

# Writing Graffiti in Berlin: Shaping Space and Self in the Postmodern Metropolis, 1990-2017

Evan H. Carver

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington  
2019

Reading Committee:  
Robert Mugerauer, Chair  
Christopher Campbell  
Jeff Hou  
Nicole Huber

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:  
Urban Design & Planning

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Evan H. Carver



University of Washington

**Abstract**

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Evan H. Carver

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Robert Mugerauer, PhD

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This work explores radical forms of participation in urban design through a case study involving longtime graffiti writers in Berlin, Germany. Working with archival data as well as over a year of on-site field work, including extensive interviews and participant observation, I argue that what we have seen emerge with graffiti in Berlin is a form of “subcultural urbanism,” that is, a vision of urban life not just informed by but actually engendered via subcultural practice. I bring this subcultural urbanism to life through a critical phenomenology of social space. I do this by building on established theories about the production of urban space and linking these to the notion of subcultural counterpublics, whose participation in urban change is important for “producing” the contemporary city in a more democratically legitimate way. Subcultural urbanism is a form of producing social space through the actions of a marginalized population whose marginalization and power are rooted in its members’ interventions in public space.

The core of this particular form of subcultural urbanism is reclamation or repurposing of

public space for social and physical change and storytelling potential. Among the most important takeaways from this study overall is emergent nature of the “resistance” represented by the subcultural urbanism of graffiti writing. The self and the city are co-constituted through the practice of graffiti writing, and performative though it may be, only rarely does it look like political demonstration in the classic sense. What I illustrate throughout this book are the ways in which the practice of graffiti writing represents incipient, prefigurative, or “fugitive” forms of city making.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first thing to be said is that without the women and men who write graffiti and install street art, this project would not exist. Their expressive practice, often undertaken at substantial personal risk, is the point of departure for this or any academic study of graffiti. The work of the scholar is secondary to that practice and could with some license be accused of being derivative or parasitic. The generosity and openness of the people who spoke with me can hardly be captured under the heading "Acknowledgements." I owe the utmost thanks and gratitude to artists and writers who agreed to be interviewed for this project: AKTE One, Hauke Altman, BORED, Mizza Caric, Cause I Said So, Martin Gegenheimer, Aljoscha Hoffman, Carsten Janke, Jones, LORIO, Tobias Morawski, Jens "TASSO" Müller, Johannes Mündiger, Juri Paderin, members of Pappsatt, Paul from orangotango, Ralf Schmuck, Nikolaus Schrott, Sebastian, Team Black Berlin, Tia, Various & Gould, and all of those who chose not to give me their names. I hope that this book honors their contributions both as interview subjects and as innovative actors in the public realm.

Plenty of people are engaged with the graffiti and urban art scenes in Berlin without being practitioners themselves. Many of them donated considerable amounts of their time to my project: Dennis and the guys at Graffitibox, Thomas Dietze from IBUg, Caro Eickhoff, Melina Gestemann from Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Ibo at Legacy BLN, Diana Marossek at Street Art Berlin, the guys at the Overkill shop, Christine Piwek and her colleagues at Quartiersmanagement am Mehringplatz, Veit Rieber at Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa, and Katharina Riemann and Kristin Schröder with Berliner Immobilien

Management. Their roles are integral and their perspectives on the past, present, and possible futures for these forms of expression were invaluable.

This would be a very different project if not for the involvement of The Graffiti Lobby. This would be a very different project if not for the *existence* of The Graffiti Lobby. The fact that Berlin is home to an advocacy group dedicated to promoting graffiti and graffiti writing indicates the degree to which graffiti has a presence in the city and is one of the reasons I chose it as a case study. Juri Paderin introduced me to the Lobby's work back in 2014, and at his invitation I attended the Lobby's monthly roundtable meetings for the entire duration of my research year in 2016-2017. Their discussions afforded me deep insight into both the everyday reality of the graffiti writer as well as the greater strategies and agonistic negotiations involved with this kind of advocacy work. The group could have been suspicious of my silent note-taking — but they were instead welcoming. I am eternally grateful to Juriji, Diana, Jochen, Stefan, Katerina, Andreas, Maria, Kira, Marco, Tim, Cren, Basti, Jan, Roger, and our frequent hosts Alain (at the Deutsch-Französische Jugendwerk) and Luisa (at the Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik).

This project is also hard to imagine without the existence and involvement of the *Archiv der Jugendkulturen* [Archive of Youth Cultures] in Kreuzberg. During the time of my research stay, access to the holdings at the archive was relatively straightforward; I would spend a few hours at a time there whenever it was convenient. It is only in hindsight, now that funding has been curtailed and there are no public visiting hours, that I realize how lucky I was to have had such easy access. And yet access to the holdings would hardly have been meaningful absent the expert curatorial and general wisdom offered by Martin Gegenheimer, Carsten Janke, Tobias Morawski, Christian Schmidt, and their colleagues. Along with The Graffiti Lobby, the Archiv was also a core source of interview contacts.

My research stay during the 2016-2017 school year was funded by the Berlin Program at Freie Universität. I am extremely grateful to the Berlin Program overall, especially its chief administrator Karin Goihl, whose academic and practical mentorship elevated my project considerably and my overall experience even more. I also benefited from the council of three Berlin Program professors: Prof. Dr. Gabriele Metzler (HU Berlin), Prof. Dr. Konrad Jarausch (FU Berlin), and especially Prof. Dr. Harald Wenzel (FU Berlin). And I am deeply indebted to the other fellows: Laura Dizerega, Sultan Doughan, Johanna Folland, Jake Fraser, Candice Hamelin, Tara Hottman, Christopher Miller, Josef Nothmann, Sidney Rothstein, Caroline Schopp, Naomi Vaughan, Brian Van Wyck, Leigh York. Their collegiality and friendship provided indispensable intellectual and emotional support through the year we had together in Berlin and beyond.

I was fortunate also to be welcomed into the intellectual community of the IGK fellows at the Center for Metropolitan Studies at the Technische Universität Berlin. Friederike Landau invited me to the colloquium initially, and she has remained a good friend and source of inspiration to this day. Aljoscha Hoffman, Laura Kemmer, Marlene de Saussure, and Hannah Schilling also extended themselves well beyond what a temporary visitor might deserve; their conversations gave new definition to intellectual companionship, and I consider myself lucky to call them colleagues. Elif Artan, Emily Bereskin, Kate Brehme, Niklas Creemers, Felix Fugh, Noa Ha, Chaghaf Hoyawek, Katarina Knaus, Geza Trojan, Leslie Quitzow, Beatrice Walthall, and Hemeng Zhou are all good readers and good writers, who pushed me through direct feedback on my work and with the example of the impressive work of their own. Prof. Dr. Dorothee Brantz asked the hard questions that needed to be asked. Over at Humboldt Universität, Nina, Stefania, and Christoph in the Georg-Simmel-Zentrum gave me necessary encouragement, as did Dr. Eszter Ganter (now at the University of Glasgow).

Beyond the seminar table, I spent my life in Berlin surrounded by a tribe of true affections. In Alicia Fuentes Vega I had a fellow aesthete who taught me new ways of seeing critically. Early in the year, I signed up for a running course through FU, mostly as a source of distraction and exercise. But I soon realized I would get much more than that: I would be part of a team. I am fitter, but also wiser, thanks to Heiko Schilff and the whole FU Laufteam, especially Linus Mührel and Lennart Brandenburg. Conco Schneider was my landlord, handyman, and bike mechanic — but he became a true friend. And Johanna Bürger, old comrade, is a living lesson in presence, care, reinvention, generosity, and kindness.

Back in Seattle, I have had all manner of material, intellectual, and emotional support. The Schlossers housed me more than once, and Lauren and Eli Barach, Hannah Chapin, Susan and Brice Keown, Sean McKee, and Anna Moseley at various times all offered couches, basements, and most importantly open ears and open arms on the many occasions I needed those things. At UW, in the Urban Design and Planning Department, Chris Campbell deserves special thanks, along with Larisa Maziak, who really runs the show. The past and current members of *Becoming Poor* — Rachel Berney, Branden Born, Amy Dobrowolsky, Peter Dunn, Keith Harris, Shima Mohajeri, Mark Purcell, Susmita Rishi, Shannon Tyman, and Yuyi Wang — embody an ideal learning community. Their thinking has pushed mine, and many of the ideas we tussled with can be found in this book. Peter Dunn pushed me on the trails of Washington State, too. My reading committee — Chris Campbell, Jeff Hou, and Nicole Huber — helped me shape a pile of inchoate ideas into an achievable project. Mark Purcell, whom I think of as an honorary if not active committee member, offered invaluable general mentorship. And my chair, Bob Mugerauer, is the very model of an advisor in many senses, helping me through the long years of reading, field work, and writing, but also helping me through the emotional gauntlet that is graduate school.

My family provided the unconditional love without which surviving the better part of a decade of graduate school would be impossible. Emily Schulman, *la mujer de mis sueños*, was there at the beginning, endured the middle, and is here at the end. Her sacrifice will be difficult to repay — she packed up her own life three times throughout the course of this project — but I look forward to trying. She is my first reader, my companion, my sunrise. It is not just this project that would be nothing without her — I would be nothing without her.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### OPENINGS

*“I like it when the walls tell stories.”<sup>1</sup>*

Board the eastbound S5 line at the Hackescher Markt, in Berlin’s dense core, and after a couple stops, as the train banks to the south, a broad vista opens up. Below are a wide rail corridor and the River Spree; ahead and to both sides unfolds the eastern vastness of Germany’s reunited capital. Except for a few church spires and bridges over the river, nothing in particular catches the eye. Unlike Alexanderplatz with its Soviet-era TV tower or Potsdamer Platz with its skyscrapers and cranes or the Tiergarten with its Siegesäule (“Victory Column”), eastern Berlin offers the novice no easy landmarks. From the train, one’s first impressions are of a sea of mid-rise apartment buildings stretching to the horizon. Some of the buildings seem to take advantage of the view of the Spree, while many seem to be turning their windowless backs to it. On one of those windowless walls, a giant spray-painted monster looms up and looks vacantly from the other side of the river. The monster seems to have emerged from the seething tangle of brightly colored graffiti that encircles the base of the building.

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<sup>1</sup> Except where otherwise noted, all quotations come from interviews conducted as part of this project.

*"I tried all sorts of drugs. Nothing was as heavy as graffiti."*

Graffiti is surrounded by an air of the mythical. It is deviant and mostly anonymous, at once creative and criminal. It can be political, satiric, absurd, or simply illegible. It can be inflammatory while being essentially ephemeral. To outsiders it seems *sui generis* — it hints at the city's second life, unfolding unseen during the night. Graffiti writers' and street artists' motives and messages vary widely, but they are all engaged in common practices: writing meaning onto and into places, and rewriting the city in their own terms. The past two or three decades have seen street art welcomed into the gallery and under the Klieg lights, and valorized on a global scale. At the same time, urban scholars from a variety of disciplines have celebrated graffiti writers and street artists as countercultural heroes and as "urban geographers *par excellence*" (Iveson, 2010, p. 26). This exposure and elevation has heightened the debates around authority, authenticity, and meaning that graffiti and street art have always provoked.

*"We loaded up the place with our history."*

In June 2013, I found myself staying in a rented room in one of those anonymous apartment buildings in the Friedrichshain neighborhood of the former East Berlin. While I had visited the city several times before, I had never spent time in this part of the city and did not know my way around. In recent years several major international media firms have colonized a former industrial stretch of the Spree, but this part of Berlin remains populated more by locals than by the business-political elite or tourists. I had been instructed to take the S5 to Warschauer Strasse, from which point it was to be an easy walk. But because the S-Bahn is elevated and most S-Bahn stops are in the middle of the unbuilt rail corridor mentioned above, one has to walk across a disorienting series of bridges or overpasses before getting to street level where there are actual named streets. At the apex of the Warschauer Strasse

pedestrian overpass, I again considered the broad vista I had seen from the train, and my eyes went back to the spray-painted monster. It was a pink, humanoid figure with hollow eyes, and it was raising something to its gaping mouth [Figure 1.1]. This arresting image was visible from at least a few hundred yards away and from a wide angle. It became a landmark for me; every time I neared Warschauer Strasse, I looked out for it. Seeing it, I knew which way I was facing, and I knew that I was close to home.



Figure 1.1 Blu's "Leviathan," Berlin-Kreuzberg, 2016. Photo by author.

*"Come, we'll turn the city into a playground."*

Graffiti is often thought of as something young people do in their free time — which is also a definition of play. Quentin Stevens argued that there should be more incorporation of the ludic principle in urban design because “play reveals the potentials that public spaces offer” (2007, p. 1). This intersection between play and space is evident in the humor seen in a lot of contemporary graffiti and street art [Figure 1.2]. Play is neglected in urban design in part because it “involves controversial expenditures of time and energy, ‘unfunctional’,

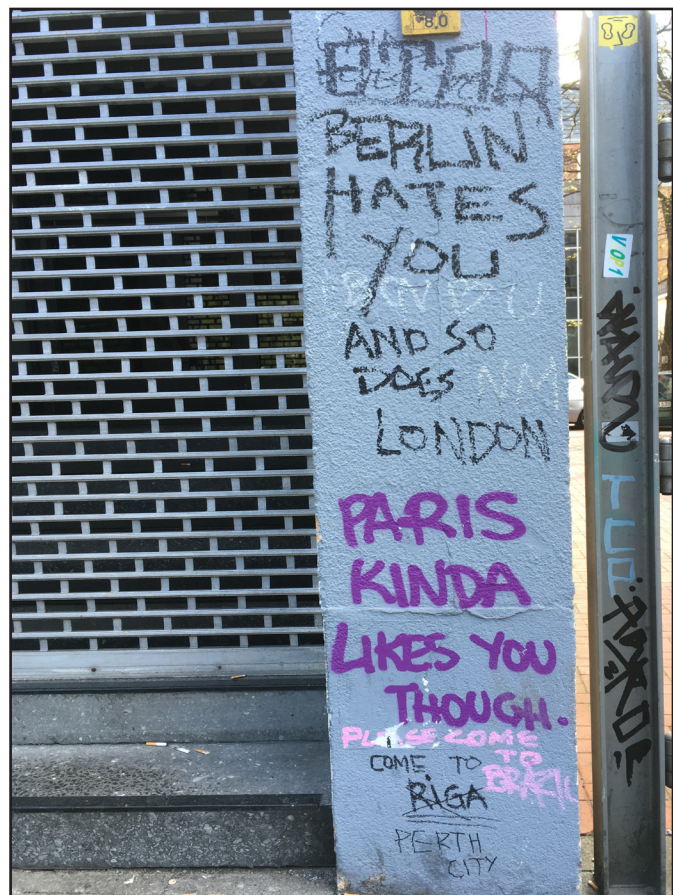


Figure 1.2 A graffiti exchange, both serious and playful, Berlin-Neukölln, 2017. Photo by author.



economically inefficient, impractical and socially unredemptive activities which are often unanticipated by designers, managers and other users” (Stevens, 2007, p. 1). To put it in simplified Marxist terms, play establishes a pinnacle use value of space while rejecting any sense of exchange value (see also Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, 2012). Of course street art goes beyond playfulness. At a basic level, as “a voice for the powerless and have-nots,” it is political expression. That it is not always intelligible does not make it any less a political act. As de Certeau might have said, “It is precisely because it is stylized and not transparent that it leaks with cultural meaning” (Highmore, 2006, p. 42), and the fact that officialdom refuses to recognize it as legitimate communication is tacit acknowledgment that to do so would open up a real threat (Rancière, 2010).

*“The streets are like a pirate radio.”*

Down on street level, I found graffiti and street art defining the landscape in different ways. Certain urban features tended to attract different kinds of markings: stickers covered lamp posts and signs; throw-ups, stencils, and wheatpastes jockeyed for space along sidewalks; pieces and murals hung like tapestries on the firewalls next to empty lots; and myriad calligraphic tags filled seemingly every doorway [Figure 1.3]. I dropped my pose of blase cosmopolitanism and was soon snapping pictures like any tourist, “collecting” my favorites tags and slogans. As a student of urban design, I was fascinated by the capacity of ephemeral artworks to serve as landmarks. As former book and newspaper editor, I was excited about the ability of graffiti to communicate outside mainstream channels and of the walls to function as a “pirate radio”. As someone with a background in Germanics, I was captivated by the poetic and literary qualities of some of the pieces as well as by their insistence on writing public history onto the surface of a city with far more than its share of history to contend with already.



Figure 1.3 Kreuzberg doors, 2017. Photos by author.

*“When the Wall fell, we drove directly to Kreuzberg. With my Begrüßungsgeld [welcome money] I bought five spray cans and a Batman t-shirt.”*

This project was born of my excitement during that trip to Berlin. But it is not in the end about me. It is not about the specific images depicted in works of street art or the messages in graffiti. It is not primarily about the particular sites where graffiti writers and street artists put their work. It is not about the art market. It is, instead, above all about the people who make graffiti and street art, whose words I have already been intersplicing with my own. It is about their experiences with this practice over the years: How do they see and understand the city? How do they understand their role in transforming public space? Do they feel empowered and in what ways? How do they link aesthetics and politics? It is also shot through with questions about space, place, and the city. At a certain level this project is about Berlin.

*“The city is a river, and it’s in motion.”*

Berlin represents something of an extreme specimen when it comes to graffiti. As such, it makes an ideal case study, with the characteristics of the phenomenon amplified into a kind of relief map that makes the features easier to recognize and analyze. There is no other city in Europe or the US where graffiti has undergone as many transformations as it has in Berlin. No other city has embraced “street art” as part of its identity while continuing to officially vilify “graffiti” as vandalism to the degree that Berlin has (Zawatka-Gerlach, 2015). In no other city has graffiti gone from being a sign of post-industrial decline to being accused of being a tool for neoliberal marketing campaigns and hypergentrification as quickly and as starkly as it has in Berlin (Morawski, 2014; Preußler and COGITO-FACTUM, 2017). In no other city has graffiti fostered the development of local economies and social organisations, complete with neighborhood spray shops and “*Graffiti-Aktionen*” [graffiti



painting events] at primary schools, while simultaneously becoming the top destination for a borderless set of global superstar artists who fly in and put up their (often sponsored) works without interacting with locals more than necessary (Bradley, 2014). In no other city has graffiti been as closely tied to the physical substrate of the city — first on the Wall and then in famous squats like Tacheles and the ubiquitous *Brachen* [empty industrial lots] of the former East — and simultaneously had its graffiti so photographed that online galleries have become perhaps more important “places” than the city’s walls (Arms, 2011). Through all of these transformations, graffiti as a practice remains remarkably resilient — the city and private sector spend millions on removal, yet the streets are covered with graffiti, with only a small portion officially sanctioned or painted by renowned artists.

