed upon” (Pabón 2016, 84). These are some examples of artists that manipulate the expectation and stereotypes around gender differentiation and use Graffiti and Street Art as a mode of resistance. Some other artists’ works are, instead, primarily politically oriented. Starchild Stela, for example, a Street Artist from Montreal, paints only faces of fairytale-like characters with pastel colors, always adding captions with feminist political

statements supporting rape victims and calling out harrassing behaviours. Faith47, from Cape Town, focuses her works on global concerns such as poverty, justice and equality. Even if she prefers not to be known as a “female artist”, she oftentimes deals with issues related with motherhood and the feminization of poverty. Her imagery is visually light, but conceptually heavy. Both artists work beyond the individual and subcultural sphere of social recognition of their presence, trying to share political, social and cultural messages in the environment.



Picture 10 Starchild Stela's work (2014)

These are examples, we could say, of how feminism is enacted in Graffiti, even though, interestingly enough, many scholars have underlined how most Graffiti women do not identify as feminists. Swoon admits that at first she did not want to be associated with feminism:

I was concerned with my ability to create things which would be read as universally human, and not tether me to a gender identity, which, I feared, would engulf what I had to bring, and chuck me into that marginalized, patronized place I associated with feminism. I wanted to sneak in through the air shaft and show up whole” (Swoon 2014).

The risk when discussing the issue of gender in Graffiti or Street Art is to reduce women's work to their gender, creating another segregating space. In the Graffiti world, where women have to prove constantly their worth against men, it is necessary to point out the challenges women have to face to succeed, navigating streets alone at night, being harassed or double guessed in their real belonging to the subculture, but we have to keep in mind their accomplishments and their dedication to this work not just as women, but as writers first.

2.5 Gender and Street Art

Street Art, assumed to be less risky, dangerous and, therefore, less masculine, is considered a preferred practice for women than that of Graffiti Writing. Street Art, as we have seen, emerged from Graffiti but developed its own language and style. It is considered less prescriptive than Graffiti, enabling artists to experiment with different tools, stencils and stickers for example, to create works that do not have the sprayed tag as the central element of composition. The question is now if the greater freedom of expression and the consequently loosened boundaries in the subculture have invited more women to enter and participate. According to Fransberg (2019) it is “not adequate to study women in Street Art and Graffiti as one *united* group, as they negotiate their structural positions and subvert and negotiate gender regimes through different strategies, and from different locations” (501). The assumptions around women and Street Art can range from the idea that women are less likely to engage in vandalism, so in Graffiti Writing; that women tend to feel more at ease in the safety of the private sphere, where many Street Art techniques (stencils, posters, stickers) can be produced; that women do not have the desire to exercise masculine behaviors necessary to pursue Graffiti. Street Art shares with Graffiti the use of the wall as a painting support instead of canvas, but the mystique of the fight against police, the danger of painting where it is not legal to do so, are not central elements of Street Art. As suggested by Nancy Macdonald (2016):

While Street Art can also place its artists at risk and in danger, less emphasis on the name would suggest less need to be immediately recognised and validated for this commentary on “masculine” endeavour. focus is more commonly placed on the art or the statement it makes, rather than physical and legal risks the, often unnamed Street Artist, took to complete it. (190-191)

Less importance given by the display of perceived masculine qualities and wider creative boundaries provided women an opportunity to explore their artistic languages and their femininity through their works, something that was frowned upon in the 1980s and 1990s traditional Graffiti subculture. Masculinity is indicated also by Ganz as a reason why women seem to direct themselves towards Street Art instead of Graffiti, together with other possible explanations:

This could be something to do with the culture's 'young' history or the 'safer environment' of Street Art — stencilling or putting up a poster can take less time and therefore carries fewer risks — or the fact that Street Art seems to be an art form in which men don't feel the need to assert their masculinity to

the same degree, an area where women aren't seen as 'the competition'.
(Ganz 2006, 11)

Male Street Artists usually appear to be more supportive and interested in the contributions of their female counterparts and therefore the community appears more balanced. In general we must point out that the problem of the invisibility of women artists is not specific to Street Art studies. Rather, it has consistently permeated other fields of knowledge and practices, such as visual arts and the fine arts and, just like in those fields, the curatorial practices of institutions have assumed the utmost importance in dealing with gender issues. That said, the perception in Street Art as well as in Graffiti from an external point of view is that there are not many female artists in this field. This could be partially explained by a gender bias in the eyes of the observer and by the perception that there is a distinction between men and women in terms of both style and content. Further to this point, French artist Kashink states: "I'm a woman but I don't paint women: I'm not constrained by gender. Most female Street Artists paint cute, half-naked figures. I think it's time to bring something new as a person and as a woman" (Global Street Art 2012). In this statement she is probably making a reference to French colleagues Miss Van and Fafi, whose art is characterized by similar sensual doll-like figures. This sensual aesthetic is considered "girly", with the use of colors like pink and references to love or flowers and to all that is cute and pretty. We are, in this way, corroborating an aesthetic that is related to gender. Opposed to this feminine style there is a neutral artistic style that always seems to be associated with a masculine hand. An interesting research (Parisi 2015) points out that in absence of common stereotypical elements, Street Artworks are usually considered done by men, as well as those with abstract and erotic elements. The results of the research confirmed the impression that the perception of urban art is deeply affected by gender prejudices. Women in Graffiti and Street Art use gendered elements in their work to signal their gender and we could even read this as an empowering move, but the issue with feminine aesthetic is upstream, as Linda Nochlin (1971) writes:

Feminine aesthetics preconceptions lie not on a misconception of what femininity is, but rather on a misconception of what art is, on the naive idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms" (24).

The way of working with gender issues and art is too often relegated to highlighting what makes a woman different in aesthetic and content terms, with the risk of promoting the idea that women, in this case in Graffiti and Street Art, are a weird and strange peculiarity of a men's discipline. Keeping in mind the points underlined here around gender-based exclusion from Graffiti and Street Art, in the next chapter I will analyze another factor that

plays an important role in defining the relationship between women and these two artistic forms, public space.

Chapter 3

Public Space and the Gendered City

3.1 The Construction of Space

Graffiti cannot be seen or understood outside of its context. As discussed in the first chapter, this subculture is strictly related to the urban space where it takes place: writings are sprayed on buildings, on train cars and streets and writers are involved in conversations not only with other writers, that respond altering the visual landscape, but with the city itself. Because of this, Graffiti is contingent upon the space on which it is written for its meaning. To grasp the importance of context when talking about Graffiti it would be appropriate to take a step back and start discussing some key concepts such as the definition of public space and the different relations that can occur between people and the space they live in or make experience of. Urban sociology is concerned with understanding the social practices, institutional forces and material complexity of how humans and spaces interact.

According to French marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre, space is not a pre-existing entity, it is instead the result of people's work and because of that it is contingent on socio-spatial performances: it is, therefore, fundamentally social. His work on the production of space, the urban and the right to the city provides a means for analyzing and understanding the complexity of the contemporary city and to contextualize and explore Graffiti's role in challenging and contesting the norms of increasingly privatized and commodified public and social spaces. In the book "La production de l'espace" (1974), he introduces three key elements: spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. These elements and their differences form a spatial triad that is the basis to understand how space is produced and why it generates tension between the dominant class that owns space and the actual people that live in it. Representations of space is "conceived space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers [...] all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (Lefebvre 1991, 38). Lived space is what he calls representational space and concerns how human beings use the space, change and mold it for their own use, while spatial practice is perceived space, or as explained by

Lefebvre “the spatial practice of a society is revealed by the deciphering of its space” (1991, 38). Lefebvre attributes more value to lived space compared to the conceived one, especially in relation to the body and its movement in space. But in general he asserts that under capitalism the dominant element of this triad, representations of space, reflects the needs and priorities of those in power, so the economic and political elites. Space is therefore produced in an attempt to shape, mold and dominate society itself. Lefebvre was deeply influenced by the reading of Marx and this is clearly reflected in his views around urban space: the city becomes the means by and through which capitalism survives but it is also where conflict and social change occur. Lefebvre believes that hegemonic values and meanings are imposed on those who live in cities through dominant representations. This, of course, impacts and influences the lived experience and everyday use of space:

Instead of being able to inhabit and use social, public or collective space freely people are forced to endure a habitat created by and for the needs of capital. Representations of space (the power to organize, regulate, delimit and delineate space according to function, aims and priorities) dominate the lived experience of the everyday use of urban space (Zieleniec 2016, 2)

For Lefebvre, this was the process by which capitalism imposes its power and its class divisions: “[...] there is no getting around the fact that the bourgeoisie still has the initiative in its struggle for (and in) space [...] The state and each of its constituent institutions call for spaces – but spaces which they can then organize according to their specific requirements” (1991, 56). Therefore social relations, including questions about inequality and exploitation, are deeply linked with experience and performance of space of different social actors.

3.2 Public Space

In a contemporary capitalist society, space can be hegemonically experienced and this is particularly visible when dealing with the issue of public space. Public space can appear to be easily categorized as space which is not owned privately, but this is not always the case. There are, in fact, spaces that are considered public because they are used freely (with a varying degree of freedom of access) by people, even if they are privately owned: examples of this could be the shopping mall or the digital sphere.

According to Kristine Miller:

We tend to think of public space as having certain essential and obvious characteristics. We believe it is publicly owned, the opposite of private space. We believe it is open and accessible to everyone, where no one can be

turned away. We imagine it as the setting for important civic events, where large groups of people come to celebrate, protest, and mourn. We see it as somehow part of democratic life - a place for speaking out and being heard (2007, 9)

In other terms we could assert that public space is the realm in which the general public claims a stake in ownership, use, access, participation or regulation. In time, this has been increasingly defined by State ownership, so parks, streets and squares are considered public space, even though in history this has not always been the case. Moreover, from the Ancient Greek *agora* onward public space has been identified as urban space, and nowadays the urban still remains the privileged scale of analysis and cities the privileged site.

Public space can also be defined in opposition to private space in terms of

rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry to a space, individual and collective behavior sanctioned in specific spaces, and rules of use. Whereas private space is demarcated and protected by state-regulated rules of private property use, public space, while far from free of regulation, is generally conceived as open to greater or lesser public participation. "Public space" has very different meanings in different societies, places and times [...] It is impossible to conceive of public space today outside the social generalization of private space and its full development as a product of modern capitalist society. (Smith and Low 2006, 3-4)

Some scholars, Neil Smith and Setha Low among them, realized that the production of urban space has changed in the last fifty years and in their research they especially focus on a recent restructuring of urban space that can be traced to several historic watersheds both in the way we think about cities and in the way we govern them. The ideological roots of this restructuring lie in the rise of Neoliberalism in the 1980s and its expression and urban policy in the 1990s. Many scholars (Smith and Low, 2006; Miller, 2007) also point to the intensification of a culture of fear with concomitant shifts in the policing and surveillance of urban space following the attacks on the World Trade Center the 11 September 2001. But basically the urban restructuring might be traced more broadly to the shift in capitalist economy during the deindustrialization of the 1970s. One significant facet of this restructuring is what Smith and Low call a "trenchant reregulation and redaction of urban public space" (2006, 1).

Probably the most visible characteristic of the restructuring of the city under late capitalism is the decline of urban public space accessibility to increase privatization. This process is consonant with the ideology of Neoliberalism, which, as the name suggests, shares a few basic principles with the seventeenth century roots: the premise that the exercise of individual self-interest leads to the best and highest public good accompanied by the belief that private property is foundational to self-interest and that the market is the best mechanism for its expression. As Smith and Low note, the practice of this

ideology came with historical consequences, most notably the mass dispossession of those who could not afford to buy land and participate in the market. Neoliberalism works mostly by the same logic: if one of the results of liberalism was the enclosure movement that drove peasants of Europe to the cities, one result of its more recent application is a new enclosure movement contributing to the production of an urban underclass which can neither return to the privatized countryside nor afford the rising cost of housing in the city. A key element of urban privatization has been the creation of what Setha Low (2004) calls the “fortress city”, characterized by walled and gated communities.

As already mentioned, planning, policy making and investment decisions, regeneration and redevelopment strategies, may impact negatively on the quality of life, opportunity and relations, on access to services and social, economic and spatial resources especially for some groups that are deemed inappropriate or marginal according to economic and financial priorities. This discrimination includes, for example, women, as we will see, but also minorities, people with handicaps and, even elders. Foucault (1995) argued that this had started already during the rapid urbanization following the development of the industrial sector, as the exploited masses living in appalling conditions were considered a threat to medical, moral and political stability. The result was the need for “designers of the built environment” (Miller 2007, 12), that developed new forms of architecture and urban design that in turn lead to a conflict between open and accessible public space and that of powerful interests trying to supplant accessible public space with more privatized surrogates.

Neoliberalism expresses itself not only through the production of space but also through its policing. Neil Smith applied the term *revanchism* (from French *revanche*, revenge) to a set of policies enacted against the urban oppressed, homeless, immigrants and also Graffiti writers. Originally the term embodied two primary meanings: a reclamation of territory deemed to be lost or stolen and a particularly vicious form of retaliation against the alleged thieves. Following the example of Smith the term came to be used more frequently in researches and texts about urban studies. Under the administration of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York City (1994-2001) those policies were used to cleanse urban space from those deemed a threat to a white privileged social order; the document that launched the zero-tolerance policy was subtitled “Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York”. The production and policing of public spaces are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories: “the way things *look*, and what the public are able or allowed to see is very important” (Cook and Whowell 2011, 611). A prime example of their intersection can be found in the so-called antisocial architecture, which is intended to prohibit certain kinds of behaviors, and by extension, certain kinds of people, from public space by design. This is visible in architectural elements such as anti-homeless

spikes embedded in flat surfaces, underneath bridges or sheltered areas of buildings, to make sleeping there uncomfortable and inaccessible. But it also extends to other measures including benches with handrails placed between individual seats, anti-skate blades and time-based sprinklers that don't water anything. Hostile architecture also deflects responsibility from dealing with the root cause of social and economic issues such as homelessness. The policing of public space can also take place through surveillance.



Picture 11 Banksy work on Newman Street in London (2007)

Some urban social theorists following Foucault have analyzed the proliferation of surveillance in urban public space as a form of “panopticism”. The panopticon was an idea for a prison developed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. It was conceived as a strategy to train people to police themselves, as they were not able to tell whether or not they were being watched. In Foucault words:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (1995, 202-203).