I argue that what we have seen emerge with graffiti in Berlin is a form of “subcultural urbanism,” that is, a vision of urban life not just informed by but actually engendered via subcultural practice. In the rest of the book, I bring this subcultural urbanism to life through a critical phenomenology of social space. What I mean by that phrasing is that on the one hand this book paints a picture of the lived experience of graffiti writers and of that experience as part of a larger social milieu and historical context (i.e., critical phenomenology); and on the other hand, it shows how that lived, social experience is directly involved in changing both what the city looks like and what it means (i.e., the social production of space). I will touch more on these concepts, the methodologies appropriate to exploring them, and their implications below, but before getting the cart too far out in front of the horse, we should consider the overall goals and germinal questions of the project.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has two related goals: to investigate the practice of graffiti in Berlin as it relates to shaping urban space; and to explore what doing graffiti has meant to practitioners throughout the courses of their lives, especially in terms of their sense of belonging in Berlin. Berlin is undergoing rapid change, marked by contrasts, dichotomies, inequalities, and tensions. Graffiti can pluck at these tensions so that they resonate all the more loudly. I investigate the extent to which graffiti writers are especially engaged and spatially sensitive urban actors who are leveraging new forms of power, new ways of knowing, and new modes for shaping urban space. Understanding their experiences in Berlin exposes how an evolving subcultural practice shapes individuals' environmental and political consciousnesses, and how these have in turn shaped the very fabric of the postmodern metropolis.

Graffiti and its related forms of public expression are not new subjects for academic inquiry. There is a long history body of scholarship focused on the content of graffiti, reaching back to the earliest examples of wall writing in ancient Pompeii, and mining it for meaning at historical, lexicographic, or artistic levels. Art history is particularly interested in the capacity of modern street art to perform extramural "institutional critique" over and beyond whatever its decontextualized artistic merits might be. These treatments, however, do not much consider the experience of the living graffiti writer or artist.

In the social sciences, the "raw data" of graffiti has been subjected to all manner of *Verwissenschaftlichung*. To name only one prominent recent example, the InGriD project (*Informationssystem Graffiti in Deutschland*), based at the University of Paderborn, is assembling a database of hundreds of thousands of police photos of graffiti and coding them for future use in quantitative linguistic studies. Meanwhile, numerous studies have looked at graffiti through the lenses of anthropology, sociology, law, and criminology.

These studies have tended to focus on things like the structure of graffiti “crews” or on masculinity or on identity formation or on definitions of crime (e.g., Ferrell, 1993; Macdonald, 2001; Halsey & Young 2006; Young, 2014). The claims made about graffiti and graffiti writers have often jumped back and forth between academic and public discourse. On the one hand, graffiti is seen as a sign of juvenile delinquency, an indicator of the failure of education and lack of economic opportunity; or graffiti is seen as a harmless creative outlet, an important source of identification and socialization. Graffiti is seen as vandalism, a classic “broken windows” crime to be stamped out aggressively; or graffiti is seen as an ingenious form of grassroots beautification, a positive and constructive aesthetic engagement with the urban environment. Graffiti is a form of local ownership and empowerment; graffiti is co-opted by neoliberal forces and invites gentrification. Graffiti is antisocial and destructive; graffiti is invaluable as political expression and thus is a key component of a healthy democracy. Popular press has even referred to graffiti as “applied architectural criticism” [*Angewandte Architekturkritik*] (Oberländer, 2011). Many of these claims assume a sophisticated relationship between the graffiti writer and the urban environment, and many assume transformations over time (e.g., from graffiti writer into a “hard core” criminal; from graffiti writer into “engaged citizen”; from locally painted neighborhood into one where graffiti is a tourist draw, and so on). But not many of these relationships, dichotomies, and longitudinal claims are supported or well understood.

Past interviews and ethnographies have done plenty to reveal the spatial awareness the graffiti writers and street artists develop. “You fuckin’ learn about geography now through graffiti,” as one graffiti writer put it (BIO, quoted in Austin, 2001, p. 261). This is invaluable groundwork and can be colorful and exciting. But it has not been systematically linked to the spatial politics of a single city, nor has it attempted to probe beyond the practitioners spatial sensibilities to get at their ideas about urbanism and the future of the city more generally. Ferrell’s seminal 1993 book on graffiti writers in Denver was researched and

written at a time and place in which graffiti held very different meanings in terms of public perception and awareness. My project can be thought of as extending, updating, and broadening Ferrell's approach for the new century.

There has been considerable research done on graffiti in Berlin during the time of the Berlin Wall, especially graffiti written directly onto the Wall (Ladd, 2008). The Wall was, and the portion of it preserved as the East Side Gallery may still be, the most famous "graffiti" site in the world. But there has been comparatively little scholarship about graffiti as a social practice in a changing Berlin more recently. Some writers have taken up the textual content of graffiti in discussions of gentrification of neighborhoods of the former East Berlin (Papen, 2012); similarly, others have analyzed the political content of graffiti on the pieces of the former Wall now scattered around the city (Drechsel, 2010; Ivanova, 2012/3) and the controversial efforts to preserve graffiti as part of the memorialization of the Wall (Dolff-Bonekämper, 2002; Till, 2005; Sandler, 2016). I myself have written about graffiti, street art, and urban narratives at one particular contested site in Kreuzberg (Carver, 2018). But none of these prior studies has explored what it means to be a graffiti writer in Berlin, much less how that meaning has changed over time.

My research questions explore the changing phenomena themselves and probe some of the problems opened up between the various existing literatures<sup>2</sup>:

- How have graffiti writers chosen their spots, and how has this changed?
- How have the spaces used for graffiti influenced the sense of place of writers?
- How has the sense of place of writers related to their everyday engagement with the city?
- How have writers' knowledges of the city related to their political engagement?

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of completeness, it is also worth acknowledging that graffiti is a lively topic for research in further-flung fields like the materials sciences and the natural sciences — and even the intersection of the two (e.g., studies that attempt to identify bacteria that can metabolize paint and survive on surfaces like plaster or marble so that they could be used for "organic" graffiti deterrence and removal) (Sanmartin, et al., 2015).

- As graffiti has become more accepted in Berlin, how has it influenced writers' practices and their senses of place?
- What kind of communal or environmental ethics are associated with graffiti writing?
- How do graffiti writers link aesthetics and politics?

## THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

As I wrote above, this project presents graffiti in Berlin as form of subcultural urbanism seen through the lens of the hermeneutical phenomenology of social space. What this means in concrete, empirical terms is the subject of chapters 2 through 5. But in the present introduction, I want to explore what it means conceptually. The connections between subcultures and urban form have been explored extensively in social science literature. Some have sought to understand, for example, how population densities correlate with the proliferation of subcultures (e.g., Borer, 2006; Denters et al., 2014; Fischer, 1975 and 1995; Talen, 2012). Some have shown the importance of “radical spaces” to marginalized groups for building social capital and organizing politically (e.g., Kohn, 2003). Others have looked at the role of nightclubs, pubs, and other “cool places” in group identity formation (e.g., Skelton & Valentine, 1998; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). I am interested here in extending these discussions to planning and urban design both developing these trajectories and by turning the causal arrow in the other direction. Instead of showing how the city shapes subcultures, I show the potential of city dwellers to shape the city directly through subcultural practice.

There is a significant debate within sociology and anthropology about how to conceptualize “subculture,” a debate that it is not fruitful for us to wade too far into here. I am using the term “subculture” rather than “counter-culture, alternative lifestyle, identity politics,

new social movements, ... neo-tribes, Bund, subjectivised occasionalism, structure of feeling, liminality, heterotopia, heteroclite identity, social centrality, restored behavior” (Hetherington, 1998, p.158) or any of the other academic neologisms above all because “subculture” has an everyday meaning that most readers — and, importantly, most graffiti writers — would understand.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, it is best to understand graffiti in Berlin as a subculture whose members’ shared interests lead them “to identify themselves as different from — usually in some form of antagonistic relationship with — normal, ‘square’ society” (Williams, 2011, p. 8). In other words, graffiti subculture is affectual rather than traditional — that is, it is an affirmatively chosen association based on common interests rather than something inherited (i.e., through religion or ethnicity). The graffiti subculture is different from the queer, Latin@, or any other minority cultures whose interactions with urban space has been the focus of important work (e.g., Bell & Binnie, 2004; Tucker, 2009; Brown, 2014; Ghaziani, 2014; Irazabal, 2012; Daiz and Torres, 2012). The added wrinkle with graffiti is that it is simultaneously a form of artistic expression and in most situations technically illegal; it is a subculture defined in part by statutory marginalization, in part by self-conscious deviance, and in part by mutual affinity for the aesthetic and expressive affordances of the practice. No matter how exactly it is understood — and even if postmodern theory suggests that there is no singular “normal” mainstream culture for subcultures to define themselves dialectically against (see Blackman, 2005), even if such a mainstream is a vaguely defined straw-man — subcultures like graffiti writing are nevertheless a reality for participants, and this reality has profound implications for identity and behavior.

This is important for our purposes primarily because the existence of subcultures offers compelling ways of rethinking “the public”. Central to theories of urban planning and of political action writ large is the question of defining “the public” whose voice is said to

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<sup>3</sup> My interview subjects used the terms “subculture”, “*Subkultur*”, “scene”, and “*Szene*” when talking about the groups of people involved in graffiti and street art.

direct democratic decision making and in whose interest collective action is supposedly taken. A long line of political theory, from Aristotle to Arendt to Habermas and beyond, is founded on an essentially Athenian model of public life founded on rational discourse among a group of equals. It is easy to critique modern proponents of that ideal as simply indulging in misguided nostalgia for a bygone *Gemeinschaft* that never actually existed. The response offered by many writers, in many different ways, is that the complexity and plurality of contemporary *Gesellschaft* demand that we reconceive collective life as a set of multiple publics or counterpublics (in opposition to a dominant public), and that the physical substrate of collective life — the *polis* — be accordingly reconceived as a series of spaces that are socially constructed and reconstructed according to the needs, actions, and desires of those publics. Fleshing out the ideas of the most important of these writers will help illustrate what I mean and why the ideas are relevant to graffiti subcultures.

Richard Sennett is an Arendtian thinker in many respects, and Aristotelian too, but his work departs in some ways that are interesting for our inspection of what “the” public might be and serves as an appropriate segue into other writers’ full-throated call for plural publics. Since the 1970s, Sennett has produced a series of critiques of contemporary political life, many of which echo Arendt’s post-marxist lament about the rise of capitalism, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, what he calls “the tyranny of intimacy,” a sort of liberalism of individual rights that has metastasized into a pandemic of narcissism (1974). However, Sennett is different from Arendt in that the latter placed primary value on the reasoned speech act for reinvigorating public life. For her, people need to be in each other’s presence, but nothing important happens until someone starts speaking. Sennett, meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of embodiment in public action. Public co-presence alone is already important. While he sees promise in the performative elements of public life, his conception of this is quite different from paradoxical-sounding performance of authentic identity advocated by some other writers (e.g., Butler, 2015). Sennett is interested in the



theatrical, where individuals in public do not necessarily identify themselves and their interests immediately. Sennett's public activity involves wearing metaphoric masks not because he values duplicity and secrecy, but rather for two other linked reasons: first, because self-interested individuality is antithetical to public life; and second, because the public is constituted by people who *do not necessarily know* who they themselves are, and should have space to anonymously explore their social identities. These ideas are linked because it is not just that it takes time to "find oneself," and that society should allow this self-exploration process. Rather, it is *impossible* to know oneself outside of community relationships. Any isolated identity is difficult to establish and impossible to maintain. These questions of identity and community are addressed empirically in Chapter 5.

And yet, instead of being a source of angst, uncertainty about identity ought to compel people to be open to each others' morphing identities; it ought to make us recognize that identities — and thus interests — are plural. Sennett places great value on the Athenian agora (indeed much of ancient Athens) as a public site where this performative exploration could occur, and explores in some detail the various public rituals that took place at specific sites (1994). Among his prescriptions for recreating this *teatro mundi*, Sennett calls for sensuality to be celebrated in public spaces more, in order that embodied citizens might be better encouraged to enact public lives based on difference. Likewise, public space should allow for disorder, for "recognition scenes," and for indeterminate "narratives" to play out in the lives and minds of citizens (1970, 1974, 1990). While not explicitly introducing a conception of plural publics, Sennett's work effectively destroys the notion of a singular *polis* built on *logos*. After Sennett, there can be no discussion of an indivisible, cooperative public.

This frame of mind leads writers like Sophie Watson to call for "a plural story ... about how people rub along, or don't, in the public spaces of the city" (2006, p. 2). For Watson, a study

of public life and public space that considers “the specificity and contingency of difference as lived in particular socio-spatial configurations” reveals public life to be constituted of multiple publics in agonistic relationship to one another (p. 3). It is not the grand central public spaces like the agora where we will recognize what this public life means. Rather, it is the small, out-of-sight places, including borders and boundaries, where publicness means “an emphasis on the micropolitics of social contact and encounter which provides us with an understanding of ethnicity, and other identities too, as a mobile and incomplete process” (p. 18). Like Sennett, Watson sees the inability for us to truly know each other in a definite sense not as tragedy of the modern metropolis (as might someone in the tradition of Emil Durkheim or Louis Wirth) but as a potential source of positive energy. Postmodern cities of plural publics and the spaces that welcome them offer the opportunities for “enchantment” that the rationalized, modern city tried to erase. Again, these topics will come up again in the interview material treated in Chapters 4 and 5.

If the views of Sennett and Watson, at least as I’ve presented them here, offer a picture of the plural city where politics is slightly muted, despite the affirmation of difference and celebration of agonism, that is not an accident. While both lines of argument are deeply informed by critical theory, neither assumes that a plural city will be a revolutionary one. Watson, in fact, repeatedly calls upon the state to help create or maintain spaces of enchantment. A parallel line of thinking, however, suggests that rather than a public realm that is simply “open-ended, contingent and elastic” (Watson, 2006, p. 172), political life is characterized by dominant publics and minority, subjugated counter-publics, again in constant tension with one another and therefore in constant flux. But now that we understand that no public is to be taken for granted ontologically, how are publics actually created?

Michael Warner (2002) outlines seven characteristics of publics: 1) they are self-created; 2) they are a relation among strangers; 3) the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal; 4) they are constituted through mere attention (in contrast to the dialogue required by Aristotle, Arendt and Habermas); 5) publics are not so much a population as the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse; 6) they act historically according to the temporality of their circulation; and 7) they engage in “poetic world-making” (p. 114). We do not have space here to unpack each of these dimensions, but at the very least it is worth noting that this is obviously a textual-literary conception of publics, which I assume Sennett would find compelling. However, such publics are also far more consciously politically engaged than what we see in Sennett. The major challenge that Warner identifies is that the practice of reading, which has elevated our rational-critical capacities, has in fact served to reinforce a Habermasian conception of “the public” over other publics that would attempt to use more poetic-expressive modes. “Publics more overtly oriented in their self-understanding to the poetic-expressive dimension of language — including artistic publics and many counterpublics — lack the power to transpose themselves to the level of the generality of the state” (pp. 83-84). In other words, the “world-making” imaginary that is the necessary task of any group of indefinite strangers attempting to act together politically is forced to rationalize as it scales up. This is why the *ne plus ultra* of the imagined community is the modern nation state (see Anderson, 2006). But what subcultural urbanism shows us is that it is not necessary to “transpose” to the level of a state in order to change the city.

The concept of counterpublics, as invoked here by Warner, is derived from Nancy Fraser’s “subaltern counterpublics” (1992). Subaltern counterpublics are “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1992, p. 123). The key word here is *parallel*. Subaltern

counterpublics are not merely special interest groups that engage in standard modes of debate in the public sphere. While they are defined in opposition to a dominant public, they are formulated through an entirely separate discursive practice. Because these counterdiscourses are almost by definition not heard, not even hearable, within the dominant discourse, counterpublics often “define themselves through performances so distinctively embodied that one cannot lasso them back into general circulation without risking the humiliating exposure of inauthenticity” (Warner, 2002, p. 73). Here is the link to Sennett’s ideas about performativity and embodiment — but note also that Warner identifies an inherent weakness in the formation of such a public (he calls it a “perversity”). As Warner puts it, a counterpublic will find itself “in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public” (p.80). Given that all publics — dominant publics and counterpublics — are created through ideological practices that are simultaneously impersonal and exclusive, it can be difficult to assert that a counterpublic is inherently more public (or more equal or more just or whatever norm).

Other writers have attempted to resurrect a version of the concept of counterpublics, and they have done so by moving away from the strictly discursive approach taken by Arendt, Habermas, Warner, and Fraser, and incorporating a spatial dimension. Before talking in more detail about *how* publics go about producing space, I want to take a few moments to walk through the theoretical side of this approach. Like Sophie Watson, Kurt Iveson proposes a more particularized, rather than totalizing, way of understanding publics and public spaces (2007). But, while he also sees the opportunity for public spaces to play a role in liberating certain oppressed publics, overall he proposes that we better understand the multiple publics of a city at an analytic or descriptive level, rather than a normative one.

As I mentioned above, Iveson readily dispatches with a discursive definition of a public (he calls such Habermasian approaches “procedural”), but he directs just as much critique to those who blindly embrace a “topological” approach. A topological sense of publicness carelessly conflates context (“urban public space”), kinds of actions (“public address”) and collective actors (“the public”) in a way that is again reminiscent of the Athenian agora, but which “miss[es] the messy and dynamic urban geographies of publicness” (p. 8). All urban publics are social imaginaries: some based on imagined shared values (e.g., New Urbanism), some based on imagined shared interests (which would produce a strong state that works to enforce equality and access), some based on imagined shared fates. The city of shared fates is the cosmopolis of Leonie Sandercock (2003) or the society of mutually recognized vulnerability of Judith Butler (2004, 2015), and it is clear that Iveson sees it as most realistic and potentially liberatory. Such a city would be defined by “openness to the other preceding from the recognition of the stranger within us” (Iveson, 2007, p. 46). There is no guarantee that this city would not also be exclusionary at some times, but the point is that it would be founded on an assumption that there are multiple publics, none ontologically prior to others, and all constantly in the making in their own terms, with their own modes of public address, and their own appropriations of the urban. It is to those appropriations of the urban that we now turn.

In this concluding section, I want to offer some concrete examples of how the notions of multiple publics and counterpublics come into play in the production and appropriation of contemporary public space. Most of these cases are informed by Lefebvre’s “spatial trialectic”: spatial practice or “perceived space” (i.e., everyday, embodied inhabitation; routine); representational space or “lived space” (e.g., historical or religious meaning attached to space; ritual); and representations of space or “conceived space” (e.g., maps, plans, and other abstractions). But let’s review quickly how far we’ve come. We know that there cannot be a single public as *polis*, united around common goals; the city is made up

of multiple publics, some of which will find themselves with unequal access to resources, representation, and space, and those multiple publics may find themselves in antagonistic relationship with one another. We know that while speech and discourse are important for the formation of a public, embodied and performative action is also important, both for mutual recognition and for establishing independent modes of communication. And we know that dominant publics will likely have most control over spatial practices and representations of space. Therefore, we can expect that subcultural counterpublics will seek to produce themselves through the production of new kinds of space on their own terms, and that this will happen predominantly at the level of “representational space,” at the lived level, where interventions will be “essentially qualitative, fluid, and dynamic.”

Many such new spaces have been produced by non-dominant publics — and many have been identified and analyzed by academics. The spaces have been classified as being variously “uncertain” (Cupers and Miessen, 2002), “radical” (Kohn, 2003), “enchanted” (Watson, 2006), “loose” (Franck and Stevens, 2007), “ludic” (Stevens, 2007), “insurgent” (Hou, 2010) and “creative” (Mould, 2015). But what they share is a reenactment of the meaning of public space through interventions at the level of “lived space.” Of course, the three parts of the Lefebvrian spatial trinity are not independent of one another, and it is easy to think of interventions that might work on more than one dimension. Spray painting a wall adjacent to an empty lot, for example, would impact the perceived space — a gray wall is now a colorful wall — while, as lived space, it would transform from a forgotten lot into a site of public art. And to be sure, subcultural counterpublics have acted at the level of conceived space, too. The entire practice of critical cartography, for example, shows how spaces can be reappropriated using alternative modes of abstraction. There is also a large body of work that explores the reappropriation of public space for explicitly political ends, that is, for political demonstration (e.g., Low, 2000; Irazabal, 2008; Parkinson, 2012). But for the remainder of this essay, I’d like to focus on how spaces are redefined through a



change in their affective register via some sort of embodied intervention by a comparatively disempowered public. Through this process, these publics shape themselves as they shape space, making an inherent political argument, too. As the rest of the book should make clear, writing graffiti in Berlin produces space that is somewhere near the nexus of “loose” and “insurgent.”

At first blush, the practices that produce loose space, as defined by Stevens, seem strikingly Arendtian:

Many of the activities that generate looseness are neither productive (like traveling to work) or reproductive (like buying necessities), being instead a matter of leisure, entertainment, self-expression or political expression, reflection and social interaction — all outside the daily routine and the world of fixed functions and fixed schedules. (Franck and Stevens, 2007, p.3).

So is loose space the kind of public realm that Arendt yearned for, which would allow us to finally achieve our destiny as *zoon politikon*, caught up in the good life that is political talk? Possibly, but not necessarily. What Franck and Stevens have in mind is something much less determinate. If anything, loose space has more in common with the “enchanted” space of Sophie Watson or the “disorder” Sennett sought:

One of the freedoms of public space is that the sensations encountered there are often loosened from their conventional contexts and are brought into new relationships of ambiguity and confusion. The city is delirious; such de-familiarization of space promotes loose and playful responses, a re-discovery of spaces’ potential (p.10).

Similarly, Hou begins by showing how insurgent space can “renew the discursive instrumentality of public space as a forum for open discussion ... [and give] meanings to the full notion of publicity in a public space” (p.1). But as he explains further, insurgent space is not just about discourse, it is also where subjected or nascent publics can shape the city and themselves through affective interventions:

If public space is where identities, meanings, and social relationships in cities are produced, codified, and maintained, it is through insurgent public space that alternative identities, meanings, and relationships can be nurtured, articulated, and enacted. ... Through continued expressions and contestation, the presence and making of insurgent public space serves as a barometer of the democratic well-being and inclusiveness of our present society. (p.16)

Clearly the potential of loose or insurgent space is linked to its affective potential, its potential as “space of representation.”

While these spaces could be almost anywhere, they are often the overlooked or forgotten spaces of the city: empty lots, underpasses, railway yards, abandoned buildings. Those are the easiest sites to reappropriate, and they are the sites of interventions like guerilla gardening, squatting, pop-up markets, “reenacting” the disorienting Tarkovsky film *Stalker*. Squatters recognize their political agency, while pop-up markets allow populations who have no other venues (e.g., immigrants) to conduct a life that is otherwise disallowed in the dominant realm of space. Other reappropriations happen in more visible locations, and involve a direct disruption of some previously intended use. Some of these are relatively harmless, such as picnicking on the steps at the New York Public Library, while others are slightly more overt in their challenge to existing norms, such as occupying a parking space to turn it into a “parklet.” Some interventions directly address the constructed divisions between the public and the private, such as repurposing thresholds or extending private gardens into the public streetscape, while others seem to operate on a purely affective level, such as the creation of impromptu memorials near to (or sometimes far away from) the site of an accident or traumatic event. Again, spaces and social groups are co-constituted through the act of intervention. To take only the last example: out of the anonymous multitude of the city, a community of mourners changes a fence into a shrine and thereby comes to recognize itself.

What is important about these spatial practices is that in them we see plural publics transforming spaces in their own terms in a way that establishes their status as publics and, by troubling the hegemonic definition of particular spaces, tacitly calls for a more inclusive public realm. Rather than depending on the rationalized discourse of the *logos*, these groups enact a new discourse that is performative and embodied. Rather than depending

on a centralized public square or abstract public sphere, these publics reappropriate spaces that are available and turn them into sites of political and social transformation. Rather than accepting the neoliberal logics that equate economic activity with political activity, these publics find identity through “leisure, entertainment, self-expression or political expression, reflection and social interaction.” Rather than passively enlisting in a singular, statist public, these publics — be they “multiple”, “insurgent”, “counter”, or, in our case, subcultural — assert their plurality and their legitimacy through the production of new kinds of public spaces.

Let’s connect this quickly back to the actual spatial impact of graffiti. Graffiti and street art have some capacity to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness that characterizes the Western Euclidean-Cartesian view of time and space (see, e.g., Seamon 2000). Because it is ephemeral, it changes constantly (but not predictably), and because much of it is abstract or cryptic in nature, public graffiti has the capacity to introduce new perspectives, to turn background into foreground, to make visible the invisible — on both physical and social levels (Wacławek, 2011). As a phenomenon, graffiti occurs as a jolt in the lifeworld of the passerby. Graffiti may be primarily a visual component of the environment (though even children can recognize the smell of fresh aerosol), and yet it does bring with it the experience of other feelings — possibly wonder, joy, fear — that are typically not part of the typical design aesthetic (Pallasmaa, 1996). As an urban environmental phenomenon, it offers a contrast to the modern, rationally planned city’s emphasis on intellect. Both Lefebvre and Sennett draw our attention to the modern city’s enthusiasm for straight roads lined with contiguous buildings that extend “infinitely” to a vanishing point. This form of urban design, married to the geometric laws of linear perspective, forces the city into abstraction and interchangeability (Lefebvre, 1991). When graffiti occupies an empty lot it and fills it with something other a facade, it disrupts this abstracting logic and insists on a city characterized by spaces of difference [Figure 1.4].



Figure 1.4 A gap in the street wall filled with graffiti, Berlin-Kreuzberg, 2017. Photo by author.

In these last several paragraphs, I have been talking about “producing” space in order to take advantage of the famous Lefebvrian framework and to link this to the notion of a subcultural counterpublic that I want to show is important for “producing” the contemporary city in a more democratically legitimate way. Subcultural urbanism is a form of producing social space through the actions of a marginalized population whose marginalization *and* power are rooted in its members’ interventions in public space. While these interventions could be understood as a non-discursive practice entirely separate from mainstream, rational discourse, it would impossible and self-defeating to attempt to “lasso them back into general circulation”. Hence my approach to foregrounding the words,

artefacts, and experiences of graffiti writers and street artists, in what I am calling a critical phenomenology.

Phenomenology is by no means a monolithic doctrine, but this discussion does not intend to rehearse, yet again, the story of the phenomenological movement. For the purposes of my project, it is not necessary to depart far from its central Husserlian principle: an anti-reductionist, reflective attentiveness to the lifeworld and its structures. That said, I am not interested in reaching for the unattainable ideal of apodictic certainty; my approach shares more with the “heretical” phenomenologists (e.g., Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Marion) in that I am more concerned with retaining and presenting the *élan vital* of the testimonies I heard. In truth, phenomenology has always been critical, as it operates against the Platonic, Cartesian epistemologies that dominate science and society. But it has become increasingly common in the spatial social sciences to place even more emphasis on the critical, envisioning “a method that is rooted in first-person accounts of experience but also critical of [Husserl’s] classical phenomenological claim that the first-person singular is absolutely prior to intersubjectivity and to the complex textures of social life” (Guenther, 2013: xiii). Such accounts will pay more attention to social relations, historical situatedness, and sensory, embodied experience in the vein of hermeneutical phenomenology (e.g., Revill, 2016). It might seem impossible, then, to have a phenomenology of the production of social space that was anything less than critical. Despite its possible redundancy, I am nevertheless using the term, in part to signal allegiance with some of these other critical phenomenologies and in part to emphasize that there is an inherent politics involved presenting the lifeworld experiences of marginalized people.

It is somewhat ironic that so much technical jargon is involved with outlining the theoretical orientation of my project, given that its core is about people's everyday experiences as expressed in their own words and via their own artistic output. Technically

this is a case of the return back from science's secondary, formal — and derivative — abstractions to remain reflectively in touch with the primary phenomena — the everyday lifeworld. This is what Heidegger does in his phenomenological descriptions and analyses of pre-reflective experience and what Lefebvre does by subordinating the current cultural domination of representational space (conceptualization) to the fundamental realms of produced and lived space. In more commonplace terms, this project is about what it means to be a graffiti writer in Berlin. This is an important question for the reasons outlined above. Let's turn now to a brief discussion of how I went about investigating that question.

## METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Further, reflective description of my methodological and analytic approaches, including the actual tools used, makes up Appendices A-D. But it is useful to include a brief sketch here of my epistemological orientation and the empirical foundations of the following chapters. In general, this work falls in a long lineage of qualitative social science whose focus is “the reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic, and cultural development in any society” (Flyvberg, 2001, p.3). For the reasons outlined above, this is a case study of a single site, Berlin, and the members of the graffiti writing and street art subcultures there (see Yin, 2014). Appropriate to my goals and research questions, this project employs mixed methods, all of which are grounded in ethnographic and phenomenological traditions.

The core of the project is oral history, collected primarily through long-form, semi-structured interviews with current and former graffiti writers. Similar techniques have been demonstrated successfully in studies of graffiti artists in other settings (Halsey and Young, 2006; Brighenti, 2010; Halsey and Pederick, 2010; Dovey, Wollan, and Woodcock, 2012; Irvine, 2012; Baker, 2015). I set out to go beyond these prior studies, however, and



achieve something closer to thick descriptions of the graffiti writers' lived experiences — and also to elicit more about their ideas about issues that normally fall under the purview of city planning and urban spatial politics. Participant observation emerged as a technique for getting at this material, too (see Chapter 4). Between October of 2016 and September of 2017, I conducted some two dozen long-form interviews, many of which were accompanied by city walks and other forms of participant observation. These interviews were recorded and are the source for the material sprinkled throughout this introduction and quoted extensively in Chapters 3 and 4. Since I am interested in the impacts of graffiti writing on people and place over time, I targeted older individuals (the ages of my respondents ranged from roughly mid-20s to mid-60s).

I also conducted between 50 and 60 shorter, more structured, survey-type interviews with other graffiti writers (who tended to be younger than the core group). Since these were recorded only as field notes, none of that data reappears in the form of quotes — but it makes up a very important source of background and supporting information about the experience of writing graffiti in Berlin. I also spoke at length with numerous people whose primary involvement with the graffiti and street art scenes was not as artists: gallerists, store owners, promoters, members of the city's departments of neighborhoods, culture, and planning. These interviews, too, served to inform the picture of the complex dynamics of subcultural urbanism that is the focus of Chapter 2 and the background of Chapters 3, 4, and 5. (Some of these interviews were conducted during a prior trip September-December 2014.) During my research stay I also sat in on the monthly meetings of the Graffiti Lobby, a group made up of current and former graffiti writers and other advocates. These observations, too, were invaluable for my understanding of the context and my ability to converse with people involved with graffiti and street art.



The ethnographic component of this project is complimented and enriched by archival research. Holdings of books and fanzines related to graffiti are considerable at Berlin's *Archiv der Jugendkulturen* [Archive of Youth Cultures]: several hundred small-print-run graffiti books and hundreds of fanzines unavailable elsewhere. I was able to visit the archive regularly during my research stay in 2016-2017; all the scans of documents found there (reproduced primarily in Chapter 3) were made during that time. It is worth stressing here that, without the archive, none of that research would have been possible. My presentation of graffiti history via *Backjumps* magazine, of which Jugendkulturen preserves the entire run, would not have been possible. Several of the contacts for my long-form interviews also came through the archive. The non-profit has been funded by federal grants and the city's lottery. While I was there, it was staffed and open to the public several afternoons a week; at the time of this writing (Spring 2019), however, funding has been curtailed and access to the holdings is by appointment only.

As a last note, I would like to acknowledge — emphasize, in fact — that during my two research stays in Berlin (September-December 2014 and October 2016-September 2017) I was inhabiting the same spaces as my interview subjects. I rode the same trains, shopped at the same supermarkets and *Spätkaufe* [bodegas], passed the same *Brachen* and graffiti-covered facades every day, and witnessed the same spectacles that they did — at the same time. I had my notebook out and my recorder running for only a small portion of this time. But the experience living for so long in a “Graffiti Metropolis” equipped me to ask different questions, compelled me to take different analytical stances, and led me to make different conclusions than if the research had been conducted remotely or only over short stays.

## ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The directions I pursue in this book are important to take seriously for a number of reasons. Planning aspires to be a democratic practice and therefore values participation. But the question, in planning theory, of how best to realize a maximally democratic participation remains open. The result is that most planning decisions are still made by elites, and most of the change in both the physical and social makeup of the city is driven by empowered entities. If planners recognize this situation as unjust, the solution would be a form of participatory justice or some other expansion of participation to greater portions of the public. And if opportunities for participation are not expanded, we can expect people to reclaim power or undertake their own forms of resistance.

One of the most common and effective, or at least visible, routes to reclamations of power remains to occupy public space. But it is wrong to expect resistance to always manifest as overtly legible or even as overtly political. What I illustrate throughout this book are the ways in which graffiti and street art represent a form of “everyday resistance,” always dancing along the line between overt and merely implicit political statement. This implicit resistance can be both diffuse and holistic, which is why I’m calling subcultural urbanism, rather than simply resistance. “Urbanism” is itself a somewhat diffuse notion, encompassing a constellation of material, social, economic, and political forces which resonate across a range of aesthetic and affective dimensions, all related to the realities of life together in a large, dense, and heterogeneous settlement (cf, Mumford, 1937; Wirth, 1938). Subcultural urbanism represents nothing less than an alternate vision for urban life.

The core of this particular form of subcultural urbanism is reclamation or repurposing of public space for social and physical change and storytelling potential. (There are secondary characteristics of space that become important as well.) But I will all along

be demonstrating that instead of some strictly historical, historicizing, didactic function for space, graffiti reveals the geographies of the postmodern cities to be “stubbornly simultaneous” (Soja, 1989, p.2). The hegemonic histories that might be promoted and touristified are instead, through the phenomenological realities of graffiti writers, “blasted out of the continuum of historical succession” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 475).

Further conclusions and avenues for research are elaborated in Chapter 6. But I want to note here that perhaps the most important takeaway from this study overall is emergent nature of the “resistance” represented by the subcultural urbanism of graffiti writing. The self and the city are co-constituted through the practice of graffiti writing, and performative though it may be, only rarely does it look like political demonstration in the classic sense. What I hope to have illustrated throughout this book are the ways in which the practice of graffiti writing represents incipient, prefigurative, or “fugitive” forms of city making.

In more concrete and disciplinary terms, this research makes contributions on several fronts. As urban history, it exposes the unique role graffiti has played in shaping urban form in Berlin over the past few decades. As environmental psychology, it illuminates the role the graffiti writing plays in fostering unique ways of knowing the urban environment. As exploration of art and social action, this project shows how active participation in the aesthetics of the urban environment can be central to the formation of political subjects. And in a global environment where “street art” is ever more accepted, if not promoted, and yet where “graffiti” as controversial as ever, the implications of my findings for policy makers and authorities are potentially significant. Further reflection on these contributions and implications is found in Chapter 6.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Graffiti in Berlin is a multifaceted phenomenon, one that invites examination through any number of possible perspectives and lenses, including linguistics and lexicography; art history and institutional critique; deviance and criminology; psychology, sociology, and social psychology; cultural transfer; communication and media studies; both globalization and localism; and architecture and urban form, along with probably many others. But as I have already been emphasizing, I am interested primarily in the relationship between urban change and human change, the ways in which graffiti practice can be understood as a mode of urban life. But this itself is a multifaceted problem, hence my strategy of presenting different “takes” on it in the chapters that follow. I do not anticipate that the different takes will result in a completely satisfying, comprehensive understanding of all the dimensions — that would be impossible. But the takes will expose the scope of those dimensions. The takes do not represent episodes in some unified narrative. But they accrete meaning in a way that I believe offers a more honest presentation of the issues of primary concern in this study.

Chapter 2 performs some necessary stage-setting. There, I present the graffiti phenomenon in Berlin in all its complexity, showing how physical, economic, socio-physical, legal, and technological factors all contribute in various tangled causal relationships, feedback loops, and non-linear historical trajectories to result in the graffiti phenomenon that one witnesses today. *Physical dimensions* encompass the material substrate of the city, the streets, buildings, parks and open space, transportation and other infrastructure; *economic dimensions* consist primarily of national and global macroeconomic factors that have influenced the industries, employment makeup, and working conditions in Berlin, along with more local dynamics in the political economy that have influenced urban policy and capacities; *socio-cultural dimensions* include traditions of political and artistic expression, traditions of public life, the historical significance of features like the Berlin

Wall, and transnational cultural flows influencing both subcultures and the mainstream; *legal dimensions* entails the changing conceptions of what is criminal behavior when it comes to mark-making in the public realm; and finally, I include in *technical dimensions* the numerous tools and techniques — from the spray can to LEDs to the Internet — that have allowed graffiti writers to expand both the range of paintable surfaces and the audiences for graffiti. The ultimate thrust of this chapter is that to understand what graffiti means for Berlin and Berliners, we need to also consider this full range of complex historical and situational factors.

In Chapter 3, I trace the evolution of *Backjumps*, the most important graffiti magazine in Berlin throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. This chapter explores how the subculture emerged and how its social and spatial sensibilities developed over that period. *Backjumps* began as a handmade, underground zine, grew into a mainstream, more formal magazine, transformed itself into a series of city-wide urban art festivals, and ultimately decided to adjourn out of recognition that it might be contributing to unwelcome processes like touristification and gentrification. In this way, *Backjumps* functions as a synecdoche for the entire graffiti movement in Berlin. It was also a document, a mediatized representation of a certain set of attitudes and ideals, and thus, if graffiti can be thought of as a form of subcultural urbanism, *Backjumps* can be thought of as a comprehensive plan. I examine the textual and photographic content of the *Backjumps* magazines along with the ephemera associated with the festivals to show how it functioned like a plan and to offer an alternative understanding of the trajectory of the movement.