This strategy has been adopted as part of a logic of social control which convinces urban citizens to participate in their own policing in an effort to present the image of a safe, crisis-free city, a keystone in the attraction of investment. The production of public space through surveillance in this view is directly connected to the neoliberal urban agenda in which the market outclasses all other priorities.

3.3 The Right to the City

As previously discussed, the right to access and use public space is more and more subject to conditions, prescriptions and sometimes even bans. This arouses questions concerning the deemed appropriateness and visibility of certain groups and the lack of power of those whose existence creates conflicts with the priorities of business. As geographer Don Mitchell puts it: “public space is the product of competing ideas about what constitutes that space - order and control or free, and perhaps dangerous, interaction - and who constitutes the ‘public’” (Mitchell 1995, 115).

In the 1968 book “Le droit à la ville”, Henri Lefebvre analyzed the dialectical tension between the implosion of historic centers and the explosion of the urban beyond existing city boundaries under capitalist industrialization. The context of his intervention was the Paris of students and workers protests, a city that was witnessing the development of a national technocratic planning and the beginnings of gentrification in its historic city center. The city as a space occupied by work and festivities was being lost. The neo-capitalist city was replacing the historic core, which once represented the center of decision-making, turning it into a center of consumption. David Harvey (2006), marxist economic geographer, drawing on Lefebvre texts, affirms that the right to the city is not just the right to inhabit it, but to have a role to play in giving it form. The right to the city is therefore the right to shape the world we live in and so it is a right to shape ourselves. This is not an individual right, because the only possible way to achieve any urban transformation is through collective exercise. Using the example of the reshaping of Paris during the Second Empire, Harvey shows how urbanization has always been a class phenomenon and makes suggestions about the close bond between urban public space and political implications.

According to Michel Foucault, space is the great obsession of the XX century, as much as history had been for the XIX century. The French philosopher asserts that during the XX century space became fundamental to the way we think and perceive our relation to the external world. In a famous speech of 1967, “Des espaces autres”, Foucault talks about the central role of space and of the importance of those relations that take place among spaces:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986, 22)

As a theorist of spatial history, Foucault not only develops concepts like that of *heterotopias*⁵ but also reveals the fundamental role of space in the exercise of power. Spatial histories are, in fact, conceptualizations of power. His analysis explores spatial relations and their ties to historical processes: discourses on knowledge and power are strictly connected with space.

Edward Soja is another important contributor to the theories of space and is usually regarded as the pioneer of the so-called “spatial turn”, the theoretical movement that places emphasis on space in social science and humanities. Soja (1989) updated the distinction among perceived, conceived and lived space in Lefebvre’s theory and the concept of *heterotopias* by Foucault. He developed the concept of Thirdspace, that is a “real and imagined” space, the lived space where people socialize and maintain relationships. This happens in the real space (Firstspace) and is enacted according to the expectation of Secondspace, the conceived space. This results in the idea that not only social processes shape geographies, but that geographies, even more so, shape social processes. Spatiality is always sociospatiality.

3.4 Graffiti and the City

The street was, according to many researchers of the contemporary urban condition, where the social life of cities was to be found, analyzed and understood. And it still remains a significant indicator of how social life in cities develops and is experienced, it remains a contested battleground. Lefebvre viewed the street and public space as crucial not only to healthy and humane cities but to a truly democratic and inclusive urban society. It is in what he calls the disorder of the street that change and possibility, the sharing of ideas, meanings and experiences, that we can find the best of urban experience, one that should be open and accessible to all.

The role of the street and public space is still significant: resistance to oppression, challenging the social status quo and demanding changes, all find their political power and strength in claiming and taking back the streets. A recent example can be found in the protests in Iran following the death of Masha Amini by the hands of the Guidance Patrol after her arrest for improperly wearing the hijab. Lefebvre makes clear that the walls of the city can work as signifiers, symbols and symptoms of conflict, contestation and protest. Clearly, living in a city involves the production and consumption of signs, as

⁵ This concept is used to describe certain spaces that are somehow “other”: ships, cemeteries, prisons etc. These are spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than what is immediately visible.

we all need to understand the semiotics of a city to make sense of information that confronts us in our everyday urban existence. However we have to keep in mind that:

there is no need for the signage and communication to be merely directional, prescriptive or only associated with commodification and the conditions of the market. Otherwise it becomes, as Lefebvre suggests, part of the dominating power of representation rather than a possibility of free creative expression (Zieleniec 2016, 4).

Graffiti is really an example of creative expression, it's a challenge to dominant representations of space as purely functional and commodified: writers and Street Artists are examples of relatively powerless and overlooked urban inhabitants that attempt to make space meaningful by inscribing, writing and painting the walls of the city. Galal (2008) finds that Graffiti and Street Art can be read as a reaction to the invasion by corporations and brands of public space and in this light it can be associated with the Culture Jamming movement.⁶ It is a form of protest used to parody and subvert media culture, especially corporate advertising. The procedure usually consists in the defacement of billboards to drastically alter the message. People taking part in this movement imply that everyone has the right to respond to images that they did not ask to see, and because on average people can not afford to respond to a company with personal advertisement they have to do it on the billboard itself. Street Art shares some characteristics and some of the motives with Culture Jamming.

Graffiti as a very public practice, as living art, even if sometimes temporary or ephemeral, can add meaning, beauty, value and distraction to cities that are increasingly dominated by the homogenizing effects of capitalism. In other words:

Graffiti can be considered then as free quotidian public art and/or politics, as a challenge to normal, banal, functionalised and increasingly commodified and privatised space. [...] Graffiti then can be understood as an expression or embodiment of Lefebvre's cry and demand for the 'right to the city', the right to appropriate, appreciate, know and use its spaces and places. Graffiti as an example of a return to city as *oeuvre*, a living creative work of art, always in the process of being made and remade. (Zieleniec 2016, 7)

Graffiti reaffirms the value of space and as a practice it represents and makes space social through active engagement and intervention with and in the urban environment. At the same time it challenges the right to colonize space and leave signs, symbols, messages, images, that are not driven only by and for the market, but, on the contrary, by and for those who inhabit urban space. The issue itself that Graffiti arises debates

⁶ The name "culture jamming" was coined in 1984 by the San Francisco band Negativland, that plays experimental music mixing radio jingles, talk shows and news clips with music.

about decorum and conflict on property damage is already a sign of participation in the life and culture of the lived environment. Again Lefebvre makes the point that:

To put art at the service of the urban does not mean to prettify urban space with works of art. This parody of the possible is a caricature. Rather, this means that time-spaces become works of art and that former art reconsiders itself as source and model of appropriate topics: of temporal qualities inscribed in spaces (Lefebvre 1996, 260).

Not everyone will necessarily find all Graffiti to be artistically or aesthetically pleasing or worthwhile, but it can't be denied that Graffiti writing is an activity that challenges the schemes and structures imposed by urban designers, planners and architects. It confronts and resists the restrictive political regulation and imposition of the spatial order and offers a non-commercial alternative adornment in contrast to and conflict with economic, commercial and financial interests. Shepard Fairey, mostly known for his black-and-white Andre the Giant "Obey" stickers, explains: " Whether it be positive or negative, the sticker's existence is worthy as long as it causes people to consider the details and meanings of their surroundings. In the name of fun and observation" (in Waclawek 2011, 75).

But when dealing in particular with Street Art, it should be pointed out, as briefly discussed in the first chapter, that wall paintings can cause unforeseen socio-economic consequences. The capacity of Street Art to contribute to the enhancement of urban places has been studied and analyzed in several international experiences, with different spillover effects, not necessarily positive ones, depending on the context where it has been developed. Antonio Comorrino, discussing the context of the city of Naples identifies Street Art works as catalysts of urban regeneration:

certain distinctive works – which refer specifically to Street Art productions - are strong indicators of incipient changes ongoing in the city: the dynamics of re-signification that such practices and cultural products have established to cause episodes of urban regeneration"(2016, 193).

In Naples, as well as in other cities like Rome or Milan, the process of regeneration has found efficacious activators in the spontaneous phenomenon of Street Art, then recognized by municipalities and therefore inserted in institutional programs, often with resource investments. One of the most meaningful examples is the Tor Marancia neighborhood in Rome where, in 2015, the cultural association 999 Contemporary promoted the project "Big City Life" with the realization of 21 murals on the walls of the City Hall. The project was partly financed by the Roma Capitale authority. Thanks to this project Tor Marancia, a working class neighborhood outside the city center, has gained new fame, with many Street Art tours organized in the area and a new sense of belonging for inhabitants. Several international experiences demonstrate an increasing correlation

between practices of Street Art and changes in socio-economic and urban dynamics. In the United Kingdom, a 2016 study conducted by scholars of Warwick University (Seresinhe, Preis, and Moat 2016), has demonstrated that in London the districts which presented the highest percentage of urban and Street Art had registered an increase in the real estate prices. It is obvious, in accordance with the authors of the study, that there are different potential reasons for the real estate price increases: but Street Art is included as an indicator of district quality improvement and real estate demand increase, as well as an attractor for resources and economic activities, making it a leading factor in real estate rise in prices. This has a major effect, known as gentrification, for historical inhabitants of once poor neighborhoods. The new found attractiveness of marginal areas with Street Art interventions attracts investors with more spending power that colonize (these areas are also usually historically inhabited by minorities) the space, causing the displacement of current inhabitants that cannot afford the living costs of the area anymore.

Writers and Street Artists practice their right to the city by 'writing the city' offering the possibility of new ways of seeing, reading and understanding the urban, the city and everyday life. Graffiti gives voice and acknowledges the existence of those who live in the city but are often overlooked or ignored. The right to the city cannot be conceived simply as a call for a return to traditional cities. It can only be expressed as a transformed and renewed right to urban life for the whole of society and especially for those who *inhabit* it.



Picture 12 Untitled by Clemens Behr (left) and Il Ponentino by Pantonio (right), Tor Marancia (Rome)

3.5 A Feminist Right to the City

Many of the scholars that I previously quoted follow a marxist approach to urban studies, therefore they are especially interested in dealing with questions and issues relating to class. We have seen how elitist a city can be, both historically, socially and physically. I am now going to address the concept of urban public space seen through the lens of gender, and the specificities it concerns. The feminist contribution has been determinant in redefining the idea of public space, presenting a newer and broader point of view on different fields, from law proceedings to everyday life, and by linking all these aspects together. Graffiti and Street Art take place in the city: and we have seen how this form of art can play a role in the creation of meaning in the urban context, but when gender comes into play balances can shift. Assuming that women take part in both Graffiti and Street Art (as they do), it is necessary to deal with questions about the relationship between gender and the urban space.

To think of the city is to think, in one way or another, of space. Feminist materialist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz defines the city as:

a complex and interactive network that links together, often in an unintegrated and ad hoc way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, relations, with a number of architectural, geographical, civic and public relations. The city brings together economic flows, and power networks, forms of management and political organization, interpersonal, familial, and extra-familial social relations, and the aesthetic/economic organization of space and place to create a semi-permanent but everchanging built environment or milieu. (Grosz 1995, 382)

Urban space is not a gender neutral environment because it is made of relations that in themselves are not neutral. As we have seen, just a number of people are allowed to create space, because they have the political and cultural capacity to design and plan. Because certain people are given the power to create urban spaces, this results in a system of inequality in which those who are not in power are subjected to the ideas and plans of those who are in charge. The average citizen is not granted the immediate ability to make decisions about what our public spaces should look like. The possibility and capacity to design space is not only about money and power. Within the last thirty years, feminist geographers, architectural historians and critics have argued that many of the power imbalances present in our urban spaces are strictly related and due to gender inequalities.

Gender is a concept introduced in feminist theory in the passage from what is considered first-wave feminism and the second-wave. It is not a term coined by feminist scholars but it was introduced in the debate to criticize a set of knowledge that was assumed to be

universally representative. To use Gayle Rubin's 1975 formulation, gender is "the socially-imposed division of the sexes" (1975, 159), so it includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman or a man. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender interacts with, but is different, from sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. The use of the term gender made it possible for feminists to shift the discussion focus from the biological and "natural" dimension of womanhood to the social one, highlighting how the definition of man and woman, male and female are socially constructed.

In this work I necessarily focus on the broad issue of gender in the urban context, keeping in mind that I do not assume that all women share the same experience of oppression. Sexism is a system of domination but it is not the only determinant: race, ethnicity, class and sexual preference play a critical part in determining the extent to which sexism oppresses women in their life experiences. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality. The development of the Intersectional Theory (sometimes identified with third-wave feminism) is due to feminist movements such as the black, chicano or lesbian feminist movement that fought to bring to light issues that were invisible to white middle class feminists in the '70s. Thanks to these movements the discussion on gender had the possibility to develop in later years with an attention to complexity and difference. Intersectionality works, therefore, on treating differences as relationships based simultaneously on similarities and differing traits (Marchetti 2013). The term intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in the juridical field after the 1976 process "DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors"⁷. She used the term "juridical intersectionality" to describe the paradoxical situation in which black women found themselves in legal proceedings as they were not protected from gender discrimination, conceived to defend white women, nor from race discrimination, that was more focused on black men. The difficulties encountered in defining intersectionality and its application have brought Leslie McCall to point out three main approaches "defined principally in terms of their stance toward categories, that is, how they understand and use analytical categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality in social life" (2005, 1773). The first approach is called anticategorical

⁷ This action was filed by the plaintiffs seeking a determination that the "last hired-first fired" lay off policies of the defendants discriminate against them as black women, and are therefore a perpetuation of past discriminatory practices. For a full account on this topic see: Crenshaw 1989.

complexity, based, as the name suggests, on the belief that social life is too complex to be reduced to fixed categories, that are, therefore, considered merely social fictions and producers of inequalities. Of the three approaches, this one appears to have been the most successful in satisfying the demand for complexity, for the fact that there is now great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way. The second approach goes under the name of intracategorical complexity and falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum between the first approach, which rejects categories, and the third approach, which uses them strategically, as we will see. This approach is called intracategorical complexity because authors following this approach tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups. Finally, the third approach is known as intercategorical complexity and “requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions”(McCall 2005, 1773).

In their book “Gendering the City”, Kristine B. Miranne and Alma H. Young argue that: “women experience cities differently from men specifically because of the gender asymmetries that are embedded in distinct institutions and local institutional relationships” (2000, 5). That is why a feminist perspective helps in pointing out how conventional models marginalize many people in our society. In order for women to not be marginalized, their urban experiences need to be taken into account, especially at the policy level. Drawing on a detailed critique of the work of Harvey (1989) and Soja (1989), Doreen Massey (1994) argues that space continues to be theorized from the premise of the universal male norm, where women are generally regarded as other, needed only as analysis material on perceived changes in the relations of production and consumption. For Mirianne and Young:

first, women’s and men’s experiences in the city are different and these differences center largely on relations of inequality; second, women’s active use of space and time often results in changes to the spatial and social structure of the city; and third, structural changes can alter gender relations within the city (2000, 1).