Despite the roles played by historical, economic, social and other forces, and despite the influence of media like *Backjumps*, a subculture is in the end still composed of people, and individual human experience is the ultimate measure urban life. In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings from over a year's worth of ethnographic work among graffiti

writers, street artists, activists, gallerists, and others actors in the urban art scene in Berlin. What I present are stories, the testimonies of people who have been intimately involved with graffiti and street art in Berlin for an extended period. In these chapters we see what it has meant to them to be a part of this form of urban life, what it has meant to interact with the city via a technically illicit but widely celebrated artistic practice. There are three main characters; their stories are given space to spread out into messy fullness. One of the primary intents in presenting these profiles at length is to present my interview partners as full, complex humans and to let them speak in their own words as much as possible. Graffiti writers and street artists may be of any race, ethnicity, or social standing, but they are almost by definition people who have been implicitly or explicitly excluded from participating in sanctioned forms of public life. As marginalized city dwellers, it was important to me to honor their experiences and make their voices heard. (This is not the same as uncritically repeating every claim they make or blindly heroizing them. My interviewees have warts, and they are visible in the profiles. I allowed my participants to speak freely, but also asked follow-up and focusing questions. The inconsistencies and contradictions of their testimonies are included here as well.) These testimonies show just how many dynamics of urban life are caught up in the bidirectional process of shaping the self and shaping the city.

In order to help visualize and conceptualize these dynamics better, I also include schematic diagrams of the processes involved with becoming a graffiti writer in Berlin. In the subsequent analysis of these main stories, I identify several emergent recurring themes, which I then reinforce or elaborate on with extracts from some of the other dozens of interviews I conducted. Each of the four main themes — Ephemerality, Materiality, Property, and Becoming — is treated in its own subchapter (with Becoming split into two further subchapters).

In Chapter 6, I do not summarize what has just been said, but reflect on the results of the case study, its implications for urban studies generally, and directions for future research. But there is a lot of ground to cover before then. Let's get into to the material now.



# CHAPTER 2

## CONTEXTS

May 17, 2017, New York: When the hammer finally fell at Sotheby's New York after a series of gasp-inducing bids, a large, untitled piece by Jean-Michel Basquiat had sold for \$110.5 Million, the highest price ever for a piece of American art (Pogrebin and Reyburn, 2017). No work by Warhol, Jasper Johns, Jackson Pollack or other textbook name had ever garnered as much. The piece depicts a skull surrounded by various abstract markings, figures, and typography, and is described in the Sotheby's catalogue, with characteristic understatement, as "a monumental fusion of viscerally charged figuration and unbridled painterly assault" (Sotheby's. n.d.). The canvas is indeed coated exuberantly in acrylic, oilstick, and spray paint. Painted in 1982, it is considered one of the graffiti legend Basquiat's first formal pieces; it is also one of the first examples of "street art" intruding into the high art world. Like many other fields, art history looks with favor upon a bold beginning. But no history is predetermined, and in the art world, 35 years is merely a blip. Yet here we are. It is worth reiterating: at least as far as the auction houses are concerned, the most valuable piece of American art ever was made by a graffiti writer.

Around that same time, in the middle of 2017, I walked into a children's bookstore in the recently gentrified Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood of Berlin, looking for a gift for a friend's toddler. In the "Birth to 4 Years" section, alongside the typical alphabets, hungry caterpillars, and drowsy moons, there was a small board book titled simply *Berlin* (Drews, 2016). Across 20-or-so boards, cartoon illustrations teach children the words for certain

archetypal landmarks of the German capital: “*Bahnhof*” [“train station”], “*Gold Else*” [“Golden Elsa,” the figure atop the Victory Column], “*Zoo*”. And there, on the page between “*Currywurst*” and “*Berliner Bär*” [“Berlin bear,” the city’s icon], our young readers find “*Graffiti*.” The illustration shows a hoodie-wearing teen spray painting the wall beside a playground. A young girl kicks gleefully on a swing. On the wall, you can recognize a superimposed rendering of a famous piece in Kreuzberg: “Love Art Hate Cops”. In Berlin, at least according to one author and publisher, graffiti is enough a part of the landscape for it to be among the first words a child learns.

I could list more indicators of the cultural acceptance of urban art (e.g., Banksy’s 5.7M Instagram followers), but the point here is that between 1982, the year of the Basquiat canvas, and 2017, urban art seems to have moved fully from the shadowy alleys and railyards of its inception into uncontroversial mainstream acceptance, as both high culture and as prosaic urban background. In Berlin, as in many other cities, there are numerous “legal walls,” places where graffiti is officially allowed and where people paint in broad daylight. The City of Berlin advertises “street art” as part of its online “Cultural Tips” guide for visitors (“Street Art in Berlin,” n.d.). In May 2017, The Haus, a temporary graffiti and street art “takeover” of an entire, condemned bank building drew tens of thousands of visitors and was briefly the talk of the town. And in September of 2017, Urban Nation: Museum for Urban Contemporary Art opened in the Schöneberg neighborhood. The former apartment building, renovated with several million Euros in public funding, has 500 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibit space and a dozen live-work units for its artist-in-residence program.

Against this backdrop, it would be easy to assume that unsanctioned graffiti, neutered of its erstwhile ability to shock or even more reviled because of all the above-board outlets available, would become less popular and wither away. But the opposite is the case. In Berlin, the facades of buildings in most dense, inner-city neighborhoods remain

covered with amateur, illicit graffiti, as do countless other industrial, post-industrial, transportation- or infrastructure-related surfaces throughout the entire city. Tags, hip-hop graffiti, political slogans, and figurative street art continue to inspire obsessive dedication among practitioners, provide distinctive motives for tourists' photos, ceaselessly reshape the appearance of urban space, and constitute a raucous and polyvocal strand in the city's public political discourse. But how is it able to do so? Why, despite mainstreaming and even partial legalization, does it still draw people to risk their lives to "get up"? How is it that illegal graffiti has come to form such an indelible part of the urban landscape and popular image of Berlin?

There are several factors which contribute to Berlin's emergence as one of the most "bombed" cities in the world. I want to emphasize that these are contributing factors, rather than causal variables or structural determinators. In all almost all of my interviews, the discussants exhibit a deeply reflected understanding of their undertaking — of what drew them to it, of the risks, of what made them leave it behind, if they have. There is no case in which people "fall into" graffiti just because the conditions welcome it. Graffiti remains officially illegal in Berlin, and the city itself, along with other agencies like the subway and commuter rail, spends millions of euros a year on removing graffiti and prosecuting sprayers (e.g., "Beseitigung von Graffiti," 2018). For a time, the Berliner Polizei even had a special anti-graffiti task force, reportedly employing up to two dozen special agents, and in 2005, the founder of the Noffiti initiative hosted a "congress" in Berlin to promote zero-tolerance measures (Staiger, 2005). Sprayers are still subject to fines, arrest, house searches, and even, in the case of extreme repeat offenders, imprisonment. Such is the rate of graffiti prosecution in Germany that a legal subspecialty has emerged: the graffiti lawyer. (Much of the work takes the form of pro bono education on civil rights, statutes of limitations, and the technical ways in which graffiti is considered illegal — and therefore

also the technical loopholes through which it is not.) All of this is to say, there is nothing self-evident or “easy” about taking up graffiti in Berlin.

Still, there are several conditions that have made Berlin a special place for graffiti and street art, and these conditions help to inform the phenomenon as it exists today, as well as the motives and political dispositions of the people I interviewed. In order to make it slightly easier to parse these conditions, I have broken them up into physical, economic, socio-cultural, legal, and technical dimensions. Of course, any such analytic framing is somewhat artificial, as certain factors might fit into multiple categories or at best uncomfortably into any one of them. But I hope nevertheless that it will be useful to pull apart some of the underlying dynamics of the phenomenon in order both to recognize the uniqueness of each interviewee’s experience as well as to better recognize what is particular to Berlin about graffiti in the early 21st Century.

The physical dimension encompasses the material substrate of the city: the urban fabric of streets, buildings, parks and open space, transportation and other infrastructure, insofar as these can be understood as components of the physical urban environment. Just because these components are non-living does not mean they are inert. Without elaborating an extensive actant ontology, I hope to show that Berlin’s particular physical environment has been extremely important for mediating graffiti practice, and to a degree particular components of it can take on outsize meaning or even “agency.” Some readers will want to read in the components’ co-construction of the graffiti world something like an actor network, but I will not engage deeply with that descriptive strategy.

The economic dimension consists primarily of national and global macroeconomic factors that have influenced the industries, employment makeup, and working conditions in Berlin, along with more local dynamics in the political economy that have influenced urban policy

and capacities with respect to regulating space and activities. The socio-cultural dimension is the most multifaceted of these categories and includes traditions of political and artistic expression, traditions of public life, historical significance of features like the Berlin Wall, and transnational cultural flows influencing both subcultures and the mainstream. Certain aspects of the legal dimension came up already. It includes both the expansion of “legal walls” and the changing conceptions of what is criminal behavior when it comes to mark-making in the public realm. Municipal laws along with jurisdictional issues also fall under this heading, as do, importantly, the writers’ own understandings of public versus private property. And finally, I include in the technical dimension the numerous tools and techniques — from the spray can to LEDs to the Internet — that have allowed graffiti writers to expand both the range of paintable surfaces and the audiences for graffiti.

## PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS

Notwithstanding graffiti’s considerable online presence, it remains a form of expression intimately linked to the physical, “real-world” spaces it occurs. Graffiti writers favor a variety of types of spaces (discussed more in Chapters 3, 4 & 5), but these spaces are not chosen randomly. The criterion governing what makes a spot attractive for writing fall more or less along axes of visibility, accessibility, appropriateness of surface, and significance. The first three of these relate above all to the physical characteristics of the site, and Berlin has had plenty of sites that offer a good surface that is accessible and highly visible (or helpfully not visible). (The significance of sites is discussed later in this chapter in the section on the socio-cultural dimension as well as throughout the rest of the book.) The existence of these attractive sites has much to do with Berlin’s urban history.

For many lay historians, and indeed for many living Berliners, the history of contemporary Berlin begins on May 9, 1945, the so-called *Stunde Null* [zero hour], the first morning after the Nazi surrender ending World War II. There are obviously profound political and

historical reasons for this, but we will focus briefly on the material reasons. Over the prior five years, Berlin had been the subject of hundreds of Allied air raids, which, by 1941, were explicitly targeting civilian as well as military areas and infrastructure. When compared to other major cities that were the targets of concerted bombing, Berlin suffered relatively little loss of human life, but by the end of the war nearly half of the population had fled the city due to destruction and fighting (Richie, 1998). Individual raids of a single afternoon would leave 80,000 or 100,000 people without housing. Then, during the Battle of Berlin, street fighting and close-range Red Army artillery resulted in substantial additional damage. The scale of the physical devastation inflicted is difficult to overstate. According to one reckoning, 16km<sup>2</sup> of the city was simply leveled [Figure 2.1]. It is said that for every resident there was 30m<sup>3</sup> of rubble. Berlin may be a rather flat city, but it is still saying something that the highest point within city limits is a *Trümmerberg*, a man-made hill of rubble cleared after the war.

The impact on the urban form is readily visible by comparing the figure-ground diagram of the central city from before the war with that from shortly after the war, when only some rebuilding had taken place. The pre-war city was typical of European cities that grew under the influence of Beaux Arts and post-Haussmann design in the late 19th Century: closed, mostly straight street walls of 5- or 6-story courtyard apartment buildings, tenements, or commercial buildings punctuated by the occasional church or a square where radial boulevards meet [Figure 2.2]. This rather dense grid was transformed into a sponge by the end of the war. Some blocks were completely destroyed, a few completely spared, most partially perforated [Figure 2.3]. Rebuilding proceeded piecemeal, with many individual lots left empty while neighboring buildings were restored, resulting in ubiquitous “missing teeth” in the street wall. The walls of the restored buildings were exterior but anticipated another structure immediately abutting them, meaning that they needed to be firewalls [*Brandwände*] of sheer concrete or masonry. These *Brandwände* — smooth; readily





Figure 2.1 Berlin in 1945. Photo by Arthur Bondar.

accessible, thanks to the adjacent empty lot; and relatively visible to pedestrians passing on the sidewalks of walkable residential areas — proved to be incredibly attractive surfaces for graffiti in the post-war and especially post-Wall periods.

Street fighting during the final days of the war was especially destructive to corner buildings (the corner being a strategic location for snipers and therefore an important target for artillery and return fire). An empty lot at a corner thus will have two firewalls



that both face the intersection. These sites are even more valuable to muralists and graffiti writers. A number of these corner lots have been transformed into playgrounds or pocket parks like the one stylized in the children's book, thus preserving the public canvas of the firewalls [see Figure 2.21].

The relationship between the *Brandwände* and their associated empty lots, or *Brachen*, was touched on above, but it is worth mentioning a few things about the *Brachen* themselves here. *Brache* is used to refer to empty, disused, or forgotten land in a variety of contexts, but is most familiar in reference to the abandoned and seemingly neglected lots that feature in cities of uneven development. The English equivalent that comes first to mind, especially when picturing the bombed-out or post-industrial *Brachen* of Berlin is “wasteland”. But *Brache* is also the technical term used in agriculture for “fallow”, or temporarily and strategically uncultivated land. Thus when Berliners speak about *Brachen*, there is a connotation that these plots are not a lost “wasteland” but rather space that is merely for the time being not being actively cultivated and maximally exploited. In other words, the linguistic — and, I believe, cultural — suggestion is that in *Brachen* lies potential.

The fact that so much land in the city remained unbuilt after its wartime destruction is a testament to the scale of the destruction, but also to Berlin's fractured political and economic condition during the divided era. It may be more helpful to think of Berlin between 1961 and 1989 (the period of the The Berlin Wall) not as two cities but a two half-cities, neither of which was entirely self-sustaining. As such, reconstruction in each half was driven at least as much by ideology and geopolitics as by local social needs and capacities. Investment from the Federal Republic of Germany (and Western allies) propped up the economy of West Berlin and directed reconstruction toward showpieces of capitalist prosperity, notably the high-rises and shopping promenades around Bahnhof Zoo, Breitscheidplatz, and Kurfürstendamm in the Charlottenburg neighborhood; the



Figure 2.2 Berlin in 1940. Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Berlin.

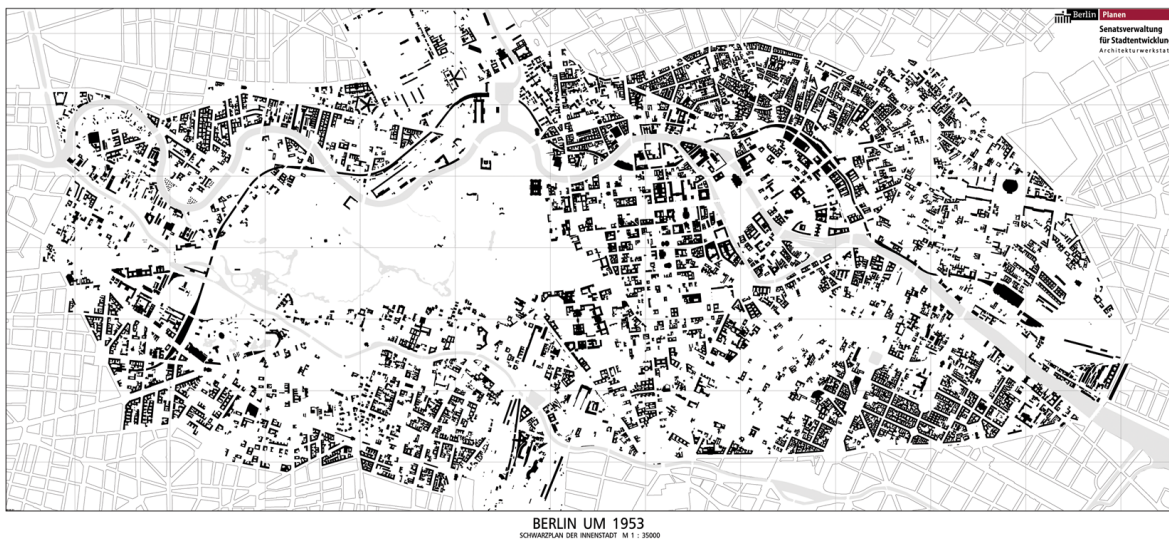


Figure 2.3 Berlin in 1953. Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Berlin.



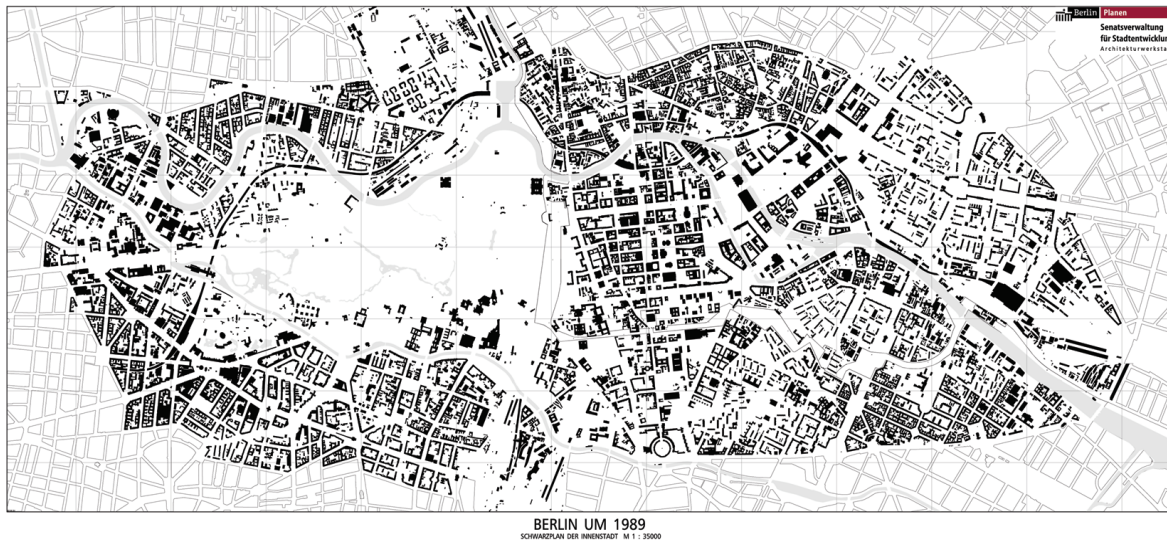


Figure 2.4 Berlin in 1989. Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung.