We can see that bounded places and spatialized identities are not static, understanding the power relations and processes that produce bounded areas gives us the possibility to comprehend how urban women are contained and enact their identities within these spaces, but also how women’s alternative vision of urban spaces can finally break the limits that contain them. Gendered urban boundaries are multiple and intersecting, provisional and shifting, and contradictory. Women have found ways to explore and

exploit boundaries, for example in Graffiti and Street Art they constantly cross boundaries as they explore spaces that have been closed to them, such as streets at night. Urban space is considered unwelcoming to women during the day, but even dangerous by night. Common idea is that women should not be out alone during the night: it is safer for them to move in groups, especially together with men. The "Take Back the Night" movement, that is actively involved in the struggle for women to regain and reclaim public spaces, especially at night, is an example of fear faced by women in the streets.

Generally urban space is thought to be more available and accessible to men than to women. In addition, many feminist architectural historians and critics see architecture itself as reflective of masculinity. Historically speaking, most architects and planners have been men and they have tended to create buildings and spaces that reflected their interests and in which men are encouraged to interact. An example of planned masculine space of production is, or better was, the city of Rotterdam: "in the modernist planning of the mid-twentieth century (the decades in which Rotterdam was largely rebuilt after WWII) the urban was imagined as a masculine space of production (and its counterpoint of the suburb as a feminine space of reproduction)" (van den Berg and Chevalier 2018, 36). Nowadays, as women are assuming more "nontraditional responsibilities", it's becoming evident that the built environment is not able to meet women's changing needs. Probably with a better understanding of how diverse social groups interact and how the urban space enhances such interaction, new and more welcoming spaces can be created in the city.

At the policy making level, working within an intersectionality paradigm can help identify and address exclusions and vulnerabilities: this can present challenges, but it could be revealed to be more effective than targeting single identity markers (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.). Hankivsky and Cormier assert that: "From an intersectionality viewpoint, targeted policies are often as ineffective as general policies in that both fail to address multiple identities and within-group diversity" (2011, 218), the premise of intersectionality is that focusing on single markers leads to a false classification that does not reflect people's experiences and lives. It is important to point out that this approach differs substantially from the so-called "additive approach" as the latter attempts to understand issues of diversity starting with one identity category, to which others are added, but it is inadequate for getting a layered view of wider social inequalities and individual experience of discrimination.

We mentioned before the Lefebvrian notion of right to the city, that constitutes a radical redefinition of the purpose and of the idea of belonging to a political community. Lefebvre doesn't define the right to the city in terms of formal citizenship status, but bases it on inhabitation. Therefore, those who inhabit the city earn the right to the city by living in it.

Researcher Tovi Fenster (2005) points out some gaps in the theory on critical issues such as patriarchal power relations, that are also ethnic, cultural and gender-related. Lefebvre's right to the city refers to the use of public spaces, that, as we said, are perceived, especially by feminist critique, as white middle class heterosexual male domain. According to Miranne and Young, urban space is made up of socially constructed boundaries, which fulfill the role of keeping women and men separate and at the same time have been keeping women out of urban public spaces and in the private space of the home. If public space is not considered safe for women, the private space, that is the home environment, is usually seen as the one associated with womanhood. This sharp distinction between public and private space as places of belonging is relatively effective: the home space can be a contested space for women, it can become a space of segregation and abuse of the right to use and participate. The question of how the right to the city is gendered cannot be separated from the debate on public and private spheres. Private and public are not neutral categories, but loaded terms that conceal other gender-related issues such as reproduction and production, passive and active, unpaid work and breadwinner hierarchical dichotomies.

This restriction in the private domain has implications in the public one:

Such dominance of patriarchal power relations at the very private domain obviously affects the different ways women fulfil their right to the public – the city. These connections may be implicit and not clearly connected even in women's minds but it seems that the construction of patriarchal powers at the home level affects, even subconsciously, women's sense of freedom of movement and use of public spaces (Fenster 2005, 222).

That is why for some women the space of the city has often represented a synonym of freedom, the only space where they are allowed to explore without strict impositions. Cities still today, can therefore represent for women both an escape from an oppressive home and a dangerous and unsafe space. The Separate Spheres ideology, that asserted the innate difference between men and women, influenced heavily by biological determinism, had a huge impact in history, partially still visible today. But the shift of feminism from a model of inclusion and adherence to an heteronormative paradigm to the idea of autodetermination, allowed the movement to open itself up to the expression of difference, as we have seen with the development of intersectionality. The dismantling of the dichotomy domestic/public following social changes happened from the aftermath of World War II onwards, led to the idea of performativity in the public sphere. Judith Butler (1990, 2004) wrote many contributions on the issue of performativity, arguing against the view that saw biological sex as determining behavior or gender (as we've seen before gender and sex do not necessarily align), but instead she affirms that people

learn to behave in a certain way to fit into society, and gender corresponds to a certain attributed role. In her words:

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my "own" gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself). (Butler 2004, 1)

So here Butler underlines the fact that performing one's gender is not necessarily a conscious activity, and, indeed, it is not something that comes from an inner self but from outside. We can find some street artists that in a certain way perform gender in their creation: we have previously mentioned French artist Miss Van, who uses round shapes, flowing hair and provocative expressions or poses to represent her doll-like characters in the cityscape. Occasionally these figures are accompanied by cuddly animals or toys which are meant as proxies for boys. The seductive playfulness of her dolls is usually interrupted by their disturbingly direct gaze: this appears unsettling because it disrupts the sexual fantasy and in this way she dismantles the audience's expectations.



Picture 13 Miss Van's work in Barcelona

Religious power can play a big part in shaping space and can be responsible for the feeling of unsafety for women. Public spaces are associated with discomfort because of a sense of threat: an interesting example can be found in the city of Jerusalem, in the ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim. This place is usually avoided by women,

even though it is located in a central area, because of its ghettoized gendered character clearly expressed on big signs at the two main entrances, where its requested, both in Hebrew and English, to limit the use of the public spaces by women unless they are modestly dressed as required by the signs. Cultural Studies scholar Elizabeth Wilson felt that: “recent feminist contributions to the discussion of urban problems have tended to restrict themselves narrowly to issues of safety, welfare and protection” (1992, 10) instead of asserting women’s rights to the risks in the city recognising that the city has consistently emancipated women more than rural life or suburban domesticity ever has. Graffiti writing can be read as an attempt for emancipation and response to a system that tends to relegate certain segments of population to invisibility, being them women or the young from marginal neighborhoods. Women have, in this case, additional issues to face, first because the city is an aesthetically, socially and physically exclusive space, secondly because Graffiti, as we will discuss in the next chapter, is a strongly masculine subculture. The female Graffiti writer is, therefore, representative of specific interactions between gender and urban spaces. In the “Women’s Environmental Rights: A Manifesto” Laslie Weisman underlines that the:

appropriation and use of space are political acts. The kinds of space we have, don’t have or are denied access to can empower us or render us powerless. Spaces can enhance or restrict, nurture or impoverish. We must demand the right to architectural settings which will support the essential needs of all women. (1981, 4)

And in a way we could argue that Graffiti and Street Art can both represent a form of resistance against societal norms but can also become an opportunity for women to reclaim space in the city as their own. As the title of this work suggests, the importance of having and claiming a space of creativity in urban space is necessary for a woman interested in writing Graffiti or Street Art, just as much as it was a crucial requisite for Woolf (1929) to have “a room of one’s own” to write literature.

In the last chapter I will discuss the history and peculiarities of the Italian Graffiti and Street Art scene, discussing some examples that I consider significant.

Chapter 4

The Italian Scene

4.1 The History of Graffiti in Italy

In the first three chapters I discussed some of the main characteristics of Graffiti and Street Art: their history and evolution, the concept of subculture and gender-based exclusion from subcultures, public space and its relation with gender. In this final chapter I will give an overview of the Graffiti and Street Art scene in Italy. I will start, once again, from the evolution of Graffiti and Street Art, dealing with some of the major contemporary street artists and then I will try to give a general outlook on specific issues regarding Graffiti and Street Art in Italian public spaces. Lastly, I will give some examples of women involved in Graffiti and in Street Art in order to see how the gender issues outlined in the previous chapters are understood by the actual people involved.

Graffiti Writing spread across Italy at the end of the '80s, while in New York the subway era was coming to an end due to the repression strongly demanded by mayor John Lindsay and conducted by police forces. Even if cities in Italy discover Graffiti, and the Hip Hop culture, later compared to major centers in Europe, such as Amsterdam, London, Berlin and Paris, it becomes a huge phenomenon in a relatively short amount of time. Following the subculture's evolutionary steps that had taken place in the United States, Italian writers started bombing the Italian railway system's cars, an equivalent of subway cars in the Big Apple. Italy is equipped with a vast and widespread railway system, especially in the northern regions of the peninsula. Through trains tags, throwups and pieces can travel all around Italy, making a writer's name famous. Before the Internet this was the only system for a writer to become known and respected: pieces could travel from small towns in southern Italy to big centers like Milan in one day or so. In the mid '90s, trains of the Ferrovie Italiane were completely covered of tags as confirmed by Rae, a writer active in those years: "If you've never done trains, you're an artist, a decorator, not a writer" (Mininno 2008, 72 *author's translation*). Many writers in the Nineties decided to focus their work only on train cars. At first, Ferrovie Italiane did not take offensive action against Graffiti, limiting the interventions on cleaning windows. After the end of the '90s, when the phenomenon had become too hard to control and

stop, the railway organization decided to finally take action, activating a repressive system similar to the one adopted by the New York MTA during the "War against Graffiti". This drastically reduced the phenomenon of train bombing, which is, nowadays, only visible on older trains. This is why pictures are so important to show what this moment meant for Italian Graffiti history. Moreover, trains represented the possibility of getting in contact not only with national writers, but also with European ones. Many European trains traveled all around with Graffiti Writing and even with writers themselves, who started forming the first international crews, with elements from different nations.

Local railway systems were equally important for the development of Graffiti, especially because many of them started using means to fight Graffiti Writing, like anti-Graffiti coating, only years after the national railway system had started. One of the most colorful lines was the Lombardy railway system, Trenord, and the Neapolitan Circumvesuviana, where it is still possible to find new and interesting works: recently a writer named Gios signed a piece against the Ukrainian war with the words "Stop war" on a rainbow background. In big cities other targets of writers' attacks were the subway systems, mostly in Rome or Milan. In Rome, especially in the '00s, pieces on the trains were created one above the other, giving a peculiar aspect to the city. Mininno writes: "the result is a visual chaos that leaves tourists feeling perplexed, but that characterizes in a particular way the public transport of the capital. Just stop for a few hours in the Ostiense station to see a good part of the history of roman writing" (Mininno 2008, 128 *author's translation*).

The most important tools for spreading Graffiti before the arrival of the Internet were fanzines. Through these independent and self-produced magazines, full of photographs of the pieces scattered throughout Europe, young writers came to know the latest trends, the most avant-garde cities, the most active crews and all the news related to Graffiti Writing. We have to thank photographs and fanzines for the most testimonies of early Graffiti that we can still look at today, making it possible to preserve some aspects of a very transient genre.

One of the first fanzines appeared in Italy is "Impatto Nitro", made in Milan by the TDK crew in 1992. Initially, the fanzines consisted of about twenty pages photocopied in black and white, made by hand, cutting and gluing photographs and sheets of paper, with covers made by hand by the writers themselves. In these magazines it was possible to find news about the whole Hip Hop culture, that was really popular in Italy in the '90s, also thanks to the diffusion of television channels like MTV. The main Italian magazines were "Tribe Magazine" founded by the writers Airone and KayOne, and "Aelle", which was later renamed "AL Magazine". Both magazines were published from the beginning of the Nineties until the year 2000. In general, Italian magazines and fanzines had a high

level of content. The services were accurate and stimulating, since they were made by admirers and by the protagonists of the movement themselves. Because of their high-quality standards, Italian fanzines and magazines spread abroad, while simultaneously foreign ones were imported to Italy, creating an almost global creative and cultural exchange.

Some exhibitions and media coverage contributed to the development and diffusion of writing. As briefly mentioned in the first chapter, in 1979 Medusa Gallery, in Rome, curated a solo exhibition of Lee Quinones and in 1984 Bologna hosted the historic exhibition "Arte di Frontiera: New York Graffiti". The diffusion of documentaries and movies about Graffiti subculture like "Wild Style" or "Style Wars" meant the circulation of the phenomenon not only among fans, but among a wider public. The Italian Graffiti Writing developed and evolved mainly on the Milan-Bologna-Rome triangle. It is in these three cities, in fact, that the main styles were born and tested, the first conventions and first exhibitions were held and the first kings were "crowned". In the '90s, Italian Graffiti Writing matured and evolved, remaining the main genre and undisputed master of the Italian streets. With the arrival of the 2000s, in Italy, as in the rest of Europe and the world, we witnessed an important development of Street Art and today the two genres coexist throughout the territory.

4.2 The development of Street Art in Italy

Italy has a great tradition of mural painting: starting from the fresco technique to mural paintings used as a tool for fascist propaganda. Much later, street artists revolutionized the concept of mural art, taking advantage of large spaces like walls to experiment with new techniques and new compositions. Many protagonists of Street Art have started as writers, but with time they have switched to Street Art, mainly for the considerably larger expressive freedom granted. The 2000s were the time that marked the fortune of Street Art, when festivals became an important meeting point for artists, contributing to the creation and the evolution of this art form. From this point of view Italy played a leading role in the European scene, not only because it is among the countries with the highest density of active artists in the sector, but because over time it has been able to produce great quality works, even far away from large city centers. We have already mentioned in the first chapter the festival "Icône" in the small city of Modena, active since 2002, among the first and most long-lived festivals in Italy, but there are many other important experiences that contributed to the formation of a generation of street artists. One of

them is the “Fame Festival” of Grottaglie, Taranto, that in a few editions has won, thanks to targeted invitations and a close relationship with some protagonists of the scene, an international following; another example is “Elementi Sotterranei” in Gemona del Friuli, Udine, or “Draw the Line” in Campobasso.