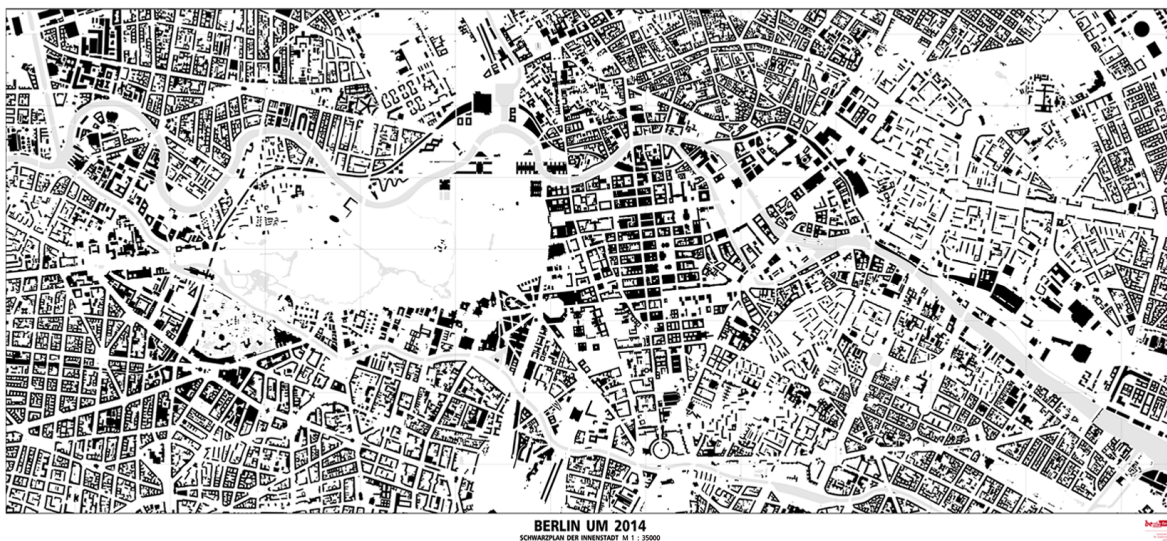


Figure 2.5 Berlin in 2014. Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Berlin.

Messe [Convention Center], with its “Marshall-Haus”; and massive, sprawling, social housing developments like the Märkische Viertel. Investment from the German Democratic Republic (and Soviet backers) propped up the economy of East Berlin and directed reconstruction toward showpieces of Communist power, notably the “worker’s palaces” along “Stalin Allee” (now Karl-Marx-Allee); the brutalist ensemble at Alexanderplatz, with its 100m-tall, Sputnik-esque TV tower; and massive, sprawling social housing projects like Mahrzahn (see Castillo, 2014; Ladd, 2001; Urban, 2009).

When it came to rebuilding everyday structures and neighborhoods, both halves of the city responded to certain modern and modernist trends in urban design, which tended to maintain a relatively porous urban fabric even as they rebuilt. The roster of the “Interbau” [*Internationale Bauausstellung*, or International Building Exhibition] urban renewal exhibition of 1957 reads as a veritable pantheon of 20th-Century architects and designers: Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Egon Eiermann, Walter Gropius, Arne Jacobsen, Oscar Niemeyer, Hans Scharoun, Hugh Stubbins. While this exhibition was focused on the Hansviertel neighborhood at the edge of West Berlin’s major park, the Tiergarten — and indeed resulted in several proverbial “towers in the park” — its influence was felt across the city, even in East Berlin, for decades. The East was ridiculed for its brutalist *Plattenbauten* — prefab apartment towers — though in reality the West also built its share of unadorned, concrete housing blocks.

By the 1980s, however, at least in the West, the enthusiasm for streamlined inner city urban renewal and sprawling suburban housing estates began to wane. The city of West Berlin launched a new *Internationale Bauausstellung*, now commonly referred to as “IBA”, in 1987, which would have twin mandates: to “cautiously” refurbish neglected inner-city housing, like the infamous *Mietskasserne* [rental barracks] of neighborhoods like Kreuzberg, and to undertake a “critical reconstruction” of certain other parts of the city. In contrast to the

slate-wiping of urban renewal, critical reconstruction meant an embrace of the historical street plan, along with historical building scales and typologies. Critical reconstruction reigned in many sectors of the city after reunification as well, with the most iconic example being Norman Foster's glass cupola for the refurbished Reichstag (see James-Chakraborty, 2018; Pugh, 2014; Rave, 2009; Sammartino, 2016; Till, 2005; Toelle, 2010). But critical reconstruction has also had important consequences for less central and visible parts of the city. With the Baroque street plan and the building typologies of the *Grunderzeit* as its guides, critical reconstruction can be credited in part with the increasingly rapid infill [*Nachverdichtung*] of inner city lots in neighborhoods like Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, and Schöneberg (see Levi. Thus the *Brachen*, their firewalls, and the associated graffiti disappear [Figures 2.4 and 2.5].

## ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

There are two large factors, economic in character, that I would like to discuss for their influence on graffiti in Berlin: deindustrialization and municipal finances. The two are of course linked: the economy of city will have tremendous influence on a city's tax base and what the city government is able to do. But I want to hold deindustrialization and municipal finances apart for a moment in order to recognize the differing impacts they have on the emergence of graffiti culture and the graffiti landscape since the fall of the Wall. Deindustrialization is a process not unique to Berlin, but the degree of transformation has been substantial. Pre-WWII Berlin was the largest industrial metropolis of Germany, which was at that time the third-largest economy in the world (Eichengreen & Ritschl 2009). Despite the destruction, after the war East Berlin remained the economic center of the GDR. But especially following reunification, when the government-supported industries of the East were dismantled and the subsidies for labor-intensive businesses in the West were cancelled, Berlin entered a crisis from which it may still not have fully emerged. From



1991 to 2001, over 100,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared, a drop of 58% in that sector (Krätke 2004a). The human toll was considerable — the number of welfare recipients doubled over the same period (Krätke, 2004b) — but the impact on the physical urban fabric of the city was also significant. In particular, the decimation of manufacturing left numerous under-utilized or abandoned buildings and urban spaces (Bernt, Grell & Holm, 2013). Even factories that were rebuilt after the war now began to return to the sort “fallow” state mentioned earlier, and sites that had not been rebuilt would now surely never be.

Around the same time, Berlin also found itself with a glut of office space (thanks in part to overambitious construction in the early 1990s), which brought real estate values down further, but it was the industrial fossils now littering the urban landscape that were more



Figure 2.6 Eisfabrik, Berlin-Kreuzberg. Source: Abandoned Berlin.

important for graffiti and street art. If the “missing teeth” of residential blocks offered attractive firewalls, as described above, abandoned warehouses presented vast, variegated playgrounds with myriad paintable surfaces [Figure 2.6]. Several of the “legal walls” of today, discussed in depth below, are located at former industrial sites like railyards and raw materials depots. Factory structures, meanwhile, tend to be located in the middle of large parcels — surrounded by space for loading, unloading, and maneuvering trucks and trains, for example. The surfaces of those structures were thus simultaneously far enough removed from streets to be painted in relative secrecy and yet, given the lack of surrounding obstructions, highly visible — an ideal combination from the perspective of many graffitiist. Numerous industrial areas had established in the late 19th or early 20th century. After the incorporation of Greater Berlin in 1920, many of these sites were suddenly in the middle of the metropolis.

The most notable post-industrial inner-city area is the so-called *Spreeraum Ost*, the eastern stretch of the Spree River, more or less between Jannowitzbrücke and Elsenbrücke, between the Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg neighborhoods. The Berlin Wall ran along a portion of this stretch of the river, so 1989 brought a reprise of the centralization process of 1920 (i.e., areas that had been on the frontiers of the divided halves of the city were again in the middle of the reunited city). Each side of the river here had been lined with warehouses, light and heavy industry, and energy production and distribution. Some of these uses have persisted until today. But most disappeared over time, leaving a corridor of empty buildings and lots which, in the reunited city, are nevertheless well-connected with the rest of the city and with each other via several bridges. This zone became one of the hotbeds of the legendary “alternative scene” of the 1990s, but in the mid-2000s, in part because of the city budgeting crisis, many of the buildings that had been repurposed as nightclubs were sold off as part of an ambitious urban renewal scheme. That scheme was blocked before full implementation, thanks in large part to a citizen’s movement that



had come to recognize the area as deeply imbued with cultural meaning, far from the comparative tabula rasa imagined by entrepreneurial urban leaders (Novy & Colomb, 2013). As a result, at least temporarily, many of the former industrial sites — and famous graffiti sites — were preserved, and now had an extra layer of social meaning attached to them, as trophies of grassroots activism. Among the most highly charged of these sites in the *Spreeraum* is the Cuvrybrache, which I have written about in detail elsewhere (Carver, 2018).

Those entrepreneurial urban leaders cannot simply, or at least not exclusively, be caricatured as examples of neoliberal management philosophy run rampant; the city was genuinely broke and needed money. This is the second economic factor influencing graffiti in Berlin. Municipal finances have impacted Berlin's growth as well as its ability to provide certain services and expend extra effort to enforce things like petty crime and vandalism. Berlin has been called a "metropolis of poverty," an admittedly inflammatory epithet that nevertheless captures the reality that it is the state with the highest unemployment in Germany and the only European capital city with a per capita GDP lower than its overall country's (Bernt, Grell & Holm, 2013, p. 15). The reasons for this are numerous and include the historical legacy of World War II and the divided era, structural issues like deindustrialization, and political mismanagement. But the banking scandal of early 2000s merits particular attention because, as Bernt, Grell & Holm further argue, it "permanently changed the framework of Berlin's urban politics" (p.16). The turn of events themselves — a publicly-owned bank bet, and lost, a massive sum speculating on private real estate transactions — are not central to our discussion here. But the effects, including the state's forced absorption of over 20 Billion Euros in further risk, instigated a transition to "austerity urbanism" well before the global financial crisis of 2008. In an effort to balance its books, the city cut welfare-state services and attempted to privatize land, housing stock, and some utilities. Among other things, austerity over the past decade and a half has meant

deprioritizing things like waste management and open space maintenance (e.g., Straub, 2017). Graffiti removal falls into this category. There is a perception among lay people and members of graffiti writing community alike that even if the city decided it wanted to remove graffiti from public spaces, it simply would not have the money (e.g., Kroening, 2017).

## SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

In the first chapter, I discussed at length, albeit with some abstraction, the ways in which graffiti must be understood as a practice that is simultaneously cultural, social, and spatial. It is almost tautological to say that any such practice therefore does not happen in a social and cultural vacuum. More than that, however, we can say that social and cultural practices both respond to and co-create the conditions from which they emerge and in which they flourish. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explore these dynamics as the play out in graffiti, in the lives of my interview subjects, and in the city throughout the period of my research (1990-2017). But there are some social and cultural factors beyond graffiti, beyond Berlin, and beyond that historic window, which are nevertheless worth brief recognition for the ways in which they have contributed to the fecundity of Berlin as a place for graffiti writing.

Berlin may be an exceptional city in many ways, but it is also still a European city. As such, it has tended to be a place where the public realm is important. I mean this in many senses of the term [see Chapter 1]. As far back as the Athenian agora, there has existed a tradition in Europe — punctuated, at times tenuous, continually disputed, and never entirely taken for granted — of public life. In the archetypal agora, citizens would meet in public space for all manner of exchange (commercial, political, cultural) and all manner of formal or informal rituals (trials, performances, holidays, shopping) (Lang & Camp, 1994). Even in the middle ages, not generally thought of as an era of political flourishing, the village green and the commons were ubiquitous features which indicate a degree of importance

accorded to publicness and the collective. By the Renaissance, rediscovered classical design principles resulted in magnificent plazas, which were the sites of markets, fairs, and rituals of church or state. During the long 19th century, semi-public venues, notably Parisian and Viennese coffee shops, emerged as important sites for gossip or planning a revolution. The streets themselves, always the basic substrate of urban life, also saw a golden age, when innovations like pavement, sidewalks, and the trolley made moving through and being in public space much more inviting. Urban space has been called the “*mise-en -cène*” of the revolutionary century that unfolded between the 1890s and 1970s (Jerram, 2011).

That the kind of contact and open exchange of ideas that occurs in such public spaces necessarily leads to more justice or democracy or progress is by no means given — as any number of examples, most poignantly from the 20th Century, would illustrate (again, see Chapter 1). I have specifically avoided invoking that most loaded of terms, “European values,” for exactly this reason: the central role of the public realm does not correspond to any given set of values or ideologies. Royalists, rebels, communists, fascists, democrats, unionists, union busters, nativists, pro-immigrant sympathizers and activists of any other stripes have used the streets, squares, and beer halls to shape and advance their causes. But the point here is that there is a tradition in Continental Europe, perhaps spanning millennia, of public life. To risk putting it too blithely, socially important things happen in the streets.

Even within this tradition, Berlin carries a reputation as being a place with a population that is particularly politically engaged. That reputation was burnished during the Cold War, but it dates back at least to the early 20th Century. “Red Berlin” was hotbed for political organization and demonstration, especially by leftist groups. *Rote Fahne* [Red Flag], the organ of the German Communist Party, was published there, and Spartacist Uprising of 1919 began there. Throughout the unstable interwar period, Berlin served as one of the

important settings for frequent demonstrations and conflicts involving parties, right up until 1933 when, following the Nazi seizure of power, opposition groups were banned outright (Richie, 1998).

Divided Berlin was territory politicized from above, but was also home to a populace — or two populations — that were far from passive. East Berlin was the capital of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) and therefore home to thousands of politicians and bureaucrats devoted, albeit to varying degrees, to the success of the communist experiment (Judt, 2005). On the other hand, the many thousands of non-communist East Berliners who were unable or unwilling to leave their homes as the Iron Curtain was crumbling, formed a core opposition. Not only did they not subscribe to the regime's ideologies, they felt themselves unjustly imprisoned (Major, 2010). People born after 1961, despite being socialized into the conditions of the DDR, were still critical to the movement for democracy, which in Berlin culminated with the half-a-million-strong demonstration at Alexanderplatz on the 4th of November, 1989, and the fall of the Wall a few days later (Schmidt, 1989).

And while in West Berlin movement was technically more free, after episodes like the Soviet blockade of 1948-9, this freedom could not be taken for granted. West Berliners were not really on the frontlines of the Cold War; they were in a sense deep into enemy territory, surrounded as West Berlin was by the rest of East Germany. Given this pervading sense of unease, as well as the fact that the capital of the new Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was in Bonn, as well as the fact that many industrial players chose not to rebuild in Berlin after the war, West Berlin was not a population magnet. In fact, it steadily lost population throughout the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and most of the 1980s. (Berlin has been growing in recent years, but even after a spike in population in the first few euphoric years after reunification, it again proceeded to lose population throughout late 1990s and early 2000s. Berlin today has about 3.7 million inhabitants, nearly a million fewer than at the start of World

War II. [Amt für Statistik, 2019b]) In order to attempt to retain people in West Berlin, the FRG instituted a number of incentives, including various social supports; a guest worker program, which attracted primarily Turkish laborers; and, perhaps most notably, a waiver of mandatory military service. From 1956 until 2011, the modern West German *Wehrpflicht* [military duty] law required 18-year-old men to perform around 12 months of *Grundwehrdienst* [basic military service]; those who were unable or unwilling to undergo military training and service were required to perform a longer *Zivildienst* [civil service]. But in Berlin, still technically occupied by foreign powers, this law was not in effect (Jeschonnek, Riedel & Durie 2007). The perception — sometimes actively promoted by West German politicians — was that simply living in West Berlin was its own form of duty-to-country. Consequently, significant proportions of the people who actually did choose to move to West Berlin during the divided period were young conscientious objectors of varying degrees of political engagement (see Richie, 1998; Braun, 2015).

Not all people who want to avoid military service are pacifist activists, of course, and Berlin attracted a broad spectrum of non-conformists. Even to this day, to be a *Wahlberliner* [Berliner by choice], is to be recognized as a self-conscious participant in a community that is willing to endure certain inconveniences in the name of a more flexible or open lifestyle. Berlin has earned many epithets throughout its history, but the one most relevant to this discussion may be “City of Exiles” (Braun, 2015). People who were misfits in other parts of West Germany or other parts of the world found themselves in like company in West Berlin, or at least in a place that was large enough and diverse enough for them to blend into the crowd of misfits (see also Chapters 4 and 5). The result was, and to a degree still is, a place where distinction and self-expression are simultaneously cultivated in myriad subcultures (Bourdieu, 1984) and nonchalantly accepted or simply ignored in the city overall (Simmel, 2010 [1903]). Testimonies like that of one electronic music producer — “You can walk down the street dressed as a leopard or mermaid and not get stared at - I’ve done both”

(Naylor, 2008) — are almost cliché in Berlin. And yet it is no coincidence that Berlin that has been the home for any number of alternative artistic movements. To take only one example, several musicians who are considered godfathers of punk and New Wave — Lou Reed, David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and Nick Cave — all lived in Berlin during formative periods in the 70s and 80s. It is also telling that, despite their extreme success and influence, despite spawning multiple new genres, these musicians all remain somewhat unclassifiable (see, e.g., Welberry & Dalziell, 2009).

The point I am making by sketching some of Berlin's social and cultural context is that at the time my interest in the city begins, the early 1990s, Berlin was a place with a tradition of public life, a politically engaged population, and large number of creative and expressive individuals. These factors combine, I argue, to make a milieu in which graffiti writers and urban artists might feel inspired or enabled. In this milieu, graffiti writing and urban art could be particularly important and viable forms of public expression and communication. And this milieu also happened to include an enormous, incredibly public, and highly symbolic potential canvas: the Berlin Wall.

Both during its period of use, which began in 1961, and since its breach in 1989 and near total removal quickly thereafter, the Berlin Wall has held a mythical status for outside observers and students of history. And there is no question that for Berliners themselves the Wall was also laden with meaning. It served as a symbol of the cruelty of totalitarianism, as some kind of collective stigmata for World War II and the Holocaust, as a concrete emblem of Germany's inability to reconcile past and future, and probably for as many political and psychological metaphors as there were people who lived in its shadow. But it was for Berliners also an everyday physical reality, a feature of the urban environment that had to be negotiated each time you went out the door. For all its world-historical associations, "The Wall," in other words, was still an actual wall. Or rather two



walls. Or two walls and the gaping, militarized *Todesstreifen* [death strip] between them. Or an ever-evolving series of walls. Or rather, in the words of a *Tagesspiegel* journalist, “*ein in die Tiefe gestaffeltes, die westliche Stadthälfte auf 155 Kilometern umgebendes Grenzsystem, das sich den Eingeschlossenen nur überwiegend, aber nicht überall als Mauer im eigentlichen Sinne präsentierte*” [“a 155km-long, deeply staggered border system circling the western half of the city, which presented itself to those locked within predominantly, but not everywhere, as a wall in the strict sense”]. In terms of the everyday experience of Berliners in the center city, however, it was encountered as a 3.6m-high, shear concrete blockade which created a “*beklemmende Atmosphäre*” [oppressive atmosphere] in its immediate surroundings (Conrad, 2009).