4.3 Geography of Graffiti and Street Art

Graffiti and Street Art thrive in the urban environment: they were born in cities and in this environment they express their subversive potential and their messages best. Italy, unlike the United States, is a country characterized by highly felt regional differences and by a constellation of medium to small towns. The first cities in which Graffiti and then Street Art became more widespread were bigger centers like Milan, Bologna and Rome, which over the years have become a reference point for writers, even internationally. But in addition to these great realities, many other centers also have an active and prolific scene, such as, for example, Turin, Naples, Padua and the Adriatic coast.

The city of Milan, with its impressive urban development, the high percentage of residents in the hinterland and the very active social centers, has led to a natural development of Graffiti writing. One of the most important experiences of writing in Milan is symbolized by the self-managed public space Leoncavallo, still active today. Founded in 1975, after several forced evictions, in 1994 the social center moved to via Watteau, choosing as its headquarters a former paper mill. Over the years the walls of the social center have been enriched with Graffiti, creating an extremely varied and dense Hall of Fame, which contains a great portion of the history of the city’s writing. Currently, the entire perimeter of the social center is flooded with Graffiti, and it is impossible to find even a space without color. The Leoncavallo is a pilgrimage destination for Italian and foreign writers. Another significant place for the Graffiti scene in Milan is the Hall of Fame of Viale Caprilli, in the San Siro area. The residential area is anonymous and not frequented much, except for the weekly football matches. So, in 2011, the association “Stradedarts” founded by KayOne, one of the first historical writers of Milan, decided to organize an event to try to revitalize the neighborhood, at least at an artistic and cultural level. The association invited two hundred and fifty writers to create works on the wall that runs along the *Ippodromo del Galoppo* (a racecourse), creating the longest concentration of Graffiti on a wall in Italy.

Graffiti works can provoke different reactions: there are always supporters and detractors, and this wall was no exception as shown in the documentary *Street Art:*

Graffiti in Milan, made in 2013. Street Art, instead, is usually more appreciated by the average audience, because it is often more easily understandable and it is considered more aesthetically pleasing. An example of how, sometimes, Street Art is integrated into the community is given by the majestic and radiant Virgin of Guadalupe made by the Street Artist Ozmo, located in the Isola district, now a real sanctuary for the South Americans of the neighborhood. Another artist whose work is deeply appreciated by citizens in Milan is Pao. He implements a process of real reappropriation of the urban space, because it does not limit itself to intervening on the walls, but exploits every type of support, from the columns of electricity to bollards, that in Milan have a characteristic rounded shape. Pao reinterprets these architectures, transforming them into characters of popular culture and animals of all kinds, among which stands out what his characteristic feature: the penguin. On his operation of decontextualization and re-transformation of pre-existing elements of the urban fabric, Pao states:

"By decontextualizing pre-existing elements, I try to create an effect of alienation in the passer-by, reality assumes magical features, logical reasoning loses importance to make room for instinctive behavior. In this sense my style is very playful and has many references to the childhood world. Using three-dimensional elements ensures that the work is one with the surrounding space; urban space is transformed, becoming the stage where my characters act, interacting with the "viewer" who becomes an active participant" (Riva 2007, 142 *author's translation*).



Picture 14 Penguins by Pao

Another big center of Italian Graffiti is Bologna, one of the first places where the movement spread, towards the end of the Seventies. The seventies brought social and political unrest in the city of Bologna, but also a culturally rich atmosphere. In 1970 the DAMS (Discipline of Arts, Music and Entertainment) was established. It was the first

degree course in Italy to be specialized in the teaching of theater, cinema, music and the various arts. Many Italian relevant culture figures studied and thought there, even Francesca Alinovi, considered one of the first Italian scholars on the American Graffiti phenomenon. The Eighties opened with the Bologna massacre in August 1980, a terrorist bombing attack that took place in the Bologna Centrale railway station killing 85 people and wounding over 200. It was Italy's deadliest terrorist attack in the "Years of Lead" of rightist and leftist militant violence. The matrix of the attack was neo-fascist and several members of the organization *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* were sentenced for the attack, even if some dynamics are still not entirely clear today. The situation and the contradictions due to this trauma were obviously very visible in the city in the aftermath. Among the first historical writers from Bologna are Deemo, Wolf, Shorty, Rusty and then Dado, Draw and Mambo. Bologna is also home, as we have seen previously with both Blu and Ericailcane, of some of the most innovative Street Artists in the Italian scene. The most famous characters, protagonists of the Bologna urban art scene from the Eighties to today, are the couple formed by Monica Cuoghi and Claudio Corsello, known as the duo Cuoghi Corsello. Since 1986, the couple has imposed its presence in the urban fabric of Bologna, distancing themselves, however, from the classical practice of Graffiti writing. Cuoghi Corsello focused their research on a purely figurative style, creating imaginative and intrusive characters. One of their most recurring and recognized subjects is *Pea Brain*, a stylized goose.



Picture 15 Pea Brain in Bologna

In Bologna, as it was the case for Milan and most Italian realities, writers and Street Artists started their Graffiti or Street Art careers in social centers. The firsts to become

real institutions for Graffiti writing in Bologna are Level 57 and Link, both not active anymore. Street Artists have fought against the forced closure of some social centers and sometimes they have been successful. An example was Blu's work on an Xm24 wall: in 2013 this social center was the protagonist of a heated dispute between the municipality and some citizens, as the municipality wanted to demolish it to make room for a traffic circle. Blu decided to help the social center by painting a large wall in which he represented an allegory of the city of Bologna, inspired by the saga of the Lord of the Rings. Due to the presence of Blu's mural, considered of great artistic interest, the urban project was modified and the social center temporarily saved, until 2019 when the municipality eventually ordered the clearing out of the building. This is an example of how Street Art, more than other forms of art, can have an impact on how municipalities and citizens see and manage public space.

In the years Bologna has hosted numerous events of Graffiti and Street Art like "Frontier. La linea dello stile", a curatorial project organized between 2012 and 2013 curated by Claudio Musso and Fabiola Naldi. Another interesting event that takes place near Bologna, in the medieval village of Dozza, is the "Biennale del muro dipinto". This event, born in 1960, has opened its doors since the 2000s to Graffiti Writing and Street Art. All these events and the numerous active artists in the city demonstrate how Graffiti and Street Art are taken into account and their work is encouraged by the city of Bologna.

Rome has a long history of Urban Art that goes from the first examples of Graffiti Writing to the most avant-garde forms of Street Art. Since the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Rome has been home to one of the most active Italian Hip Hop scenes. It is in this atmosphere that one of the first crews of Graffiti Writing was born and it developed: "00199". The group was made up entirely of girls and unfortunately broke up early because of the tragic death of one of the members, Cheecky P, in a car accident. I will discuss this crew more in depth in what follows as it is one of the few examples known of an all female Graffiti crew in the Italian scene. In more peripheral areas of the city such as the area of Tiburtina station and Tor Bella Monaca it is still possible to see many Graffiti works, even those belonging to the first generations of writers, while the district of San Lorenzo, Ostiense and Pigneto are some of Street Artists' favorite places to work in. Social centers were, and still partially are, incredible gathering places for writers, for example the CSOA Forte Prenestino, that could be considered the Roman equivalent of Leoncavallo in Milan.

On the front of Street Art, Lucamaleonte is one of the most renowned Roman artists: active since the early 2000s, he is one of the most sought after Street Artists in Italy and abroad. He uses a mixed technique of stencils and freehand painting. Lucamaleonte has a remarkable artistic background, he appropriates subjects of Classical and Modern art,

reinterprets them on posters or stencils and places them on the street, creating a contrast between the classicism of the subjects and the surrounding contemporary urban environment. An example is the work realized in via Ostiense in 2014 entitled *#backtoblue*. The work is realized with his usual mixed technique, stencils and free hand. Lucamaleonte intervenes on a wall located below a very busy bridge of Via Ostiense, which often floods or fills with large puddles as a result of rains. The artist thus decided to portray an image taking inspiration from an illustration of the Flood, from an edition of the 1865 Bible, illustrated by the painter and engraver Gustave Doré. The realization was curated by the gallery 999 Contemporary, under the patronage of the City of Rome. The same gallery and the municipality of Rome curated and funded also the project in Tor Pignattara discussed in the third chapter. It is already possible to see the underlying project of Rome, and many other cities, as we will see, of using Street Art as a means of urban regeneration.



Picture 16 *#backtoblue* by Lucamaleonte

Another example of renowned Street Artists are Sten & Lex, probably the most famous artistic duo in Rome. They began to invade the Capitoline streets with their art in the early 2000s and are considered among the precursors of stencil art in Italy. They create huge works on the walls of various buildings, mostly portraits. Among the most notable commissioned works are: a wall of the former seventeenth-century Convent of Mentana, now used as a historic residence, built in 2012; the facade of the Palazzo dell'Economia, in Bari, in 2013, made through the technique of the "Stencil Poster" and a work made in K ge, Denmark, in 2011, during the urban art exhibition Walk this Way. Sten & Lex portraits are made of many small paper strips placed side by side, because of the

materials used they are very fragile and easily ruined by the weather. The Street Art scene in Rome is very active and the city is home to many other interesting and innovative Street Artists: from the boldness of Hogre's stencils, to the great poetic and colorful murals by Agostino Iacurci that seem to come out of a book of illustrations, up to the delicate works of Hitnes or the social commentaries by Laika MCMLIV.



Picture 17 The Church by Sten & Lex in Mentana

4.4 How does Italy react to Graffiti and Street Art?

Graffiti and Street Art have expanded throughout the Italian territory and nowadays it is really rare to find a city totally devoid of such artistic expressions. Illegality, as discussed in the second chapter, is one of the characteristics that make Graffiti appealing for young people. Illegality can derive from many aspects: from the political message, from offending public decency, or it can simply result from a lack of authorization, as it is mostly the case. Together with the other two fundamental factors, that are the use of public spaces and the motivations for writing on walls, illegality still remains a fundamental aspect. Street Art does not place the same amount of relevance on illegality

and many Street Artists are involved in painting both legal and illegal walls. From a legal standpoint the question of how to legally proceed against writers and Street Artists in Italy is a complicated one. Italian law provides Article 639 of the Penal Code in reference to the crime of disfigurement and defacing of other people's things. On the other hand, article 33 of the Italian Constitution protects artistic freedom and its teaching, while the law on copyright (n. 633/1941) protects every form of creativity and artistic expression. This law does not state explicitly if this applies also to works realized illegally, therefore the problem arises when determining whether the work carried out illegally on the walls is actually artistic expression or merely vandalism. Although sometimes it is undeniable the creative and aesthetic value of the work, the judgment remains extremely subjective and it is up to the judge to decide the final word. I will not dwell into specific juridical cases as it is not the focus of the present work, but this parenthesis could be useful to understand the confusion surrounding Graffiti and Street Art, sometimes considered art and sometimes vandalism.

The reaction of municipalities and citizens towards Graffiti, and partially towards Street Art too, is a symptom of how complex the matter around artistic production and public space is. We have discussed this subject in the previous chapter and here I would like to make a few examples regarding the specific situation of Italy. Nowadays, a process of openness towards Graffiti is visible in many cities, but unfortunately, some municipalities are still adopting a zero tolerance policy against it. In 2013 ex mayor Giuliano Pisapia took part in an initiative to clean the walls of the city of Milan asserting the necessity of establishing cleaning days to "create beautiful things and cancel the ugly. There is Graffiti and Graffiti. For example, those on the walls of the *Ippodromo* are works to be preserved" (D'Amico 2013 *author's translation*). Those works at the *Ippodromo* were previously mentioned discussing the Graffiti scene in Milan, and we have seen that they had received mixed critiques by inhabitants of the area. In addition, always with the same purpose of cleaning walls, many associations were created by citizens' initiative, including the Associazione Nazionale AntiGraffiti and the Associazione Milano Muri Puliti. This is not the only case in which the municipality, with the citizens, engages in an exhausting, modern witch hunt, even introducing exemplary penalties and sizes on writers. Many other cities can brag having similar associations dedicated to cleaning away the perceived ugliness of Graffiti Writing. We can name some of the most active ones: Retake in Rome and Angeli del Bello in Florence for example. These groups share among each other the mission of the "promotion of beauty" ("Associazione - Retake Roma attiva nella cura dei beni comuni!" 2022), "the care and decorum of the city" ("Angeli del Bello" 2021). What is the significance of the anti-Graffiti, administrative or voluntary initiatives? Usually, material and symbolic interests are at

stake: mayors seek and gain cheap consent and do not spend much money, by outsourcing the cleanup work to the good will of citizens or by having it financed by sponsors. Associations gain visibility for their leaders and make proselytes while government and opposition parties find easy scapegoats to urban issues. Writers, at the same time, get exactly what they are looking for: clean walls ready to be written on and the thrill of continuing to play hide-and-seek with policemen. Here we introduce a few key terms used, and misused, in the discussion around the legitimacy of Graffiti on public space. As interestingly noted by Dal Lago and Giordano:

there is *no* socially recognized criterion of beauty or ugliness of the urban scene, the claim to erase Graffiti in the name of decorum and elegance seems the result of an aesthetic judgment, but in reality hides, more or less consciously, something else: for us it is essentially about the *preservation of property* (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 9 *author's translation*)

The defense is not only of what one owns but also of traditions, refusing *tout court* everything that is new or not easily understood. Campaigns against Graffiti rest on very nebulous theoretical assumptions, apart from the defense of private property. Theoretically, property owners, cleaners and mayors who patronize Graffiti could get away with it easily, saying that any unauthorized intervention on private or public surfaces is prohibited and therefore must be punished. However, this rarely happens: aesthetic criteria are always brought up. In other words, even the most exacerbated opponents enter sooner or later in the artistic merit of Graffiti. The question of beauty is tricky: we could start considering who is or should be in charge, and on which grounds, of deciding that building walls are more aesthetically pleasing without Graffiti. The concept of beauty is subjective and we are aware, studying the art history from the avant-garde movement onwards, that it is possible to make art renouncing the dogma of beauty. This kind of obsession with beauty is a very European feature and I dare say, especially Italian.