The entire Wall was built, owned, and maintained by the East German government, and as far as it was concerned, the Wall was infrastructure critical to national security. Therefore it was heavily guarded, especially within the *Todesstreifen* and on the eastern side. While there was an active graffiti writing culture in East Berlin, this primarily took the form of sloganeering on other surfaces; to have tampered with the Wall itself would have been a grave offense, possibly life-endangering. So it was only the West Berlin side of the Wall that was accessible as a canvas for, and target of, graffiti writing and mural art.

There had been graffiti on the Wall in the 60s and 70s, but only sporadic, hastily written, monochromatic slogans [Figure 2.7]. Early versions of the wall had been built with cinders blocks or other materials which were too uneven and rough to provide an attractive painting or writing surface [Figure 2.8]. It was only after the completion, in the late 1970s, of what would be the final iteration of the Wall, the “*Grenzmauer 75*” [Border Wall 75, after the year it was first introduced], that Wall painting and writing blossomed. Unlike the former Walls, *Grenzmauer 75* was composed of new “retaining wall elements” [Stützwandelement UL 12.11], 3.6m high by 1.2m wide, of smooth concrete. As if in



Figure 2.7 Berlin Wall at Waldemarstrasse, 1973. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.

reference to the capital of a classical column, the elements were crowned with a pipe, which supposedly functioned to stabilize the Wall against forces breaking through westwards (Neef, 2007). While spray paint can be used on many surfaces, these elements could easily be painted or written on with a variety of tools in a variety of media. (The role of spray cans and other tools is discussed later in the chapter in the section on Technological Dimensions.) Because of their size and uniform surface, whatever was written on them would be also highly visible and (depending on the skill and intent of the writer) highly legible. After Grenzmauer 75, graffiti proliferated [Figure 2.9]. Even areas of the Wall that did not have the colorful, figurative pieces that would become associated with the Wall became photo-ops for visitors [Figure 2.10]. Already here, graffiti both reacts to and fundamentally alters social space. If I have spent a few extra moments here exploring how material specificities relate to where and how graffiti was written during the Wall era, it is



Figure 2.8 Berlin Wall at Luisenstrasse. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.

because these relationships will remain important throughout the discussion of graffiti in the post-Wall era and up to today.

Still, painting it was not legal, nor universally accepted by the local West Berliners. The most famous Berlin Wall artist, the French transplant Thierry Noir, described the risk: *“Mit einem Auge mußte man malen, mit dem anderen ständig aufpassen. Einmal, z.B., im Mai 1984, sprangen vier maschinengewehrbewaffnete VoPos über die Mauer, um uns anzufassen*





Figure 2.9 Berlin Wall Mitte (Ost), 1986. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.



Figure 2.10 Berlin Wall at Ebertstrasse, 1989. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.

[You painted with one eye and with the other you had be constantly on the lookout. Once, for example, in May 1984, four machine-gun-toting East German police jumped over the Wall to grab us]" (van Treeck, 1999, p. 128). Noir described how initially neighbors would sometimes whitewash his paintings, requiring him to come back repeatedly to restore them.

And yet Noir's images became famous. His brightly colored, elongated, minimalist, humanoid heads are almost exactly what would come to mind if you imagined Easter Island moai with huge lips and buck teeth as rendered by Keith Haring [Figure 2.11]. They were instantly iconic, and they can still be found decorating postcards and other Berlin kitsch. Either because of the persistence of artists like Noir, the popularity of such paintings, the decreased willingness of the East Berliner Volkspolizei to police the West side, or increased rejection of the Wall's exalted status, from the mid-1980s, the Wall was covered with paint [Figure 2.12]. People from around the world, from established muralists to soi-disant street artists, came to participate in this giant, collective art project. (Haring himself also painted the Wall.) But the vast majority of painting and writing on the Wall was done by anonymous locals and visitors. The content of Wall graffiti varied widely, and the cartoonish quality of Noir's characters (and those of numerous artists he inspired) tends to overshadow the more amateur, less aesthetically refined, more overtly political art — not to mention the tremendous amount of text-based graffiti and written messages — in public memory.

It is easy to let Noir's figures stand for all Berlin Wall graffiti because of their convenient symbolism. Vivid totems in shades of crimson, canary, and plum, they were to a certain degree literally, and to a huge degree metaphorically, the one strip of color in an otherwise bleak, grey landscape. Their color neatly corresponded the idea that the Wall-as-canvas was an outlet for freedom of expression in a climate of oppressive ideologies, a fissure leaking





Figure 2.11 Thierry Noir pieces recreated at the East Side Gallery, 2001. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.



Figure 2.12 Berlin Wall at Lohmühlenstrasse, 1986. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.



warmth and light in the middle of the cold, Cold War. To take one representative cultural example, the painted Wall plays a pivotal symbolic role in Wim Wender's 1987 film *Die Himmel über Berlin* [Wings of Desire]. Shot mostly in black and white, the film follows a pair of angels as they in turn observe the lives of mortals in the city. When one of the angels decides to rejoin the mortals, the scene of his "rebirth" is the first scene shot in color. And the first frames of that scene show the former angel waking up at the foot of the Wall in front of a row of Noir's colorful figures. (Noir was engaged to paint in the exact spot where Wenders wanted to shoot the scene.) As if to reinforce the point that the Wall represents color, and that color represents mortal life in all its multisensory viscosity, as the angel wakes up, he notices red blood on his hand and, out of curiosity, licks it. Bruno Ganz, the actor playing the angel, says nothing but manages to convey in his facial expressions something like a simultaneous discovery and loss of innocence, a discovery at once gustatory and visual.

But as mentioned above, colorful figurative work like Noir's was only a portion of what was written on the Wall, and if it overshadows graffiti writing, that does not mean the latter went unnoticed at the time or has been forgotten since. It is outside the scope of this introductory gloss to give a comprehensive summary of the kinds of things that were written on the Wall, much less their impact, both in public memory and in scholarship. Suffice it to say that both locals and visitors, writing in German, English, Russian, French, and numerous other languages, left messages on topics as diverse as romance, philosophy, local politics, walls and borders, geopolitics, city planning, football, and the weather [Figures 2.13 and 2.14] (Kuzdas, 1999). Berlin Wall graffiti has been analyzed, among other things, for its visual iconography, its semantic and linguistic content, its marketability, and, perhaps most unexpectedly, its sense of humor (e.g., Drechsel, 2010; Stein, 1989). Given the stark political divisions that the Wall represented, it is not surprising that a tremendous amount of political graffiti appeared on and was targeted at the Wall. But the fascinating



Figure 2.13 Berlin Wall, Tiergarten, 1986. Photo by Edward G. Murray.



Figure 2.14 Berlin Wall, Friedrich Ebert Platz, 1983. Source: Stiftung Berliner Mauer.

nature of political writing on the Wall was that, in its content, it was by no means limited to (largely anti-communist) geopolitics and the tragedy of a divided city. If anything, that particular sort of political expression — more or less in accord with prevailing political ideologies in the West — seems to have been tacitly sanctioned and to thus have given social license to political expression across a much broader array of topics. Common themes were as diverse as environmental affairs, university policies, and militarization.

While the portion of the Wall preserved and turned into the museum known as the “East Side Gallery” would later be famous for professional murals, most with political messages, the vast bulk of the Wall painting prior to 1989 was done by lay people (Stahl, 2009; Burkhardt, 1997–2006). (The East Side Gallery will be discussed in greater depth below.) Again, avoiding protracted exegesis of the content, the extent and intensity of this form of expression are important here for additional reasons. First, it can reasonably be seen that the politically engaged population in Berlin and the presence of the Wall resulted, by the late 1980s, in a self-reinforcing cycle of public political expression in the form of graffiti. Second, it is a very visible indicator of the degree to which lay people took part in mobilizing at the Wall, a mobilization that would be immortalized in images from the evening of November 9, 1989, when the Wall was opened following months of peaceful demonstrations. It is tempting to conflate the graffiti with the demonstrations, to believe, in a sense, that the graffiti helped bring down the Wall. And because the Wall fell peacefully, because of those indelible images of jubilation at the Wall as people climbed over it and rushed through it, the Wall has, paradoxically, managed to hold a certain nostalgic place in popular memory.

It is difficult to overstate the legacy of the Wall, especially the painted Wall, in the memories of Berliners — and in the marketing of Berlin as a tourist destination. The Wall and events that occurred at it are memorialized countless times throughout the city, numerous



companies offer Berlin Wall tours, and the East Side Gallery is among the most popular stops on the tourist circuit (Baker, 1993; Ladd, 1998). For years following reunification, it was common to find street vendors selling hunks of concrete supposedly broken off the Wall (Dolf-Bonekämper, 2002). Even today, a visitor wanting a souvenir slightly more *echt* than a made-in-China Brandenburg Gate snowglobe can buy a tiny magnet that appears to be made out of a piece of the Berlin Wall. The magnet is a rough, grey nugget with one smooth, brightly painted face [Figure 2.15]. Note that these souvenirs do not even need to be labeled “Berlin Wall”. It is understood that they are, or represent, a piece of the Wall. Many are simply labeled “Berlin”. Such souvenirs may do many things for those who purchase them, but we do not need to engage in theories of the fetish or the commodity,



Figure 2.15 Berlin Wall souvenir magnet.

or to elevate Wall nuggets into something like Proustian madeleines in order to recognize the important, and essentially rhetorical, move taking place here: in a deft bit of concrete synecdoche, the painted Wall comes to be more than just a famous landmark of the city; it is the city. The paradox embodied in these souvenir Wall fragments, and in many memories of the Wall in general, is that so much of their *positive* valence comes from the fact that the Wall was *dismantled* (Ivanova, 2013). In this sense, it is important not just that one face is colorfully painted but that the others are crudely chipped. These are not just souvenirs of the painted Wall but of the painted Wall as torn down with hand tools wielded passionately by a people reclaiming its freedom. Or so the implication may be.

The importance of the Berlin Wall for publicizing and legitimating graffiti writing and unsanctioned street art may be impossible to measure, but it is equally impossible to ignore. While there had been relatively robust mural traditions in both the East and West, the murals were formal and tended to be decorative. And, since they were located high up on facades and fire walls, they were literally out-of-reach from, and figuratively out-of-touch with, everyday Berliners. The Wall, by contrast, was oriented toward pedestrians. Already during the divided era, the painted Wall was a popular backdrop for tourist photos — and not just at the spots that were painted with more formality and conscious aesthetic. As mentioned above, now, during the post-Wall era, the East Side Gallery has been incredibly popular. The East Side Gallery may be completely “inauthentic,” insofar as it is a mural-oriented museum (the only graffiti writing has been added later), anachronistic (all the pieces were created after 1990 and have been periodically refurbished), geographically inaccurate (the murals are on the DDR side of a preserved stretch of Wall, the side which would not have been painted prior to 1989), and generally not aligned with the spirit of pre-unification Wall painting (professional artists are commissioned to paint their murals on fixed pieces of the Wall, in contrast to the spontaneous, non-professional, informal Wall painting that characterized the 1980s) (Dolf-Bonekämper, 2002; Feversham &

Schmidt, 1999). It is also roundly ridiculed by some preservationists, historians, critical urbanists, and artists and graffiti writers themselves (e.g., Ladd, 1998; Till, 2005; Tölle, 2010). And yet many people, even critics from the graffiti writing community I spoke with, acknowledge that the Wall — as preserved at the East Side Gallery — is very “important” in the Berlin graffiti scene. Many of the people I spoke with were not even alive when the Wall fell, and most others were only very young and therefore would have had no personal experience painting the Wall, and yet they mentioned the Wall as an important site. Nearly 30 years after it ceased to cast actual shadows, graffiti writers and street artists are still, in a sense, painting under the cultural penumbra of the Berlin Wall.

If the Wall is the most important socio-cultural factor characterizing the graffiti-friendly atmosphere in Berlin, another factor must rank a close second: the rise of “hip-hop” graffiti, and of hip-hop culture overall. A new and distinctive form of graffiti arose in the late 1960s and 1970s in cities of the Eastern United States, especially Philadelphia and New York City, and had become exceptionally wide-spread by the 1980s (Wacławek, 2011). This new form is sometimes also called style writing, bombing, or wildstyle, but by any name it is the variety that probably comes to mind at the mention of “graffiti” today: colorful iterations of an alias or “crew” name, rendered in aerosol or permanent marker in highly visible public space, with the letters expressively distorted to the limits of legibility (or beyond). Arcane but ostentatious, impetuous, born of the rubble of the neglected inner city, this form of art — or protest, or speech, or territorialization — was the perfect visual analog to hip-hop music, which emerged in roughly the same place at the same time. (Purists often cite Afrika Bambaataa’s declaration of “four pillars” of hip-hop culture: rapping, i.e., crafting percussive verbal rhymes; DJing, i.e., creating musical beats, usually by sampling other music; breakdancing; and graffiti [Rose, 2008].) There are numerous related types of graffiti name writing, and cognoscenti claim to be able to identify myriad national, regional, and even neighborhood styles (e.g., Cooper & Chalfant, 1984; Wacławek, 2011). But in general,



American hip-hop graffiti, disseminated through films such as *Wild Style* (1983), *Style Wars* (1983), and *Beat Street* (1984), became a global phenomenon.

The global graffiti phenomenon influenced practices in Germany, and Berlin in particular, considerably. I give much more attention to how this influence, in its social and spatial specificity, unfolded over the 1990s and 2000s in the next chapter (Chapter 3). But I would like to digress briefly here in order to suggest some of the general cultural preconditions that made Berlin open to American hip-hop culture and its subgenres.

At the risk of being coy, Germans have a complex relationship with American cultural hegemony. To begin with, on the one hand, Germany is famously the land of *Dichter und Denker* [poets and thinkers], not to mention novelists, composers, film makers, and fine artists. Germans have some right to be proud of their cultural heritage. That figures like Dürer, Kant, Goethe, Wagner, or Nietzsche have had a tremendous impact on Western culture is seldom disputed; the last movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony ("Ode to Joy") serves as the anthem of the European Union. Yet on the other hand, this cultural heritage is one of the things fascists leveraged in their arguments for racial superiority, *Lebensraum*, and murderous nationalism in the early 20th century (Herb, 2002). The history of post-war German culture has been one of renegotiation and reevaluation. Goethe helped Northern Europe rediscover classical ideals — but he can hardly be held responsible for racial purity propaganda like Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* or the imperial grandiosity of the plans for "*Welthauptstadt Germania*" [World Capital Germania]. Wagner was, perhaps, a proto-Nazi, or at least an anti-Semite — but he can hardly be held responsible for the camps.

Still, it is not at all surprising that Germans became far more circumspect about celebrating certain cultural touchstones of their past, and that they may have been open to adopting other cultural traditions that were free from the taint of the Nazi past. Alexander Stephan

puts it somewhat more bluntly: “after 1945 the country was open to a radical cultural reorganization from the outside.” And the Americans were happy to oblige. “No other country in Europe was blanketed after 1945 with such a network of American cultural institutions (*Amerikahäuser*); nowhere else were there comparable programs from the translation and dissemination of American books and films” (Stephan, 2005, p.5). On top of this, the Marshall Plan injected many billions of dollars into Western European societies, rebuilding them physically as well as politically, in a liberal democratic model (Hogan, 1987). (Much of my research for this project was funded by exactly such a program for intellectual exchange, The Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies, hosted at Freie Universität [Free University], which itself is an institution of higher education explicitly modeled on the American university.) It is possible that the forces of globalization and modernization would have “Americanized” West Germany without such pointed intervention. It is possible that the allure of Hollywood and Coca-Cola alone would have sold themselves, so to speak. But soft power was accompanied by hard power: in 1989, around 250,000 US military personnel were based in Germany, with again as many civilian employees and family members (Alvah, 2007; Kane, 2004). One particular Cold War episode served, in Berlin especially, to bind the two forms of power together.

If there was some ambivalence amongst Berliners about the presence of Allied military forces — they had, after all, dropped many tons of bombs on the city throughout the war (see above) — there was decidedly less following the Soviet blockade of 1948-9. For a period of 11 months, Soviet forces blocked all road and rail access into West Berlin. In order to keep the city alive, the Allied forces flew thousands of cargo flights into Tempelhof airport, bringing a total of over 2 million tons of essential supplies to the island city (Miller, 2000). The so-called *Rosinenbomber* [raisin bombers] became icons of goodwill between the West Berliners and their occupying forces. One such bomber is still on display at the Berlin Airlift Memorial at the former Tempelhofer Field, and the plaza in front of the airport

was renamed *Platz der Luftbrücke* [Airlift Square] already in 1949, just weeks after the blockade was lifted (Kauperts, n.d.).

Ambivalence about the US military presence went through several permutations over the subsequent decades. Pacifist Germans, for example, frequently protested against militarization in general, and against Germany's tacit support of US involvement in Vietnam and other conflicts around the world (which of course made for alliances with similarly minded Americans; see Davis, et al., 2013). But on average, especially in Berlin following the Berlin Airlift, attitudes toward Americans were positive (Walsh, 1994).

Ambivalence about the presence of US culture is somewhat more difficult to unravel, perhaps because it runs deeper (Stephan, 2005). Europeans are often accused of cultural elitism. This label is no doubt embraced by some, who would point quickly to the thinkers and artists mentioned above and ask to be shown American equivalents. During my stay in Germany, even in 2017, I was occasionally reminded that North America was originally settled by people who were "not exactly the brightest Europeans." Throughout the Cold War, German elites on both sides of the Wall had reacted with predictable disdain toward each novel import from the capitalist culture industry associated with "America": Mickey Mouse, jazz, Elvis Presley and rock 'n roll in general, James Dean, westerns and American movies in general, Superman, Pop Art, and so on. East Germany's approach to governing culture — a Byzantine matrix of selective promotion, criminalization, and censorship — is impossible to succinctly summarize, but by and large it promoted a version of high culture pegged roughly (and ironically) to the bourgeois European culture of the era spanning the century leading up to 1848. Anything modern or popular — and worst of all, anything abstract — was branded by GDR critics and officials as western cultural imperialism or "boogie-woogie cosmopolitanism" (Hermann Meyer, 1952, quoted in Hermand, 2005, p.

70). And the government was in fact able, to a certain degree, to insulate its people from what it viewed as noxious cultural influences.

There were exceptions, of course, one of which is particularly relevant to this topic. The East German Ministry of Culture would occasionally promote Western media that it thought was adequately critical of Western society, and this included, in 1985, a screening of *Beat Street* that drew over three million viewers (Schmieding, 2012). Since the film depicts a Bronx ravaged by poverty and disinvestment, the Ministry assumed that it would reinforce the government's anti-capitalist propaganda. Some East Germans may have taken that message from the film, but through it many also discovered graffiti and the larger hip-hop culture, to such an extent that the government eventually banned spray paint.

In West Germany, meanwhile, certain forms of modern music and art, such as Abstract Expressionism, were embraced by critics as examples of "Western freedom" (and were covertly promoted as such by the CIA [see Jachec, 2002, and Saunders, 2013]). To the dismay of elites, however, consumer culture operates on the logic of markets, not aesthetics or politics, and in the West "low" culture, abetted by comparatively free markets and advertising, achieved a mass market appeal that was impossible to ignore. Some critics see this all as a battlefield where critics capitulated before the "triumphal march of the capitalist culture industry." As Jost Hermand contends, "The result has been the growth of that aesthetic supermarket that still features a number of non-contradictory subcultures but in which every critical voice of those advocating high culture is rejected immediately as prescriptive or authoritarian" (2005, p. 75). Hermand's hyperbole notwithstanding, there is no doubt that "authoritarian" high culture has yielded considerable ground to "democratic" mass culture, perhaps especially in Germany, for the historical reasons mentioned above. While the US can not be credited (or blamed) solely with this transformation, it was the US that emerged, certainly by the 1960s, as the primary source of cultural imports to West

Germany. The great majority of West Germans were in fact delighted to browse the aisles of the “aesthetic supermarket”; if most of the products available there were American, all the better. It is impossible to say what proportion of Germans who were drawn to American culture saw their choices as “anti-authoritarian,” but even this suggestion is provocative in the discussion of the emergence of graffiti in Berlin.

These questions about the relationship of taste to politics are often caught up in questions of class. The fact that matters of cultural taste are often deeply informed by classist attitudes is well-established (see e.g., Gans, 1999). In the case of trans-Atlantic cultural transfer, however, there can be additional racist overtones to the assessment of cultural output, as with trepidation toward jazz music and its odious labeling as *Negermusik* [negro music] in the interwar period and ultimately “degenerate” art by the Nazis (Berman, 2005). Comparatively enlightened racial understanding has not entirely transformed these attitudes. It can be bewildering for a 21st Century American to walk into a German music store and see a shelf of CDs labeled “Black Music,” in English, a category which in that setting usually comprises hip-hop and R&B, but which would be totally meaningless in the United States. On the other hand, in the post-war period, there has been a surprising amount of writing, from scholarship to propaganda, rehabilitating jazz as an “intellectual” music, and explaining the ways in which jazz can be considered European.<sup>1</sup> Today, jazz — once understood solely as a black, American, urban, sweaty, iconoclastic, popular music — has a comfortable place in the top echelon of European taste (Poiger, 2000). Most major conservatories offer instruction in jazz, and most major cities have jazz festivals and are regular stops on the international touring circuit. During my stay in 2016, two of the biggest names in jazz, Joshua Redman and Brad Mehldau, played together as part of the

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1 “Jazz” and “European music” have a history. The saxophone was invented by Adolph Sax, a Belgian, for example. From the 1940s through the 1960s, numerous African-American musicians sought refuge from Jim Crow in comparatively color-blind capitals like Copenhagen and Paris. And recent musicological research has made even more provocative assertions, including that the rhythmic pulse known as “swing” is actually derived from *notes inégales* [unequal notes], common in 17th and 18th Century French Baroque music. The argument goes that the French who colonized the Mississippi Delta brought with them a performance practice which was picked up with minimal variation by the progenitors of jazz in New Orleans (Sublette, 2008).



week-long Jazzfest Berlin on the main stage at the Haus der Berlinerfestspiele. Though the tickets were over 50 Euros, they sold out within hours.

If I have dwelled for a moment here on musical examples of the complexities around reception of American culture, it is to bring the discussion back to the original point of departure: hip-hop music as an American cultural import that paved the way for graffiti culture. As mentioned above, the dominant form of graffiti today is closely associated with hip-hop music, for both historical-geographic and aesthetic reasons. Note that I am not arguing *prima facie* that because hip-hop became popular in Germany, so did wildstyle graffiti. As outlined extensively elsewhere in this chapter, I believe there are numerous other factors that contributed to graffiti's widespread pullulation in Berlin. But the grouping of these art forms under a single subcultural umbrella is commonplace among cultural historians and practitioners (e.g., Elflein, 1998; Halsey & Young, 2002; Joetze, 2015; Krekow & Steiner, 2002; Paulus & Wackenberg, 2016).

Hip-hop music first took hold among immigrant groups in West Germany (Bennett, 1999; Cheeseman, 1998; Elflein, 1998), and graffiti appears to have been no different. The first generation of graffiti writers in West Berlin includes the likes of POET and AMIR, both of whom have "migration backgrounds" (Paulus & Wackenberg, 2016). (The notorious 36 Boys, a Turkish-German gang active in the late 80s in Kreuzberg, was also known to leave its tag around the neighborhood.) But, also like hip-hop music, style writing was soon popular amongst ethnic Germans (Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2003). In general, and certainly in Germany, hip-hop culture has been an important vector for the formation of the kinds of identities, sometimes labelled "transnational," "translocal," "cosmopolitan," or "rhizomatic," that draw on a variety of geographically dispersed cultural traditions (e.g., Bennett, 1999; Kaya, 2007). The nature of these identities and their cultivation is one of the subjects taken up in Chapters 4 and 5, but the point here is to emphasize the relationship

between the rise of graffiti and the spread of hip-hop music. This link is directly embodied in one of the people I interviewed, Akte One, a white, native-born Berliner, who in addition to a 20-year graffiti writing career has recorded albums with titles like “Fat Cap Rap.” Most of his lyrics deal explicitly with graffiti and the life of a graffiti writer. In the lead track to that album, “Ich bin ein Writer” [I am a writer], his rhymes spell out the intertwined nature of his pastime and his place in the world:

*Ich ziehe mein Ding durch wie ein einsamer Rebel,  
mit der Dose in der Hand gehe ich allein in die Welt.  
Sie haben keinerlei Chancen, nein, sie können mich nicht stoppen,  
Ich bin ein Writer, meine Wille bleibt ungebrochen.*

...  
*Ich bin ein Writer, und ich bin stolz darauf.  
Ich bin kein Sprüher, kein Künstler — ich bin ein Writer!*

[I see my thing through like a lonely rebel,  
With the can in my hand, I walk alone in the world.  
They’ve got no chance, no, they can’t stop me,  
I am a writer, my will remains unbroken.

...  
I am a writer, and I’m proud of it.  
I’m not a sprayer, not an artist — I am a writer!]

There are a few important things to note here in the way Akte bundles graffiti and hip-hop: first, the adherence to the metrical and rhyming conventions of hip-hop verse; second, the invocation of the tool, the can, as a primary attribute (which will be discussed more below); and third, the emphatic insistence on his identity as a writer, using the English term — as in someone who writes graffiti — as opposed to a simple “sprayer” and definitely not an “artist.”

And yet there is one final cultural factor contributing to the increased acceptance of graffiti in Berlin which I need to mention: the rise of street art. I opened this chapter with an anecdote about a Basquiat painting which sold at auction for over \$100 Million. Whatever commentary or debate that event might invite — along aesthetic, social, or moral

dimensions — it at least serves to illustrate something about the ascendance of street art as a socially recognized practice. What I do over the next few paragraphs is argue that the rise of street art — culminating, perhaps in the Basquiat sale — has been important for the continued presence of graffiti and its simultaneously increasing acceptance in Berlin and worldwide.

Whether the Basquiat piece should be called street art, graffiti, or something else entirely is somewhat beside the point, given that much of Basquiat's work is considered to come "from the street," thanks partly to his obvious employment of graffiti techniques and partly to his image as a former illegal graffiti writer. And yet, while also acknowledging that there are no clear semantic lines circumscribing various mark-making practices in public space, and that the referents for these terms are in flux, some general distinctions can be made between graffiti and street art. First, street art tends to be thought of as figurative, while graffiti is text-based. Additionally, the term "graffiti" has often been used to refer to anything done free-hand with spray paint. "Street art" on the other hand has often been used for pieces made using techniques like wheatpaste or stencil and materials including everything from paper to tape to bathroom tile to yarn (Bofkin, 2014; Wacławek, A. (2011).

More importantly for the present discussion, "graffiti" holds any number of negative associations, thanks to its widespread framing, by police and public officials, as a "broken windows" crime, supposedly leading to all kinds of more dramatic crime in a given neighborhood (Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012; Iveson, 2010; McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011; Shobe & Banis, 2014; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Media reports paint graffiti writers as deviant youth, as drug users or delinquents; not infrequently they are compared to dogs marking territory by urinating everywhere (Dovey, Pafka & Ristic, 2017; Lombard, 2013; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Young, 2005). Graffiti markings are described in terms of vandalism and property damage. In the German press, the relatively formal

term *Sachbeschädigung* [property damage] occurs alongside the slightly more casual but nonetheless dismissive *Schmiererei* [scribbling, “smear-about”] when describing graffiti. As touched on again in Chapters 4 and 5, the illegibility of some graffiti contributes substantially to its frequent negative connotations in the media public opinion.

“Street art,” on the other hand, is usually figurative and easier to interpret. It therefore tends not to trigger the unease and knee-jerk criminalization of comparatively hermetic of graffiti — even if its content is equally aggressive and its execution equally illegal. It aims for a larger audience, and it achieves it. In the media as in public opinion, the first instinct is to treat street art as, well, art (Bofkin, 2014; Wacławek, A. (2011).

From the mid-1990s through the mid-2000s, street art experienced a vogue across the world, especially in Europe. Public art is of course a centuries old practice, and even illicit urban art has long roots (Schacter, 2013). But this modern incarnation of street art is often linked to founding figures like Blek le Rat, a French stencil artist active beginning in the 1980s; Shepard Fairey, the American poster artist known for his Andre the Giant “OBEY” poster, and subsequently his “HOPE” poster associated with Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign; and, above all, the British multimedia artist Banksy. The content of the works tends to be politically edgy and instantly comprehensible. These artists tended to be most active in major world cities like London, Paris, New York, or Los Angeles, where their pieces would be seen not only by locals but also by many tourists, who would subsequently share photos of them. The rise of cheap airlines helped artists travel to other major cities, and soon numerous urban centers, each of which had also had a local graffiti writing tradition, were linked in a global network street art destinations: Melbourne, Lisbon, Barcelona, Moscow, Valparaíso, São Paulo, Mexico City, Cape Town, and so on. Meanwhile, the rise of the Internet and digital photography made it far easier for artists, tourists, and flâneurs to document and share street art. Photo sharing sites like

Flickr and Instagram have been especially important in the proliferation of visual culture in general, and this holds equally true for street art (MacDowall & de Souza, 2017; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015). Many people who have never been to Berlin can nonetheless claim to have viewed a lot of “Berlin street art.”

But street art is not an Internet-only phenomenon. Street art has propagated through an array of print media, from glossy magazines to coffee table books, and numerous cities and artists have received cinematic treatment. (The next chapter takes a much more in-depth look at the relationship between media and graffiti in Berlin.) If street art has an equivalent to graffiti’s *Style Wars*, the documentary of New York’s subway graffiti scene from 1983, it is Banksy’s 2011 documentary *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. As mentioned above, *Style Wars* is often credited with spreading the idea of subway graffiti around the world; it also won the Grand Prize for Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. Likewise, *Exit Through the Gift Shop* received wide distribution and contributed significantly to the profile of street artists like Shepard Fairey, Invader, and Swoon; it also was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary. But where *Style Wars* was a relatively straightforward account of an admittedly complex subculture, *Exit Through the Gift Shop* is a convoluted, slightly madcap “prankumentary” about the risks and rewards that come with the pursuit of fame in the world of street art (Catsoulis, 2010). The genius of the film — as with much contemporary street art — is to make the audience feel as though it is in on a clever joke. The genius of Banksy is to have made a film in which he is the star but is almost never on screen. True to the erstwhile spirit of “getting up,” the film creates out of Banksy a figure that is at once more present and, paradoxically, even more mythical.

I am not exaggerating here. Banksy’s stature is without parallel. His name is nearly synonymous with street art (and, increasingly, with graffiti, as I will discuss in a moment). He is perhaps to street art what Miles Davis was to jazz or Beethoven to classical music



— simultaneously the art form’s best known practitioner, its chief impresario, wildly successful, and still, somehow, an enfant terrible. He has been accused of “selling out” by allowing his pieces to be auctioned and shown in galleries — and he has himself staged events that are so over-the-top in their commercialism that they can only be understood as a mockery of commercialism. As a figure in the high-art scene, he has brought out extreme behavior: his outdoor works have been sealed under lucite and even sawed off of walls in attempts to preserve or resell them. As a pop culture figure, he has achieved that rare milestone of 21st Century celebrity: he has over 1 million followers on Instagram (5.7M, as of this writing).

Banksy is central to the point I mean to make here about the spread and acceptance of illicit graffiti for a few reasons. The enormous popularity he enjoys helps legitimate transgression. While he often makes what in a strict semantic sense might be considered street art, he frequently calls his own work “graffiti” and is an advocate for “graffiti.” (“People say graffiti is ugly, irresponsible and childish ... but that's only if it's done properly.”) He remains an unapologetic — and exceptionally outspoken — vandal, true to the roots of graffiti as a transgressive act. (“Is graffiti art or vandalism? That word has a lot of negative connotations and it alienates people, so no, I don't like to use the word ‘art’ at all” [Banksy, 2005].) It is not unreasonable to suggest that without Banksy, there would be no \$100 M Basquiat. Most importantly for the present study, many of the people I interviewed mentioned Banksy specifically as an inspiration or as someone whose work they admire (see Chapter 4).

Recent empirical work offers some support to the trends I have been suggesting about the relationship between street art and graffiti. For example, Honig and Macdowall (2016) examined Instagram accounts and posts associated with either “graffiti bombing” or with “street art” over a period of several years in the early 2010s. Unsurprisingly, they find that

the audience for “image-based street art muralism” is an order of magnitude higher than that for graffiti (p.12). And yet, “The audience for graffiti bombing and street art is still growing, but at a rate slower than the rate of interconnection between the two genres” (p.9). In other words, users are more frequently using the term “graffiti” to describe image-based, muralistic pieces. What is more, “Consumers once exclusively interested in street art are expanding their interest to graffiti bombing and vice versa” (p.9). The authors readily acknowledge that the aesthetic and linguistic trends evidenced on Instagram are by no means identical to overall trends in artistic style or word usage. (Instagram posts, “follows,” and reactions are also frequently automated. And, like all social media, the platform is contaminated by fake accounts or “bots,” as well as by “echo chamber” effects. Thus any conclusions made from quantitative data like that used by Honig and Macdowall must be taken with a grain of salt.) And yet their findings ring true to my experience in everyday conversation with people involved in urban art. There are many possible explanations for this “convergence” of street art and graffiti, including diminishing aesthetic distinction between the two forms. But the upshot of the trend toward convergence is that, at least in public opinion, graffiti is not quite as demonized as it once was.

## LEGAL DIMENSIONS

Public opinion may be “the greatest power under heaven,” as George Eliot put it, but it is notoriously mercurial and, at least since Hammurabi, it has had a comparatively ferrous counterpart in law. And there are few countries quite so associated with the rule of law as Germany. Famously (or infamously), Germany is thought to be a place where *Ordnung* is valued above all else. From the Prussian military through the SS and the Stasi, a jackbooted, goose-stepping phalanx has been both caricature of and metonym for all of German society. Contrast this for a moment with such archetypes of national identity as the American frontiersman or the French revolutionary, characters whose identities are based on existing in some way beyond the law. To a certain learned eye, these stereotypes are absurd enough

not to be taken seriously. But even today, having seen the mainstream futility of racist and xenophobic arguments, anti-immigration pundits often charge that many asylum-seekers and refugees do not respect the values of the *Rechtsstaat*, a term that can be translated as “the rule of law,” but which more literally, and certainly in usage, means “a state based on the system of law and justice.” In the minds of such pundits, to be German is to be above all else a law-abiding citizen.

For these reasons, it is perhaps counterintuitive that something as transgressive as graffiti is so present in Berlin. It is not that Berlin is some sort of lawless zone. (In 2016, however, it did indeed take over the top rank for felonies per capita, narrowly edging out Frankfurt and Leipzig, which had been the top cities in prior years [Lutz, 2017].) As mentioned above, during the divided era, the four-power management system did result in Berlin being governed somewhat differently from the rest of Germany. But since reunification Berlin has been operated under a system of laws fundamentally comparable to those of the other city-states (Hamburg and Bremen). In fact, it is the nature of these laws, and their execution, that has allowed graffiti to achieve the widespread visibility that it has.

Any system of justice must determine to what degree to distinguish between illegal acts and the people who perform them. Attention must be directed either at the infraction (and its possible reparation) or at the perpetrators (and possible punishments) or at both. In many parts of the world, including in the United States, graffiti themselves — that is, the markings on the wall — are considered dangerous, unclean, indicators of decline, and so on, a mentality which was amplified by the “broken windows” theory of policing (Cresswell, 1992; Dovey, Wollan & Woodcock, 2012; Iveson, 2010; McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011; Shobe & Banis, 2014; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). The people who create graffiti may be punishable under laws regarding vandalism or trespassing, but, under “broken windows,” the graffiti themselves must be also removed as quickly as possible. And as a result, many

US communities have laws not only against graffiti, which make graffiti writers liable, but additional laws that property owners liable if they do not clean their properties within a certain period of time.

No such laws exist in Berlin. In line with “broken windows” theory, the city does *recommend* that graffiti be cleaned quickly, and even outlines steps to do so in a “Graffiti Removal and Prevention” article on its website (City of Berlin, 2014). But it is only a recommendation. And yet it is by no means an admission that graffiti writing is allowed. In fact, the German penal code was updated in 2005 to expand the types of vandalism or property damage cases that could be punished criminally. The earlier version had provided legal means to imprison or fine vandals only when their actions *damaged* or *destroyed* a particular object. The updated code stipulates that anyone “who without authorization alters the appearance of a foreign {i.e., not one’s own} article of property, not just superficially and not just temporarily” [*wer unbefugt das Erscheinungsbild einer fremden Sache nicht nur unerheblich und nicht nur vorübergehend verändert*] has committed *Sachbeschädigung* [vandalism] and is subject to up to two years incarceration and/or fines (§ 303 Abs. 2). (If the object in question is a cemetery, monument or memorial, or otherwise “public,” including infrastructure, the penalty can go up to three years.) So perpetrators can be arrested, assessed fines, and jailed, even for attempting something that would fall into this classification of vandalism — but property owners are not required to actually clean the offending graffiti. This is spelled out further: a property owner can collect the fine for cleanup even if no cleanup occurs. In other words, on the whole, the German system is focused more on punishing perpetrators than on eliminating the negative impacts of the so-called crime. This fact is well-understood by the “graffiti lawyers” mentioned earlier. Since graffiti markings themselves are less a crime than *being a person who does graffiti*, much of the legal advice offered concerns potential defendants’ civil rights, for example, when and why their homes can be searched, what property can be

confiscated, whether they can be forced to give things like fingerprints or saliva samples (e.g., Gau, n.d.). The law's focus on the people doing graffiti has powerful resonance for the identity issues explored in the interviews in Chapters 4 and 5.