The “War against Graffiti” in the United States was launched as a response against criminality based on the “broken windows theory”. First proposed by the criminologist James Q. Wilson in 1982, this theory holds that: “seemingly minor instances of social and physical disorder in urban spaces can contribute to an atmosphere of lawlessness that encourages more serious crimes” (Gladwell and Zakaria 2015). That is why Graffiti Writing was heavily persecuted in New York, with, as we have seen, mixed results. So, beauty or the other term introduced by the passage quoted from the book by Giordano and Dal Lago (2018), decorum, are not necessarily central everywhere in the discussion around Graffiti. The importance of urban decorum is closely linked to the existent relationship in Italy between urbanism and democracy that is declined almost exclusively

in terms of conflict between conservation and modification of the nature or legacy of the past. But the urban landscape is a field of implicit or explicit conflict between heterogeneous powers and interests, visible in all forms of advertising that occupy urban surfaces. It is taken for granted that anyone with adequate means can impose on all other urban actors their own aesthetic conception. Graffiti, as we have seen in the previous chapter, contests the illegitimate monopoly of the urban landscape, explained in better words by Giordano and Dal Lago:

no one has ever formally defined a “right to the appearance of urban space”, but it is intuitive that in the context of the city only very few exercise it, and therefore all the others are subject to this. In a sense, Graffiti questions the “monopolistic property” of images and is therefore opposed by everyone. In sociological terms, the power to impose its own urban setting, and to prevent that of others, can be defined substantially, but formally, illegitimate. (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 6)

Even if municipalities are not always appreciative of writers' works, some cities have worked to contain the phenomenon of illegal writing promoting a different approach based on cooperation between writers and institutions. The city of Turin, with the project "MurArte", active since 1999, decided to encourage this form of expression, assigning legal walls to writers. On these walls, writers have total freedom of expression. Following the considerable success, in economic, social and aesthetic terms, the project "MurArte" was also adopted by other cities.

4.5 Street Art in Italy: between Urban Regeneration and Gentrification

For Street Art, even though it is definitely possible to find its detractors, we have to keep in mind that this artistic form is more socially accepted by both municipalities and citizens. Many factors can influence the different reception reserved to Street Art compared to Graffiti. One of the main reasons is that Street Art is on average considered more aesthetically pleasing. It is perceived as a factor that can help in beautifying neglected neighborhoods and it is considered a catalyst for urban regeneration. We can understand urban regeneration as an inclusive and integrated approach aimed at improving buildings and the surrounding areas through interventions on the social, environmental, physical, cultural and economic tissues. For its own characteristics, it is therefore defined as a broad and multi-faceted operational vision, which can start a path capable of restoring quality, values and wealth, thanks to the attribution of a leading role to the local communities (Messina 2018). Within the tools used to start the process of regeneration, urban art is a fundamental means on which many methods, experiments

and contemporary case studies are based. In an integrated and interconnected vision, however, it is evident that the exclusively artistic operational orientation cannot intervene alone as an activator of change. On the contrary, it may be able to trigger negative impacts on different aspects of the settlement and human tissue, fueling differences, favoring the relational fragmentation, worsening the socio-dynamics and favoring a vision of Street Art as a simplistic answer to complex and multi-layered issues and problems.

In Italian history three phases of urban regeneration have been identified: the first one started in the '70s from a renewed need for re-appropriation of spaces considered symbols of the city identity. Thus a process of redevelopment of historic centers was promoted, to mainly fight the depopulation in those areas. The second phase of urban regeneration, between the '80s and '90s, intervened on the buildings and areas let free after deindustrialization, starting a phase of new experiments that begin to integrate complex programs to new development and sustainability objectives. Cities in Italy have tried to take advantage of the so-called "Bilbao effect"⁸, funding different projects that took years to see the light and involving a significant use of financial resources. These kinds of projects, if strongly supervised, can be partially successful, but as scholars like Plaza (2006) highlighted, there are significant risks associated with operations of this kind, because significant investments in terms of money do not provide sufficient guarantees of stimulation for urban regeneration. The third phase of urban regeneration, which began in the 1990s and is currently underway, aims to respond to critical and widespread issues in large residential districts built during the real estate speculation era in the '60s. These areas suffer from poor architectural-urban design and latent service management that in time lead to questionable quality of life for people and to phenomena of discomfort and social fragility. The projects of urban regeneration aspire to supporting social inclusion, promoting new uses of urban spaces and facilitating access to services and innovation.

In those last thirty years art has often been identified as a pillar for urban regeneration strategies (Florida, 2002; Evans, 2009). Art is seen as a tool able to communicate and modify urban space, thus becoming a privileged site of intervention for redevelopment initiatives. In particular Street Art, for its strong expressive impact, accessibility, and the ability to improve the aesthetic qualities of urban space, is a privileged choice in urban regeneration projects. Instead of spontaneous works, Street Art becomes a work on commission born from the initiative of private or public subjects. Urban art is able to

⁸ The effect of economic and cultural renewal that took place in the declining industrial city of Bilbao thanks to the construction project of the new branch of the Guggenheim Museum.

promote positive impacts on the built environment and community. According to researchers (Messina 2018, Mela 2021) these include: reconfiguration of the perception of space; dissemination of a collective aesthetic consciousness; attribution of positive values to art and creativity. A multiplication of the positive effects is certainly possible in the interventions that have seen the community taking active part in the artistic processes, for example through the involvement in the choice of the object or theme depicted, or through active participation in the implementation phases.

What has been studied is that the tangible and visible impacts through the aesthetic improvement of contexts promote an underlying system of benefits on the social sphere that can also initiate stages of economic development. An enriched and more attractive environment can, in fact, more easily accommodate new investments or, in the same way, observe an increase in the rent of land. In the medium-long term, large contexts rich in numerous works, are configured today as particular destinations of new slices of artistic-cultural tourism. Just think about all the Street Art tours organized in every big city around the world, especially in contexts that are strictly related with a specific artist, such as Banksy with Bristol. But, on the other side, it is easy to understand how these urban regeneration projects can generate some negative externalities. Sometimes the request for better living conditions in neglected neighborhoods is met only with interventions of urban art, thus fulfilling only the demand for aesthetic improvement. All this often happens when administrations think that they can trigger a process of autonomous regeneration only through low-cost interventions and easy and immediate implementation such as Street Art works. The question, answered only in part, can instead create a new disconnect between the community and local authorities, perceived as actors able to respond with simplistic formulas to complex infrastructure, socio-economic, welfare and cultural needs. The purely ephemeral essence of Street Art must not be forgotten; subject to bad weather, carelessness and increasingly rare conservation interventions, it can become a new negative symbol of degradation and neglect. This can feed further detachment between the community and the works, seen as an element able to accentuate the present and unresolved problems or, in a nutshell, perceived as symbols activating new processes of fragmentation and social distress.

All this can be further aggravated in the presence of gentrification phenomena activated by a modified perception of the redeveloped context. I already briefly discussed this concept but here I would like to make some clarifications. Every responsibility in the process of gentrification is easy to attribute to artists: we could say that the ways in which they participate in initiatives aimed at improving neighborhoods can in different ways trigger gentrification processes, but this process can turn against them. According to the theoretical model of Hackworth and Smith (2001), there are three phases of

gentrification: the spontaneous arrival of artists represents the first wave of gentrification, the second wave starts when their work is used as an economic lever by some actors (art galleries, bars, restaurants, clubs, etc.) and leads to the emergence of “themed” neighborhoods. The third wave, which is also characterized by the scale of investments and transformations, coincides with increasingly obvious institutional attempts to use art and culture as a tool for urban marketing. As the process takes off, in the absence of policies to encourage the rooting of artist communities, economic pressure, increase in rents and cost of living and the progressive gentrification of the neighborhood force artists to move.

I have already mentioned some examples of positive experiences of urban regeneration that used Street Art as a catalyst, the experience in neighborhood Ponticelli in Naples and the project Big City Life in Tor Pignattara in Rome. In time most Italian cities have started projects of urban development connected to Street Art, a very recent one is the project “On the wall” in the area around Ponte Morandi in Genoa. The murals painted on that area wanted to give a new face to the Certosa district that develops around the bridge, which collapsed on 14 August 2018 causing 43 victims. The project is not only a symbol to remember the tragedy, but represents an investment in the future of the neighborhood. The itinerary of the wall paintings has become a tour initiative dedicated to the rebirth of Certosa but also to other parts of Genoa, such as the adjacent district Sampierdarena. It is important to be careful with these kinds of projects for the externalities we have seen could be generated. Nowadays, municipalities and private associations work towards more community led programs, where people are involved not only in the project realization but they are invested at a deeper level in projects that have something to do with the history of the neighborhood.

In the working-class suburb of Tufello, in Rome, two murals were painted to honor the history of the area: a big portrait of actor and comedian Gigi Proietti, that grew up in the neighborhood as a child, and the face painted by Jorit of Valerio Verbano, a kid that was killed in his house by the Nar (Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari), a fascist organization, in 1980. The memory of both of them is really important for the entire neighborhood, as stated by Councillor for Culture of the third municipality Christian Raimo at the inauguration of Jorit’s mural: “Now, finally, the mural can become a symbol for the whole neighborhood, the sense of this initiative lies in the idea that memory, alive and present within the neighborhood, becomes a vehicle for strengthening community ties” (Pertici, Quagliata, and Falcier 2021 *author’s translation*). Initiatives that operate on two levels, affirming on the one hand a “right to art”, that is to be recognized as bearers of an aesthetic and cultural value, and on the other hand a “right to the city”, intended as the right to use public space by modifying and attributing new meanings to it (Mela 2021)

are the ones that do not run the risk of resulting in sterile embellishments, together with effective overall programs targeting the specific issues of the areas.

4.6 What about girls? The case of the 00199 crew

The central question in this work is trying to understand how and why women decide to take part in Graffiti or Street Art. In this chapter I have outlined different aspects of these two disciplines in Italy, from some of the most famous active personalities in the field to the reception reserved to those works and the economic effects they can produce. But I did not yet touch upon the issue of gender in the specific context of Italy. Italian literature around Graffiti and Street Art does not focus individually on this topic, and even in terms of figures it is very hard to know how many women take part in Graffiti in Italy.

Protagonist of the first Graffiti wave that flowered in the nineties is the historic women's crew "00199" composed by Breezy G together with Cheeky P, Panama, Tanzi and Drenni, who chose the train station Nomentana, abandoned after the World Cup, as a creative laboratory. The name of the crew comes from the postcode of a Roman district, "Quartiere Africano", where both Breezy G and Cheeky P grew up.

To the group is dedicated to the homonymous song by Assalti Frontali (ex. Onda Rossa Posse) in the album "Terra di Nessuno" that sang "La nostra strada è una, asfalto sotto i piedi verso il cielo mura, scritte di rabbia e d' amore, Graffiti, e per farsi guardare, spara colore, colore contro grigio, parola contro silenzio"⁹. The strong bond with the hip hop group Assalti Frontali, known for their political commitment and the relationship with the roman radio station Radio Onda Rossa, should give hints about the environment in which this crew was born and developed. Another writer of the Roman scene presents a clear view of how the situation of Graffiti in Rome was between the '80s and the '90s:

The Graffiti scene in Rome in those years was divided into two separate groups, one composed of traditional writers or tags, bombing and trains, in which each one wrote only his own name, while the other scene was composed of writers from social centers such as the crew BK38 or 00199, the latter formed only by women. So, in those years, if you were part of the Hip Hop scene you wrote your name while if you were part of the social center movement you wrote a message, or rather sentences that could represent the ideas of the movement. I remember that it often happened that during the demonstrations made by the social centers, at some point, the procession stopped and the protesters opened a circle to protect and hide

⁹Our street is one, asphalt under the feet walls to the sky, writings of anger and love, Graffiti, and to be looked at, shoot color, color against gray, word against silence [*author's translation*]

from the cops the writers who wrote these phrases on the walls. (Kode 2023, *author's translation*).

Surely it was a very lively environment, and the divisions with time lessened, the hip hop scene had some singers involved in politics but many were just interested in the new trend and in the communicative possibilities of this genre. Social centers were, as it was pointed out earlier in this chapter, one of the most important venues for Graffiti writers in Italy and, as they were highly politicized spaces, this reflected also on writing. 0199 writers themselves asserted the need to communicate something to the reader:

Politics, music, the color of Graffiti [...] made us start an intense activity following the Onda Rossa Posse around the social centers of Rome and Italy, blending together traditional writing with messages expressing thoughts. Our goal was to communicate with the reader" (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 34 *author's translation*).

This need to communicate with the external audience is not typical of traditional Graffiti, Panama, one of the components of the group explained: "it seemed reductive to write only the name and that's it, I disagreed with writers who did it" but she also adds "today on the contrary I believe that even writing only the name of the crew has a value, an impact, because the medium and the technique used are already disruptive, they change the viewer's perception" (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 40 *author's translation*).

Politics was really important for this crew: 00199 was born during the student protest movement known as "la Pantera" that involved university students between 1989 and 1990. It was a protest born to fight the reform wanted by Antonio Ruberti, at the time Minister of University and Scientific Research. The reform project implied a clear privatization of the public University system and less power granted to students, therefore, them, especially the ones closer to the Italian Communist Party, started the occupation of most universities in Italy. During these protests at the University La Sapienza in Rome Breezy G and Cheeky P wrote some messages of support to the cause, soon joined by the other crew members, Panama, Tanzi and Drenni.

The crew was aware of the peculiarity they represented: "we've been a bit of an anomaly, writing, instead of our name, a message, being politicized, being girls..." (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 35 *author's translation*). This statement is one of the few direct references to their gender in the interviews conducted by Giordano and Dal Lago (2018). In articles or in interviews, it is always pointed out that they are the only known example of an all-female crew in Italy, but more than that, the attention is mainly reserved to the political and ideological Graffiti they wrote. Even though Panama affirms that the hip hop scene, in particular the rap one, was really sexist, sticking together with other girls helped. The issue of being a gender minority in that environment did not stop the female

crew as they found strength and support among themselves, having “sisters in crime” during the teen years into adulthood “was vital: belonging to a group that shared values and life experiences made it possible for me to feel understood but also to live public space as something collective, so mine too: where it was possible for everyone to write and paint” (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 40).

In 1991 one of the members of the crew, Cheeky P, was killed by a car in an accident while writing. The crew kept working for a while signing pieces in her name. It is not easy to find photographic material of their works, and apart from these interviews collected in the book “Sporcare i muri” (2018) there are just a few newspaper articles or blogs that name this crew. Unfortunately, it is very hard to have the possibility of interviewing Graffiti writers as they are really careful in protecting their privacy. I tried to collect as much material as possible in order to discuss this crew as they represent an interesting case of women writing Graffiti and doing this in their own way. Their works at the Nomentana train station, just like the one in the picture, are not visible anymore, replaced by other tags and pieces or by Street Art works. On this topic, Panama reflected that writing has been a powerful social phenomenon with “a punk attitude: challenge the law” (Giordano and Dal Lago 2018, 41) while Street Art is more connected with the art world. But they do have the same roots, in particular the attention to taking ownership of public space.



Picture 18 Mura da Abbattere by 00199 crew

4.7 Laika and Noeyes

Talking about taking ownership of public spaces I would like to discuss here about two Street Artists whose works I found extremely interesting for this research. They are very

different artists, united by the fact that they both make art on the streets. Street Art, we have seen, is a broader discipline than Graffiti and, for reasons that we have analyzed before, it is a more welcoming environment towards women. It is easier to find articles online that make a list of the most important female writers, and many times we can associate those names to faces and to social media profiles where they post pictures of their work. This is not the case for Laika MCMLIV, who is known to be the “Italian Banksy”, as she hides her face when working. She has a very followed Instagram account but she never shows her appearance. I had the opportunity to interview her for this work and we discussed some of the topics of this research. One of the few things she does not hide is her gender, as she states in her website: “It is not important to know who is behind the mask: in front there is a woman who ironically interprets reality” (Laika 2023). But she also adds that usually people are the ones trying to define her:

Laika is a woman but I tend not to identify myself. If you think about it, my figure is a bit "asexual" and repudiates the traditional aesthetic canons. The others are the ones trying to define me: they have defined me as trans, fluid, young, old, man, woman, non-binary. They are all right for me¹⁰.

The name, Laika 1954, is taken from the first animal in space and the first to orbit the Earth, the Russian dog Laika, that was born in 1954. As she explained to me, space has a very important symbolic meaning, as it represents spreading the message of her works as much as possible. Moreover, from space everything looks clearer: “From space, from a distance, things are observed with more clarity and there is nothing further, by definition, than space. Italo Calvino wrote that the form of things is best seen in the distance”. She has been active in the Street Art scene since 2019 and she works mainly with posters: she defines herself as an “attaccchina”, someone that glues advertisement images to the walls. Laika uses a white mask to disguise her face under a neutral, expressionless form, in order to shift attention only to the message of her works. The red wig to cover her hair is a touch of color that breaks with the white of the mask. On the whole, the costume resembles that of characters from pop culture such as “V for Vendetta”, even though she says that the mask is only to keep her anonymity and to always be direct in messages she wants to convey. She explains: “the mask also allows the viewer to focus only on the message that I want to convey with my works and not on the personal aspects of my life. Just the message, no gossip”.

She works illegally on walls, usually during the night. She affirms that walls are “the most democratic art gallery in the world”, because the access is free so everybody can see and enjoy the works: “even a simple passerby suddenly becomes a spectator, a visitor.

¹⁰ For the full transcription of the interview, see the Appendix. When not indicated otherwise, all the excerpts are from the interview that I made to Laika MCMLIV (27/01/23, email interview).

For me, as I address the mainstream audience, it is important not to close oneself exclusively in galleries, museums”.

Moreover, once a poster, an inscription, a mural is on the street it can remain intact, be vandalized, stolen or modified: it happened to her poster of Patrick Zaki and Giulio Regeni hugging each other and, even more recently, to the image of young Giuseppe di Matteo, a mafia victim, that was torn off the day after it was posted on the wall. Her relationship with public space is very interesting as she mostly works illegally: one of the few pieces she painted legally was the mural on the walls of the Ostiense market, in Rome, in memory of Soumaila Sakho, a day laborer who was killed in Gioia Tauro. This was also one of Laika’s biggest works, which took more than one day to finish and would have been impossible to conceive without the municipal permission. She usually works on smaller formats because she has to be quick to not get caught, but she admits that she “could never give up the adrenaline given by the fast and clandestine action” (Giovannini 2021) and that “illegality is my core business: in this way I have maximum freedom, I don’t have to answer to anyone. It’s all up to me and only me: decide the message, choose the wall etc. I don’t have to ask”.

Her activism is not expressed just by the message in her art but also by the means she has chosen. We have seen the gender implications of taking ownership of an excluding place: Laika does take back the night through Street Art and it has a huge symbolic value: to go out to take the road, the walls, alone or in company means asserting one’s own existence in space. She has worked on a project called "Libere sempre, anche di notte", to reiterate that

the night is also ours and that you can not, in 2023, be afraid to go out or go home alone at night. The night is my best friend, I can’t let abusive men take over. There is a great job to do on this and the girls of “DONNEXSTRADA” are carrying out an incredible project. I hope to see more and more co-workers go out on the street at night and do Street Art.

Laika is deeply involved in projects centered on women rights, for example she has participated in the first Women’s Art independent festival, dedicated to women’s rights and to social inclusion and she worked on the poster called *¡Es Ley!*, where she took inspiration from the famous image of the American wartime poster representing a working woman with the writing “We can do it!”. The words in her work are changed to celebrate the approval of the abortion law that was passed in Argentina at the end of 2020 and the woman represented is wearing a green scarf, symbol of the abortion-rights movements in Latin America. Her attention to women’s rights is also demonstrated by the recent poster affixed November 25, 2022, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, where she showed her support for women fighting in Iran

against the oppressive patriarchal regime. Discussing feminism, Laika underlines how important feminist fights were and still are, and how much our patriarchal society affects Street Art: “we live in a society that is still very masculine: no wonder Street Art is affected by this as well. I feel the responsibility to carry out feminist issues. Is that a burden? No, not at all. With this mask on, nothing is a burden”.



Picture 19 Es Ley! by Laika

Laika asserts and shows in her works how important social activism is for her: “I make an art in which the concept takes priority over the stylistic aspect: for me, the important thing is the message” (Cerniglia 2022).

Just before the Covid-19 pandemic, Laika reaches fame around the world with the famous works “#Jenesuispasunvirus” and “L’abbraccio.” The first depicts Sonia, a famous Chinese restaurant owner in Rome, whose poster was glued in the Esquilino district in Rome. The drawing recounts the first phase of the Coronavirus epidemic, when the emergency was still confined almost exclusively to China, while in Italy there were taking place numerous episodes of discrimination against men and women with Asian features. The second is a statement by the artist to shed light on the detention of Patrick Zaki, the young Egyptian student of the University of Bologna, prisoner in Egypt. In the poster, affixed near the Egyptian Embassy in Rome, Giulio Regeni, the young researcher killed in Egypt, embraces Zaki reassuring him that “everything will be alright this time”.



Picture 20 L'abbraccio by Laika

Not only this, but after the lockdown months, in February 2021 Laika embarked on a trip to Bosnia in the places symbols of the migrant Balkan route. Through a series of posters, the artist wanted to denounce the rejections and violence of the Croatian police against asylum seekers. A warning to the European Union to welcome these people and guarantee them human living conditions. The posters were put in some symbolic places that represent the life of migrants such as: the makeshift shelters in which they live, the frontier woods where they try the 'game', the Lipa camp and the Miral camp. This trip was also documented by director Antonio Valerio Spera, who made a documentary with the collected footage: "Life is (not) a game". Making art on the walls for Laika is the best way to communicate: "It's amazing how an image in a public space can create debate, emotion, dissent, anger, joy. It is incredible how a poster can make someone think more than a thousand written words can". Her identity as an artist is inevitably influenced by her gender, from the subject matters she chooses to portray, to the way she deals with those matters, but her art is not confined to this.



Picture 21 Life is not a "game" by Laika

There are street artists that do not hide their identity, one of them is Giulia Salomone, in art known as "Noeyes". She works mainly in Lucca, Tuscany, but she has painted also in other Italian regions and in Europe. She attended the Accademia di Belle Arti in Carrara, where she followed her artistic inclination. She has explored various forms of art such as painting, installations and photography, and even many techniques, starting with a hyper realistic technical style and then moving to a period of black and white, until she found her own expression in her current works, abstract chromatic compositions characterized by overlaps, transparencies and depth.

Her distinctive feature is the shape of the eye, from which derives the name "Noeyes", an empty eye that looks critically at contemporary society but at the same time emphasizes the importance of observing and looking beyond the surface of things. She explained to me in an interview that getting to this final module was part of a process lasting a month in which she carved and studied forms and shadows to finally land on this outline of an eye. This eye is without its pupil, therefore it is an eye that cannot see. In the artist's words: "I chose this empty eye because it had to be an eye that could not see, a dead eye [...] it was born from a bond, an experience of life, with death"¹¹. In time this eye has assimilated new meanings, as she precisely explains in a different interview:

Noeyes is the eye that cannot see and that gives importance only to the interiority of the person. This certainly reveals a critique of today's society: on the one hand, the almost sick relationship with aesthetics and, on the

¹¹ For the full transcription of the interview, see the Appendix. When not indicated otherwise, all the excerpts are from the interview that I made to Giulia Noeyes (6/02/23, email and phone interview).

other, the possibility of having everything immediately, ready. In practice, a demonstration against a comfortable life that enhances the appearance by asking the least possible number of questions. (margherita 2021)

Noeyes' drawings, in fact, do not only represent simple geometric and abstract lines but are a meticulous observation of characters and personalities, both negative and positive. They are not only forms but real analysis of what surrounds us: with her eye Noeyes observes people and paints them on canvas or on walls.

Using mainly sprays and paint, her works are divided between canvases, design objects and walls. The latter is the support where she feels she can do:

art for everyone: I like that it is free, that it can be used to attract the interest of people who maybe do not look for art, do not go to museums, or in any case do not have, maybe not even by choice, a culture so linked to art. And it is also to color our cities.



Picture 22 Riemergere by Noeyes, Civitanova Marche

As I mentioned previously, it is not uncommon for street artists to start as writers first, and this is the case of Noeyes too. She started tagging at the beginning of her high school years with the name Dust. She recalls those years as fundamental for the development of her artistic relationship with the wall, which in time evolved from writing her tag to the first drawings with spray cans. When she was starting experimenting and trying to find her personal style she worked mainly on walls and illegally. Finally, at her current artistic stage she started using the brush, which she finds more suitable for the

kind of figures she works with. The change of medium led to the necessity of working mainly in legal settings, in order to deliver a good finished product.

Abstract art, on average, has the characteristic of not being immediately readable or to be associated with a specific gender. On this point, Noeyes states that her identification with the female gender does not directly influence her artistic choices but that it can have an unconscious impact on the forms and colors, those typically associated with femininity, that she represents. She affirms that: "the choice of colors, the sensuality that one can put in their works is unconscious". At the same time, the environment she works in, she admits, is very masculine, both in terms of numbers and of visibility. Many women paint with their male partner and this, especially if he is already renowned, can help in boosting their fame. And this can end up being "a bit of a burden, sometimes you can feel it, and it is especially difficult for a woman like me who is alone: I am neither someone's girlfriend nor I am anyone's daughter", explains Noeyes.

As I mentioned earlier, compared to figurative painting, abstract art is not easily readable, especially by an average audience, therefore Noeyes' works are not always well received, because, as she says: "there are those who do not understand what [the mural] is, what it represents. [...] People find it hard to accept what they can't understand right away and it leads them to ask questions". This means that her wall paintings raise perplexities, and, as we will see, this is one of her main artistic objectives.



Picture 23 Mural in honor of Noemi by Noeyes and Vittorio Valiante, Naples

Noeyes has worked many times with artists that have a different style compared to hers and she has shown interest in different social issues: for example, she worked, together with street artist Vittorio Valiante, on the mural in Naples in honor of Noemi, a child that was wounded by mistake by exponents of the camorra. But her social commitment is present in all her works, Noeyes highly critiques contemporary society's needs of

homologation and consumerism, her art aims at making people reflect and feel something through the clarity of her murals: "I really want my work to be simple, many people tell me: "why don't you go back to painting figures?" because I wish there was a bit of mental effort, a feeling of well-being or annoyance when you see one of my works, depending on the colors I use, or how I choose to link the forms together".

Laika and Noeyes are very different artists: they use different techniques, different styles and they negotiate their role in Street Art in diverse ways. Both artists have to deal with a not extremely welcoming environment for women, but they both found their place in this field. I chose these two artists also to show how female artists can range between different genres exactly like their male colleagues do. Both Laika and Noeyes chose walls as the support for their art, because they believe in the collective fruition of works to spread their messages, more socially engaging for Laika and more reflective for Noeyes.

Conclusions

This research does not attempt to give a univocal explanation and answer to the question of why and how women actively choose to engage in both Graffiti and Street Art. The aim here is to give a tentative answer based on the research literature and on the interviews conducted. In the previous chapters I have discussed how much gender plays a part in the decision of women to participate in Graffiti or Street Art. Gender-based discrimination does not stop women from becoming writers or street artists, as we have seen. The reasons behind the adherence are multiple: desire to feel part of something, to express themselves, to spread a message or make viewers reflect. McDonald (2001) asserted that Graffiti appealed to boys as it worked as a site for the development of masculinity, therefore the absence of women from the subculture was due more to their disinterest towards it, than to physical inability. But, if it is true that women represent a minority in the subculture, what is interesting is that when they decide to participate, they do it in their own way: the ones that want to assert their gender identity do so through the use of words, colors and objects typically associated with femininity. The limit in this case is the risk of reproducing the patriarchal conventions already present in society. But even with its own limitations, these gender assertions are important to show that women are not invisible in Graffiti. For female street artists gender can play a part in the subjects and messages that one decides to portray.

I have experienced some of the limitations of a research in this field: first of all, the limited amount of literature dealing with female presence in Graffiti or Street Art in the Italian context. Further research could be carried out on this topic, without relegating women writers and artists as just weird specimens, but problematizing the issue of their less consistent participation, especially in Italy, where the subject is rarely touched upon compared to the American context. The complications in dealing with this matter are also due to the difficulties encountered in trying to interview and talk to Graffiti writers, who are really hard to track down and highly value their privacy. Reason why I had to rely on the book by Giordano and Dal Lago (2018) for most of the material about the 00199 crew, as even the Internet was not provided with information.

Probably, the major issue encountered during this research, as anticipated earlier, is the risk of reducing women participating in Graffiti and Street Art just to their gender: this can lead to the minimization of their artistic achievements. The attention to sociological factors behind female exclusion is fundamental in trying to give an accurate account of the situation. This field of study is very broad and both Graffiti and Street Art can be

analyzed from many different angles, which I only briefly touched upon during this research.

Appendix

These are the transcriptions of the original interviews that I conducted in Italian.

Interview with Laika MCMLIV

- **Come sei arrivata alla scelta del tuo nome d'arte? Ha una molteplicità di significati come si può intuire dalle tue interviste?** Mi chiamo Laika come il primo essere vivente ad essere stato nello spazio. Lo spazio per me ha un valore simbolico importante: puntare allo spazio per essere sempre più ambiziosa perché la mia missione è diffondere i miei messaggi il più possibile. Dallo spazio, da lontano le cose si osservano con più chiarezza e non c'è nulla di più lontano, per definizione, dello spazio. Italo Calvino scrisse che la forma delle cose si vede meglio in lontananza. Poi c'è Laika scritto come Leica perché ho un amore forte per la fotografia.
- **Come ti sei avvicinata alla street art e in particolare ai poster?** Sin da piccola mi sono appassionata ai "muri sporchi" e ai manifesti. Se ci pensi le città sono immensi agglomerati di strade circondate da muri ed è inevitabile, camminando in città, non vederli, non "inciamparci visivamente". Ho sempre creduto che i muri avessero un potere comunicativo molto forte. Dei poster, dei manifesti in particolare amo il gesto di attaccarli. Amo la preparazione della colla, la notte e soprattutto il blitz, l'adrenalina. Se penso ai manifesti, nell'arte, penso a Mimmo Rotella.
- **Indossi una maschera quando sei in azione: perché? Vuole essere uno strumento per dividere l'artista dalla persona?** Indosso una maschera per essere libera (un filtro che elimina tutti i filtri). Libera di poter parlare di ciò che voglio senza paura, essendo schietta e diretta. Libera di muovermi in giro per il mondo senza essere fermata. Libera di vivere la mia vita di tutti i giorni quando tolgo la maschera. La maschera inoltre permette allo spettatore di concentrarsi solo sul messaggio che voglio trasmettere con le mie opere e non sugli aspetti personali della mia vita. Il messaggio è basta, senza alcun gossip.

- **Cosa significa per te fare arte su muro? E perché lo preferisci ad altri supporti?**

Il muro è la galleria d'arte più democratica del mondo. È alla portata di tutti ed il suo potere comunicativo è estremamente forte. Creo così un inciampo visivo, anche un semplice passante diventa improvvisamente spettatore, visitatore. Per me che mi rivolgo al mainstream è importante non chiudersi solo ed esclusivamente nelle gallerie, nei musei. In realtà ho iniziato ad utilizzare anche altri supporti (ho fatto un'installazione a Francoforte tempo fa): il mio è un processo di crescita e studio continuo.

- **Con che genere ti identifichi? Maschile, Femminile, Non binario?** Laika è donna ma in genere tendo a non identificarmi. Se ci pensi la mia figura è un po' "asessuata" e ripudia i canoni estetici tradizionali. Sono gli altri che cercano di definirmi: mi hanno dato della trans, fluida, giovane, vecchia, uomo, donna, non-binary. Per me vanno bene tutte.

- **Quanto pensi che il genere con cui ti identifichi influenzi la tua arte?**L'arte viene inevitabilmente influenzata. Lo vedi spesso nelle tematiche che affronto. C'è spesso un fil rouge...

- **Cosa ti ha portato a scegliere l'arte come mezzo per fare attivismo sociale?** Come ti dicevo prima, il potere comunicativo dei muri e del pezzo di carta che ci attacchi sopra. È incredibile come un'immagine in uno spazio pubblico possa creare dibattito, emozioni, dissenso, rabbia, gioia. È incredibile come un poster possa far riflettere a volte più di mille parole scritte.

- **Com è fare street art in Italia? Come vengono accolti i tuoi lavori?** In Italia è difficile tutto... la street art sta vivendo un periodo di grande crescita ma... rispetto ad altri paesi siamo indietro. Quando lascio un lavoro per strada è la strada stessa a sceglierne la sorte. È come se ci fosse una legge non scritta. Sono famosa per la velocità con cui vengono strappati/rimossi/rubati i miei poster. Sono contenta, nel bene o nel male, che i miei lavori suscitino qualcosa nella gente che li guarda.

- **Ho letto dalle tue interviste che hai lavorato anche in paesi come la Polonia e la Bosnia: come paragoneresti il clima artistico e l'accoglienza verso la**

street art in questi paesi rispetto all'Italia? Quando vado in quei luoghi l'accoglienza è l'ultima cosa a cui penso. Sono andata per attaccare i governi di quei paesi per terribili violazioni dei diritti umani. Penso solo a "sganciare la bomba" e scappare il prima possibile, senza farmi beccare. L'obiettivo è fare tanto rumore per far parlare di certe tematiche.

- **Ho visto che hai preso parte a progetti contro la violenza sulle donne e a favore dell'aborto legale, mi sembra quindi che le lotte femministe ti stiano molto a cuore: il femminismo quanto influenza la tua arte?** Le lotte femministe sono state, sono e saranno sempre fondamentali in questa società patriarcale lenta a cambiare. Troppe sono ancora le disparità tra uomo e donna e anche la violenza di genere è un fenomeno ben radicato nella nostra società. Quando smetteremo di stupirci se una donna occupa una carica importante, i salari saranno gli stessi, i femminicidi diventeranno una rarità, il congedo mestruale sarà una realtà collaudata e.. la lista purtroppo è lunghissima, allora FORSE ci riposeremo. Non si smetterà mai di lottare: sarebbe importante che a queste battaglie si unissero anche gli uomini.
- **L'ambiente della street art è ancora molto maschile, cosa significa essere una donna in questo contesto? È un peso? Si riesce a fare squadra anche con altre donne che si occupano di street art?** Viviamo in una società ancora molto maschile: non c'è da stupirsi se anche la street art ne risente. Sento la responsabilità di portare avanti tematiche femministe. È un peso? No, affatto. Con questa maschera addosso nulla è un peso. Sono una street artist anonima... difficilmente riesco a fare squadra. Ho contatti con altre colleghe e sostengo, con la mia arte, associazioni ed organizzazioni femministe.
- **Quando una donna fa street art si può correre il rischio che ci si concentri più sul fattore di genere, visto che fa ancora abbastanza strano che una donna faccia street art, piuttosto che sul prodotto artistico. A questo proposito hai mai avuto la tentazione di nascondere l'essere donna?** Sono gli altri a concentrarsi sulla mia persona, sul mio sesso, il mio orientamento sessuale... Il messaggio delle mie opere è più importante di qualsiasi altra cosa.
- **Le strade, soprattutto di notte, sono considerate luoghi non molto sicuri per le donne, quanto è importante per te poter prendere possesso attraverso la tua arte, anche solo temporaneamente, di questi luoghi?**

Importantissimo. Ho lavorato ad un progetto intitolato “Libere sempre, anche di notte”, proprio per ribadire che la notte è anche nostra e che non si può, nel 2023, avere paura di uscire o di tornare a casa la sera da sole. La notte è la mia migliore amica, non posso permettere che uomini molesti, violenti se ne appropriino. C'è un grande lavoro da fare su questo e le ragazze di DONNEXSTRADA stanno portando avanti un progetto incredibile. Spero di vedere sempre più colleghe uscire per strada di notte a fare street art.

- **Preferisci l'azione illegale per la tua arte? Trovi che ti dia maggiore libertà espressiva?** L'illegalità è il mio core business: così ho massima libertà, non devo rendere conto a nessuno. Spetta tutto e solo a me: decidere il messaggio, scegliere il muro ecc. Non devo chiedere. Sono io che decido dove avverrà, la mattina dopo, “l'inciampo visivo”.

Interview with Noeyes

- **Come sei arrivata alla scelta del tuo nome d'arte?** Noeyes, senza occhi, nasce esattamente dal modulo che io riproduco, questo modulo nasce da, ancora prima, da Giuls: è stata una scelta, avevo 26 anni, ne farò 34 quest'anno, di crescita, di maturazione, ho pensato che doveva maturare la mia ricerca. Io arrivo comunque da una tecnica pittorica iperrealista, accademica, ero fissata con la perfezione minuziosa, la copia di foto. Come tu vedrai nei miei lavori c'è stata sempre questa ricerca delle ombre e delle luci, questo effetto ottico, un po' il 3D che poi ho riportato, perché io parto da uno studio accademico. Poi ho totalmente abbandonato la pittura precisa, ho iniziato a fare tutto in pennarello nero, marker, e creavo questi disegni con diversi moduli che comunque riportavano ad un modello figurativo, ad un riconoscere un'immagine. Ad un certo punto ho scelto di concentrarmi su un modulo. In un mese di studio nel mio teatrino in cui inserivo i fogli intagliati, le ombre, fotografavo, solamente questa forma di occhio, ma senza occhio perché non ha la pupilla, è un occhio vuoto. Ho scelto quest'occhio vuoto perché doveva essere un occhio che non poteva vedere, un occhio morto. In realtà per me, intimamente, è un occhio morto, che non vive più, è nato così, poi ho dato più senso all'interiorità, a coloro che sono

in vita, a coloro a cui mi rapporto e con cui dialogo tramite i miei lavori, ma inizialmente nasce proprio da un legame, un'esperienza di vita, con la morte.

- **Come ti sei avvicinata alla street art?** Fin da piccolina, primo anno delle superiori, avevo la fissa delle tag, io ero Dust e taggavo, usavo la bomboletta, ero un po' quello che c'era e che c'è ancora in città grandi, qua a Lucca l'abbiamo un po' perso, sono rimaste piccole crew di ragazzini, però c'era questa cosa dell'andare in giro, taggare, un po' l'illegale ovviamente, quindi più che altro pezzi con le bombolette della tag Dust. Quindi già nasce da lì un po' il rapporto con i muri, che poi si è evoluto con il portare i miei disegni con le bombolette, con cui ho iniziato, infatti i primi muri sono a spray, e quindi nasce così, poi quando ho iniziato ad avere Giuls nel linguaggio stilistico e personale l'ho riportato da subito sui muri, ovunque, illegalmente. Ho iniziato a partecipare a degli eventi e da lì sempre in crescita ho abbandonato lo spray e ho iniziato a dipingere a pennello quando sono diventata Noeyes, per il tipo di tecnica e anche perché un tipo di spray aveva iniziato a darmi allergia.
- **Cosa significa per te fare arte su muro? E perché lo preferisci ad altri supporti?** Non lo preferisco ad altri supporti, a me piace tutto, mi piacerebbe anche imparare a fare sculture, design, mi piacciono le tele, la scenografia, le installazioni, mi piace tantissimo il muro. La street art mi piace che sia un'arte per tutti, mi piace che sia gratuita, che possa essere usata inconsciamente per sensibilizzare le menti di persone che magari non vanno a cercare l'arte, non vanno nei musei, o comunque non hanno, magari neanche per scelta, una cultura così legata all'arte. Comunque sia anche per colorare le nostre città, visto che spesso l'architettura di strada è diventata molto più triste. Rispetto a una città antica come Lucca, che abbiamo le case in mattoni, ma se vai nelle metropoli di Street Art lì ce ne vorrebbe molta di più. Io direi che infatti ho anche iniziato a fare uno stile molto più di decoro urbano in un linguaggio astratto che è abbastanza decorativo.
- **Con che genere ti identifichi? Maschile, Femminile, Non binario?** Mi ritengo un genere femminile, una donna etero.
- **Quanto pensi che il genere con cui ti identifichi influenzi la tua arte?** Non penso che influenzi la mia arte, penso che in quanto donna, mi venga da fare

qualcosa di più formoso, femminile, credo che sia inconscia la scelta dei colori, della sensualità che uno possa mettere nelle proprie opere.

- **Com'è fare Street Art in Italia? Come vengono accolti i tuoi lavori? I miei lavori vengono accolti non sempre bene, perché c'è chi non capisce che cos'è, cosa rappresenta, io penso che la maggior parte delle persone non abbia bisogno di riconoscere quello che vedono, vivendo in una società piena di immagini, di colori. Le persone fanno fatica ad accettare ciò che non riescono a capire subito e li porta a farsi delle domande, quindi in Italia, essendo la gente un po' poco acculturata, non è facile lavorare tanto, in tanti ambienti. Come puoi vedere se sei una interessata alla Street Art, sta andando tantissimo l'illustrazione, a volte anche scadente, se posso essere sincera, perché arrivo, come ti ho detto da una tecnica accademica quindi so disegnare, o dipingere, so fare delle figure e quindi riconosco anche quando la capacità è bassa. Anche perché secondo me per arrivare all'astrazione bisogna passare da tutto, è come chi canta, per trovare il tuo genere dovresti saper cantare tantissime altre melodie, come gli strumenti, un musicista sa suonare tantissimi altri strumenti, prima di specializzarsi in uno. I miei lavori c'è chi li accoglie benissimo, chi se ne innamora, chi invece me lo dice tranquillamente che per lui è difficile, capisce che gli possono piacere i colori ma è difficile apprezzarli realmente.**
- **L'ambiente della street art è ancora molto maschile, cosa significa essere una donna in questo contesto? E' un peso? Si riesce a fare squadra anche con altre donne che si occupano di street art?** Io sono stata a eventi con 50 artisti, ora dico percentuali a caso per far capire però del tipo 45 uomini partecipanti e cinque donne. Anche se stanno avanzando molto, ce ne sono sempre di più di street artist donne. Un po' è un peso, a volte lo senti, soprattutto è difficile per una come me che è donna, è sola, non sono né la fidanzata di nessun artista né sono figlia di nessuno. Mi sono fatta la strada da me, ho iniziato a lavorare a 16 anni, a studiare, mi sono laureata e ho investito tutti i soldi nei viaggi, nei materiali perché all'inizio c'è un grande investimento. A volte alcune donne o sono più maschili, o spesso lavorano in coppia con il fidanzato, che magari ha fatto strada prima e lavorando con lui si fanno conoscere. Capitano anche queste cose giustamente, come in tanti ambienti. Comunque sì è un po' dura, lo posso confermare. Il fatto di fare squadra non è facilissimo, con alcune sì, sono carinissime, invece altre ti capita che ti mettano il like su Instagram e

quando tu glielo metti loro te lo levano, robe che non capisco, però funziona anche così.

- **Ho letto dalle tue interviste che hai lavorato non solo in giro per l'Italia, ma anche all'estero: come paragoneresti il clima artistico e l'accoglienza verso la street art in questi paesi rispetto all'Italia?** Dipende ovviamente da dove, quando sono stata a Berlino è andata bene, lì sono più aperti, c'è di tutto e di più, poi in quel periodo facevo ancora tanto black e lì andava di moda.
- **Il tuo nome d'arte non è strettamente associato ad un genere: anche se non nascondi il tuo nome completo, hai mai avuto paura che la tua arte potesse essere considerata il prodotto artistico di un uomo?** No, credo che si riconosca abbastanza bene, anzi tanti dicono che sembra una vagina il mio occhio vuoto, quindi è abbastanza diretto alla donna.
- **Fai lavori sia su muri legali che non? Se sì, quale delle due modalità preferisci? E perchè?** Allora ultimamente poco illegale, sono partita che ne ho fatto tanto di illegale, anche per allenamento, gusto, adrenalina e tantissimi altri motivi. E' ovvio che preferisco la modalità di poter lavorare bene, avendo anche cambiato tecnica dallo spray al pennello, volendo fare un lavoro fatto bene, grande, con tutte le tempistiche e i materiali giusti e arrivare a un buon obiettivo, perchè il mio obiettivo è sempre fare passi avanti. Poi magari l'illegale è più bello per passare la giornata, tutta l'aria che si crea dietro a un lavoro illegale, però un obiettivo migliore, almeno secondo me, è lavorare bene, legalmente, su una bella parete. Quindi sono proprio due cose che non riesco realmente a paragonare o a decidere, sono distaccate. Io lo ritengo un lavoro con gli occhi, e perché lo sia devo lavorare bene e in migliori possibilità e comodità.
- **L'arte astratta non è solitamente immediatamente riconducibile ad una critica sociale, ma anche attraverso la lettura di interviste precedenti viene fuori che la ricerca dell'essenzialità nell'ambito artistico è anche una risposta ad una società fortemente concentrata sull'apparire e sull'esteriorità piuttosto che l'interiorità personale. Credi che la critica che muovi nei confronti di questo specifico aspetto, che caratterizza la società odierna, sia influenzata dalla tua identificazione nel genere femminile, considerando quanto le donne siano sottoposte a pressioni elevate rispetto a standard estetici?** In realtà io penso che tutta la società stia andando dietro a

cose troppo futili, stiamo perdendo valori, certezze, il rispetto soprattutto verso se stessi, si mira ad un'estetica che non è personale, è di massa, anche l'assomigliare ad altri, sembrare tutti uguali, questo lo trovo un po' pesante, parlando anche del femminile, questi mascheroni. Sembra che la società talmente complicata ti porta a dover essere qualcuno, a non sentirti accettato, quindi ti porta a voler sembrare qualcun altro. E poi è ricca d'immagini, anche i film, anche questi telefoni hanno contrastato tutto, i colori sono forti, non sono reali. E sembra quasi che non accettiamo più la realtà, la nostra natura, la nostra semplice e umile natura. Quindi si critico molto questo lato. Poi anche gli uomini ora hanno iniziato, ma le donne molto di più, vengono usate tantissimo per l'immagine, però vorrei proprio che il mio lavoro possa essere semplice, tanti mi dicono: " perchè non torni a dipingere le figure?" perché vorrei che ci fosse un po' di sforzo mentale, una sensazione di benessere quando vedi un lavoro o di fastidio, in base al tono di colore che uso, rispetto all'incastro che metto, alla semplicità o alla difficoltà che c'è in un'opera per realizzarla.

Bibliography

- Arnaldi, Valeria. 2014. *Che cos'è la Street Art? E come sta cambiando il mondo dell'arte*. Roma: Mondo Bizarro Press.
- Bailey, Marlon M. 2011. "Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture." *Feminist Studies* 37 (2): 365-386.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23069907>.
- Baker, Stuart, ed. 2011. *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92*. London: Soul Jazz Records.
- Banksy. 2005. *Banksy*. Westmister: Century.
- Bartoli Langeli, Attilio. 2003. "Prefazione." In *Graffiti, scritti di scritte. Dalle epigrafi fasciste alla bomboletta spray*. Roma: Vecchiarelli.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Caliri, Gaspare, and Fabrizio Lollini. 2010. *Do the right wall-Fai il muro giusto*. Edited by Fabiola Naldi. Bologna: MAMbo, Museo d'arte Moderna di Bologna.
- Camorrino, Antonio. 2016. "Vedi Napoli e poi i muri. La Street Art dal punto di vista della sociologia della cultura." In *Società, Economia e Spazio a Napoli*, 193 - 206. Vol. Working Papers 28. L'Aquila: GSSI Social Sciences.
- Chaney, Damien. 2004. "Fragmented Culture and Subcultures." In *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*, 36-48. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Chang, Jeff. 2005. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. London: Picador.
- Cerniglia, Pietro. 2022. "Life is (Not) a Game: Intervista a Laika, Street Artist." *The Wom*. <https://www.thewom.it/lifestyle/entertainment/laika-street-artist-intervista-life-is-not-a-game>.

- Cook, Ian R., and Mary Whowell. 2011. "Visibility and the Policing of Public Space." *Geography Compass* 5, no. 8 (August): 531- 622.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2011.00437.x>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1): 139-167.
<http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.
- D'Amico, Paola. 2013. "Lotta ai Graffiti, anche Pisapia in strada." *Corriere Milano*, May 27, 2013. https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/13_maggio_27/lotta-Graffiti-pisapia-pulizia-strade-muri-tag-writer-imbrattamenti-2221343497954.shtml.
- Dogheria, Duccio. 2014. *Street Art*. Firenze: Giunti.
- Fenster, Tovi. 2005. "The Right to the Gendered City: Different Formations of Belonging in Everyday Life." *Journal of Gender Studies* 14 (3): 217-231.
10.1080/09589230500264109.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22-27.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan and Alan M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Fransberg, Malin. 2019. "Performing gendered distinctions: young women painting illicit Street Art and Graffiti in Helsinki." *Journal of Youth Studies* 22 (4): 489-504.
10.1080/13676261.2018.1514105.
- Galal, Claudia. 2008. *Street Art*. Milano: Auditorium.
- Ganz, Nicholas. 2004. *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents*. New York: Abrams.
- Ganz, Nicholas. 2006. *Graffiti Woman: Graffiti and Street Art from Five Continents*. London: Thames & Hudson.

- Giordano, Serena, and Alessandro Dal Lago, eds. 2018. *Sporcare i muri. Graffiti, decoro, proprietà privata*. Roma: DeriveApprodi.
- Giordano, Serena, and Alessandro Dal Lago. 2016. *Graffiti: arte e ordine pubblico*. Bologna: Il mulino.
- Giovannini, Marco. 2021. "Chi è Laika, l'attivista e Street Artist in maschera che firma i muri di Roma." ELLE. <https://www.elle.com/it/magazine/women-in-society/a34783142/laika-attivista-street-art/>.
- Gladwell, Malcolm, and Fareed Zakaria. 2015. "Shattering 'Broken Windows' | Columbia Law School." Columbia Law School. <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/shattering-broken-windows>
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1995. "Bodies-Cities." In *Space, time, and perversion: essays on the politics of bodies*. London: Routledge.
- Haenfler, Ross. 2014. *Subcultures: The Basics*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hankivsky, Olena, and Renee Cormier. 2011. "Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models." *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (March): 217-229. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41058335>.
- Harvey, David. 2006. "The Political Economy of Public Space." In *The Politics of Public Space*, 17-34. London: Routledge.
- Hebdige, Dick. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Herzog, Amy, Joanna Mitchell, and Lisa Soccio. 1999. "Introduction / Issue 2: Interrogating Subcultures." *InVisible Culture* 2 (January). <https://doi.org/10.47761/494a02f6.382146d5>.
- Jefferson, Tony, and Stuart Hall, eds. 1976. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Kimvall, Jacob. 2019. "A Family Affair? Framings of the concepts 'Graffiti' and 'Street Art' in a diachronic perspective." In *Framing Graffiti & Street Art*:

- Proceedings of Nice Street Art Project, International Conferences, 2017 - 2018*. N.p.: Urban Creativity.
- Kode. 2023. "Amir Issaa aka Cina Trv - Digging In Graffiti." Palude Underground. https://paludeunderground.com/it/posts/051/digging_in_Graffiti_cina/.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Wiley.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. New York: Wiley.
- Low, Setha M. 2004. *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*. London: Routledge.
- Manco, Tristan. 2011. "The 10 best Street Art works - in pictures." *The Guardian*, August 6, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/gallery/2011/aug/07/art>.
- Macdonald, Nancy. 2001. *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mailer, Norman. 2009. *The Faith of Graffiti*. Glasgow: HarperCollins.
- Mansbach, Adam. 2013. "New York City's War on Graffiti." *HuffPost*, January 22, 2013. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nyc-Graffiti_b_2527074.
- Marchetti, Sabrina. 2013. "Intersezionalità." In *Le etiche della diversità culturale*, edited by Botti Caterina, 133-148. Firenze: Le Lettere.
- margherita. 2021. "Giulia Noeyes, l'occhio emergente della Street Art – Il Risveglio." Il Risveglio. <https://www.2020ilrisveglio.it/2021/02/17/giulia-noeyes-locchio-emergente-della-street-art/>.
- McAuliffe, Cameron. 2012. "Graffiti or Street Art? Negotiating the Moral Geographies of the Creative City." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, May, 2012.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30 (3): 1771-1800. <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>.

- McDonald, Nancy. 2016. "Something for the boys? Exploring the changing gender dynamics of the Graffiti subculture." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, 183-193. Oxon: Routledge.
- McRobbie, Angela, and Jenny Garber. 1976. "Girls and Subcultures: An exploration." In *Resistance Through Rituals. Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, 209-222. London: Routledge.
- Mela, Sara. 2021. "Urban Regeneration and Public Art: the Case of the Aurora District in Turin." *Fuori Luogo Rivista di Sociologia del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia* 9 (1): 161-173. 10.6093/2723-9608/7420.
- Mendelsohn, Kaya. 2022. "Gender in Fandom." *Applied Psychology Opus*.
https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/gender-in-fandom/.
- Messerschmidt, James W. 1993. *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Messina, Emanuela. 2018. "L'arte per la rigenerazione urbana: rischi e impatti sociali verso la definizione di nuovi modelli di trasformazione dei sistemi insediativi." *Life Safety and Security* 6, no. 3 (November): 124-129. 10.12882/2283-7604.2018.6.3.
- Miller, Kristine. 2007. "Introduction: What Is Public Space?" In *Designs on the Public: The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*, 9 - 22. N.p.: University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.cttv5pq.4>.
- Mininno, Alessandro. 2008. *Graffiti writing: origini, significati, tecniche e protagonisti in Italia*. Milan: Mondadori arte.
- Miranne, Kristine B., Alma H. Young, and Author Alma H. Young, eds. 2000. *Gendering the City: Women, Boundaries, and Visions of Urban Life*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mitchell, Don. 1995. "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85, no. 1 (March): 108-133.

- Money, Claw. 2007. *Bombshell: The Life and Crimes of Claw Money*. New York: powerHouse Books.
- Moore, Ryan. 2010. *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis*. New York: NYU Press.
- Nochlin, Linda. 1971. *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* New York.: Artnews.
- Pabón, Jessica N. 2016. "Ways of being seen. Gender and the writing on the wall." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, 78-91. Oxon: Routledge.
- Pabón, Jessica. 2012. "Feminism on the Wall." TED Women Talk.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_4JOexUj0M.
- Pabón, Jessica. 2013. "Shifting Aesthetics: The Stick Up Girlz Perform Crew in a Virtual World." *Rhizomes.net*, no. 25.
<http://rhizomes.net/issue25/pabon/index.html>.
- Parisi, Vittorio. 2015. "The Sex of Graffiti. Urban art, women and "gender perception": testing biases in the eye of the observer." *Street Art and Urban Creativity* 1, no. 1 (November): 53-62.
- Penner, Barbara, Jane Rendell, and Iain Borden, eds. 2002. *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. Milton Park: Taylor & Francis.
- Pertici, Laura, Livio Quagliata, and Paola Falcier. 2021. "Roma, il sorriso di Valerio Verbano rivive nel grande murale di Jorit." *Roma - la Repubblica*, February 22, 2021.
https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2021/02/22/news/roma_il_sorriso_di_valerio_verbano_rivive_nel_grande_murale_di_jorit-288615576/.
- Pray, Doug, dir. 2005. *Infamy*.
- Riva, Alessandro, ed. 2007. *Street Art sweet art: dalla cultura hip hop alla generazione pop up*. Milan: Skira.
- Rosser, Elizabeth, Rom Harre, and Peter Marsh. 1980. *The Rules of Disorder*. Milton Park: Taylor & Francis.

- Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex." In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, 157 - 210. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Seresinhe, Chanuki I., Tobias Preis, and Helen S. Moat. 2016. "Quantifying the link between art and property prices in urban neighbourhoods." *R. Soc. open sci.* 3, no. 4 (April). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.160146>.
- Smith, Neil, and Setha M. Low. 2006. "Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space." In *The Politics of Public Space*, 1-16. London: Routledge.
- Snyder, Gregory J. 2016. "Graffiti and the subculture career." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, 204-213. New York: Routledge.
- Soja, Edward W. 1989. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. New York: Verso Books.
- Swoon. 2014. "Feminist Artist Statement." Brooklyn Museum. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/feminist_art_base/swoon.
- Taylor, Myra F., Julie A. Poley, and Georgia Carragher. 2016. "The psychology behind Graffiti involvement." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, 194-203. New York: Routledge.
- The New York Times*. 1971. "'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals." 07 21, 1971. <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/07/21/archives/taki-183-spawns-pen-pals.html#:~:text=His%20TAKI%20183%20appears%20in,YANK%20135%20and%20LEO%20136>.
- van den Berg, Marguerite, and Danielle Chevalier. 2018. "Of "city lounges", "bans on gathering" and macho policies - Gender, class and race in productions of space for Rotterdam's post-industrial future." *Cities* 76 (June): 36 - 42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.03.006>.
- Waclawek, Anna. 2011. *Graffiti and Street Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Williams, J. P. 2011. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. New York: Wiley.

Williams, Raymond. 1985. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 1992. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Zieleniec, Andrzej. 2016. "The right to write the city: Lefebvre and Graffiti." *Environnement urbain* 10. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040597ar>.

Sitography

"Angeli del Bello." 2021. Fondazione Angeli del Bello - Firenze.

<https://www.angelidelbello.org/>.

"Associazione - Retake Roma attiva nella cura dei beni comuni!" 2022. Fondazione Retake. <https://retake.org/roma/associazione/>.

"Breaking Moulds: An Interview with Kashink." 2012. GLOBAL Street Art.

<https://blog.globalstreetart.com/post/30985725431/kashink>.

Laika. 2023. Io sono Laika. <https://laika1954.com/>.

Shiro. 2021. "Biography." Shiro Japan Graffiti. <https://shiro1.com/>.