It is astounding, even oxymoronic, that property owners can claim civil damages for graffiti that they then choose to let remain. The result, for graffiti, is that the act of painting graffiti remains something which the civic body has declared to be officially illegal (but only in most cases, as will be discussed more below), while graffiti markings are left to private individuals, many of whom have come over time to accept them, at least tacitly.

The story of the Berlin police's special action force on graffiti seems to underscore this evolution. The GIB [*Graffiti in Berlin*] was founded in 1994 and at one point had two dozen dedicated staff people (City of Berlin, n.d.; Paulus & Wackenberg, 2016). But quietly, since 2012, the unit has been downsized. Meanwhile, while police data from 2008 to 2012 showed increasing reports of graffiti, since then the numbers have been falling. I asked city representatives what they made of these statistics. Is graffiti actually ebbing in Berlin? No, one said, shaking her head with a bemused smile. "People just don't care anymore".

It is worth pausing a moment here to reflect on that comment. It is possible that there is in fact less graffiti than there was in prior years — since the police only record *reported* graffiti, there is no way to know the actual incidence of graffiti across the entire city over time. But Berlin's population has been growing at the same time that reports of graffiti have been going down, meaning that there are fewer reports per person — a fact that aligns with the official's perception that people are less concerned with graffiti. I outlined above a number of the cultural factors that contribute to Berliners' acceptance of graffiti, but I believe there are other legalistic factors as well. As just mentioned, the decision whether to clean graffiti is left to property owners — and the vast majority of Berliners do not own

property. Over 86% of the dwelling units in the city are rental apartments. Fewer than 14% of Berlin houses or apartments are owner-occupied. Compare this to Seattle, where 61.3% are. [In Germany overall, just 51.9% of people own their homes, compared with 64.5% of Americans (Eurostat, 2018; US Census, 2014).] And not all homeowners live in single-family, detached houses: 89.7% of all Berliners live in multi-unit structures. So, even some property owners are not in sole control of the buildings they live in.

The implications of this for urban life and for graffiti writing are manifold; some are explored in greater depth in Chapter 4. But what I want to emphasize here is that only a small minority of Berliners interact with the city as private property owners empowered to make decisions about the way buildings look. Even if, as I argued above, graffiti and street art are finding increasing acceptance, and even if it is simply the case that, as the city official insinuated, people “don’t care anymore,” there is still the fact that very few members of the public are empowered (much less required) to do anything about graffiti. The argument here may be slightly cyclical — if the public cared more about removing graffiti, they would demand more laws or funding to fight it — but it merits consideration that there may be something in the very nature of property ownership in Berlin that predisposes Berliners to accept or at least tolerate graffiti. This theme also comes up in the interviews which make up Chapters 4 and 5.

Of course, graffiti occurs on plenty of public and quasi-public property, too, and the way it is handled there introduces further legal wrinkles into the story. Trains are a common target for graffiti writers, and, as public transportation, there may be a perception that trains somehow belong to everyone. Any transit authority will be quick to correct this perception, and, in theory, an aggressive, well-funded train operator could keep its trains clean. This has happened in New York City, for example. By the mid-1980s, it was uncommon to find a completely clean train in New York. But beginning especially with the



Giuliani administration, the MTA made buffing its cars a priority (Lueck, 2006). Since cars were typically painted overnight while waiting in a railyard (or “layup”), the MTA simply made sure that no car ever went into service if its exterior had been graffitied. In Berlin, however, it has not been so easy. For one, there are multiple transit operators: the Berliner Verkehrsbetrieb (BVG) operates the subways and trams, Deutsche Bahn operates the regional and long-haul trains that pass through the city, while the S-Bahn commuter rail is operated by the Berlin S-Bahn GmbH, a semi-autonomous arm of the Deutsche Bahn. Each group has different policies for graffiti on its trains and different capacities for responding to it. A common fare structure and payment system links the BVG services and the S-Bahn, but all three groups receive different funding from the city and federal government, meaning that their priorities are not necessarily aligned.

This jurisdictional patchwork extends to non-rolling transportation infrastructure. Retaining walls, subway tunnels, bridges and supports for elevated tracks, train stations — all are commonly used surfaces for graffiti writers and other urban artists. And each is maintained by a different corresponding agency, again with different policies, priorities, and capacities for buffing and abatement. Bridges used by cars, bicycles or pedestrians, meanwhile, are managed directly by the Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Umwelt, Verkehr, und Klimaschutz [Senate Administration for the Environment, Transit, and Climate Protection] — unless these involve smaller streets outside of the urban core, in which case they are managed by the respective districts. Most city parks are again managed by the Environment, Transit, and Environmental Protection Administration — except for a number of high-profile green spaces that are managed by Grün Berlin GmbH, a state-owned non-profit. Any large city will have a variety of departments responsible for public infrastructure, of course, and conflicts in interest are natural in any complex society. And Berlin is not known for corruption or buck-passing (the ongoing boondoggle of the new Berlin-Brandenburg airport notwithstanding.) But still, what I mean to illustrate here

is that Berlin may be *particularly* fragmented and *particularly* ill-equipped to respond to graffiti with any coordinated effort, even if it wanted to. And given that many of these various entities involved are perpetually underfunded (see above), the result is that graffiti removal is not nearly as prioritized, much less orchestrated, as it may be in other places.

Some of the fragmentation in Berlin's infrastructure management can surely be traced to the divided era and the not entirely seamless reunification process that followed it. The early 1990s were famously a time of squatted houses, illegal nightclubs, temporary art shows, and other creative, opportunistic uses of open buildings and spaces. These activities had already been somewhat common in the '70s and '80s in West Berlin, especially Kreuzberg, and they spread to newly accessible East Berlin neighborhoods like Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, and Friedrichshain in the '90s (see, e.g., Braun, 2015), thanks in no small part to the power vacuum left by the dismantling of the East German state. As we will see more in the next chapters, graffiti writers were among the so-called *Raumpioniere* [spatial pioneers] who took advantage of the many spaces in Berlin that existed in a legal limbo: abandoned buildings, *Brachen*, abandoned factories and infrastructure, and most visibly, the now-defunct Wall and *Todesstreifen*.

Some of these spaces became *de facto* "legal walls" or "free walls," sites where graffiti writers could paint without fear of being apprehended. Graffiti writers traditionally refer to such a site as a "Hall of Fame" or just "Hall" (even Germans use these English terms), from the old convention that certain walls were used only by the most accomplished artists. But in practice, in Berlin at least, legal walls have been open to and used by everyone, from beginners to professionals. As discussed above, the most important *de facto* legal wall was the Berlin Wall. Following reunification, certain areas of the former *Todesstreifen* remained popular among graffitiists, especially Mauerpark, in Prenzlauer Berg. But there were *de facto* legal walls throughout the city: Priesterweg, in Schöneberg; Hallesches Tor,

in Kreuzberg; the back side of the East Side Gallery, in Friedrichshain; and Blankenburg, in Pankow, to name only a few of the most popular. Some of these sites, like Priesterweg, which is part of a massive Prussian-era railyard abandoned after World War II, became popular among graffitiists because they were relatively obscure. But others, like Hallesches Tor and Mauerpark were central, exceptionally visible, and well-known to the general public and the “graffiti scene” alike. (The next chapter also traces transfer of knowledge about the city, including good sites for painting, amongst graffiti writers.) These are sites that were, and in some cases still are, painted by dozens of people each day in a vibrant and perpetually renewing pastiche. Sites like these would have been visited by countless graffitiists and lay people everyday; there were part of the normal cityscape. In many of these cases, members of the public and graffiti writers may have assumed that the walls were in fact *de jura* legal.

The visibility, “success,” longevity, or simple irrepressibility of certain of these Halls of Fame eventually led to the establishment of official legal walls. The arguments for legal walls have been various and range from public safety to “The Creative City” to “the right to the city.” It is impossible to stop graffiti, so authorities might as well try to redirect it; graffiti is a harmless pastime, what is dangerous is having to jump fences and train tracks at night, so authorities should provide ways for people to paint in safe places during the day; graffiti is an important outlet for expression; graffiti belongs in a creative city; more legal graffiti will lead to less illegal graffiti, and so on (see Halsey & Young, 2002; McAuliffe, 2013; Mould, 2015; Young, 2014). Berlin even has an independent coalition of advocates, The Graffiti Lobby, which names the establishment of more legal walls as one of its primary goals (Graffiti Lobby, n.d.). One of the Lobby’s arguments is that there is too little space for graffiti in the city, driving people who want to paint to take more extreme actions. A solution, in their eyes, is to provide of more legal walls. Whether it is quantitatively true that there is “too little” space for graffiti is impossible to determine — but, by 2017, there

were certainly fewer of the types of spaces favored by the *Raumpionere* of the 1990s and early 2000s. And the Lobby has found an ear in the city government.

Most notably, through work with the administration of the district of Pankow, the Lobby secured official declaration of Mauerpark as a legal wall. The wall in question at Mauerpark, a long retaining wall that divides the public park from the stadium of a private sport club, resembles the Berlin Wall — but is not actually a Wall fragment. And yet the site retains a strong association with the heady time around reunification, and has more than once been saved from infill by civilian groups (Laub & Lattner, 2016). That the most famous de facto Hall of Fame should now, through the work of a civilian group, become a de jure Hall of Fame is a turn of events that corresponds nicely to what many, Berliners and outsiders alike, expect of this city of “alternative” but politically engaged people.

Just as importantly, this is the most visible legal wall in Berlin. Thousands of locals as well as tourists visit Mauerpark for its giant flea market and open-air karaoke sessions on Sundays. On clear days, it offers rare elevated views in an otherwise very flat city. As I sat there one cool spring afternoon, I watched a group of art students doing field sketches; a young couple flirting on a bench; a small group on an organized bicycle tour; an elderly couple out on a constitutional with their pomeranian; and a few dozen grade-schoolers walking with buoyant purpose, probably on their way home from the local Grundschule. And behind me, at the wall, were several small groups of graffiti writers calmly executing their designs. One group had a small speaker playing German hip-hop; a few people working alone were wearing earbuds. Several people were nursing beers. Except for an occasional whiff of aerosol paint and the fact that the graffiti pieces were of higher-than-usual quality, the scene was very much like that of other public spaces in Berlin [Figure 2.16]. The other park users seemed to take little note of them. In other words, at these legal walls, graffiti and graffiti writers seem to be almost normalized.



Figure 2.16 A recent weekend at Mauerpark.

And yet it is also important that at Mauerpark, as well as the other major, extant legal sites mentioned earlier — such as Priesterweg, Rummelsburg, Blankenburg — the surfaces that have been declared open are “natural” graffiti surfaces — that is, they are part of existing structures. No one has created an “artificial” playground for graffiti; rather, preexisting parts of the urban environment which were attractive for (and used already as) surfaces for illicit graffiti writing were declared to be open for legal graffiti writing. (To use an analogy from skateboarding, this is comparable to the difference between skateboarders being directed to a skatepark versus skateboarding being allowed in other everyday places, such as paved plazas or parking lots.) So, while at legal walls graffiti may seem to recede into the anonymous white noise of cosmopolitan “diversity,” ignored by blase urbanites in the same way they must ignore most of the innumerable stimuli of the city, at the same



time, when graffiti is legalized on “normal” features of the urban environment, its place in that environment becomes more legitimized.

Some graffiti proponents, especially those who consider themselves “hardcore” or “old school,” will often denounce criminalization and legalization in subsequent breaths. As much as they would rather not be arrested and treated like criminals, they see measures like legal walls as a neutralization, as graffiti being decocted into palatable blandness. As we will see in much greater depth in Chapter 4, some also do not want to be limited in where they paint. Nevertheless, the legal wall trend seems to be proceeding in Berlin. As of this writing, the Graffiti Lobby was in talks with the Berliner Immobilienmanagement, or BIM, the city’s property manager, which is responsible for city office space and other buildings like schools, about creating at least a half-dozen new Halls of Fame on BIM buildings scattered throughout the city. These will all be natural walls, and some will even be parts of schools. One is even scheduled for a fire department! This exceptionally public display of legal graffiti writing likely plays a role in legitimately the practice throughout the entire city.

## TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

It may be a truism to say that humans are tool-using animals, but for any study of wall markings, this is not a fact to be overlooked. The ancient cave painters would not have been able to depict their lions and aurochs without techniques for applying ochre and charcoal to the walls. Likewise, we would not have such a fascinating corpus of Pompeian graffiti if the Pompeians had not had their styluses. Writing itself is a technology without which it is difficult to even imagine the last several millennia of human culture. The same logic holds true for modern graffiti, I believe: *techne* and the related concept of craft are important for understanding the psychological and social implications of graffiti writing today. But here I want to focus more directly on the actual tools and techniques used by graffiti writers and



urban artists. What we will see is that “Berlin, Graffiti Capital of the World” would look very different were it not for an ongoing series technological innovations and novel applications of “old” technologies.

Graffiti as we know it today is inseparable from the spray can. In the spectrum of tools designed for art or communication, the spray can is more like the pencil than like egg tempera: it is cheap, simple to use out of the package, requires minimal surface preparations or knowledge of color blending, gives quick results, is easy to correct or at least paint over, and can be mastered with little formal training. And like the pencil, the spray can is fairly ubiquitous in modern society — a fact that can distract from what a technological marvel it is.

A “Method and means for the atomizing or distribution of liquid or semiliquid materials” was first developed in the late 1920s and patented in 1931 by the Norwegian inventor Erik Rotheim, supposedly as part of his quest to find a better way to wax skis [Figure 2.17]. (Rotheim, 1931; Ferguson, 2008). Rotheim understood that paint was one of the “semiliquid materials” that might be used with his aerosol propulsion method, but it was only in 1949 that Ed Seymour invented a “Hermetically sealed package for mixing and discharging paint,” widely credited as being the first true hand-held spray paint can (Seymour, 1951). Modest improvements led to the “Method and apparatus for packaging paint and the like in a pressurized dispensing container” in 1962. The diagrams for this invention bear a strong resemblance to what one finds in an art or hardware store today, testimony to the enduring utility of the humble spray can [Figure 2.18] (O’Neill, 1966).

The mechanism is rather simple. A sturdy can of aluminium or tinplate is filled with some paint, usually acrylic, and topped with pressurized gas, the propellant. (CFCs were the default propellant before they were banned by the Montreal Protocol; now, propane,

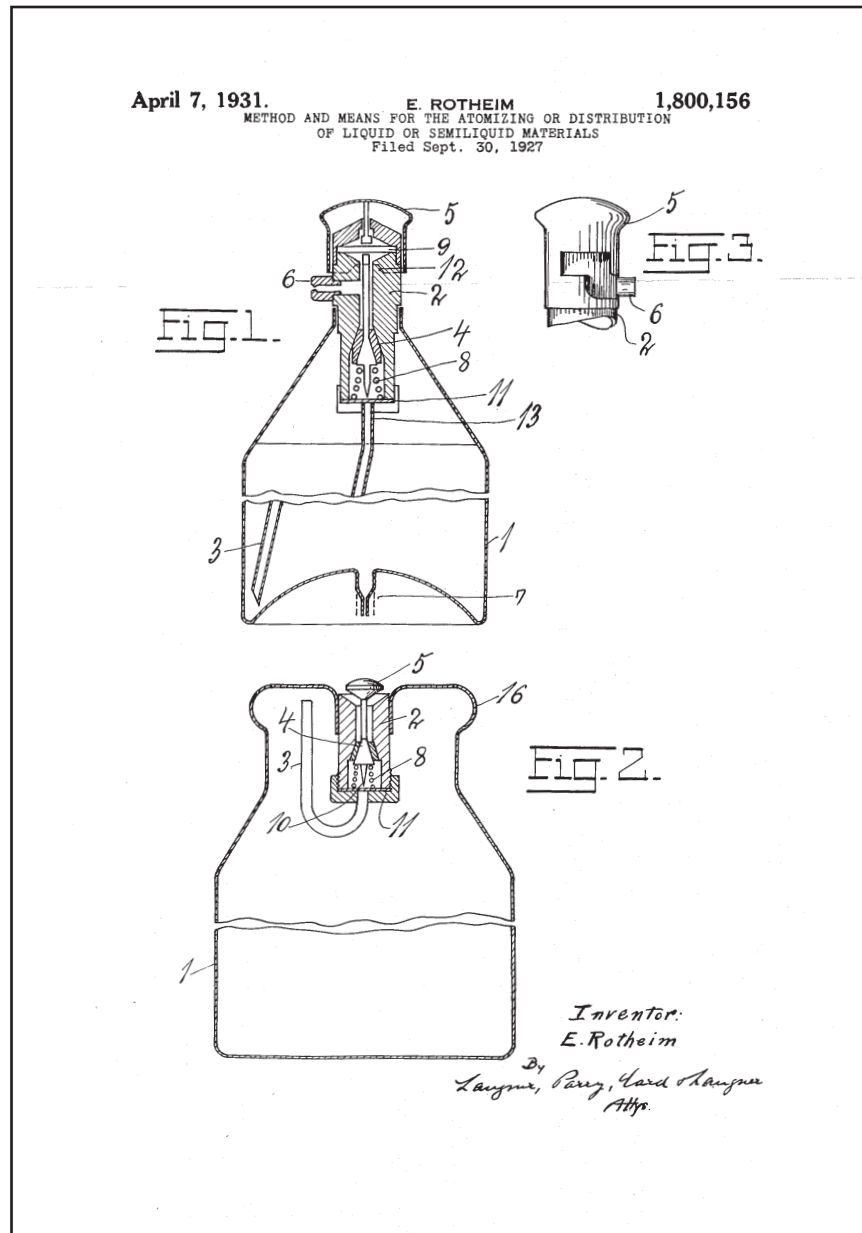


Figure 2.17 The first “spray can” patent. Source: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

isobutane, and dimethyl ether are common propellants.) Balls or “peas” stir the paint with the propellant — this generates the familiar rattle of a shaken spray can — and a spring loaded valve allows for easy and controllable, if rapid, release of the aerosol. The paint dries quickly in most conditions — the primary thing that keeps graffiti writers at home is the cold. A wet surface is ideal, but beyond that, surface preparation is essentially optional, although more layers of paint may be needed depending on the porosity of the

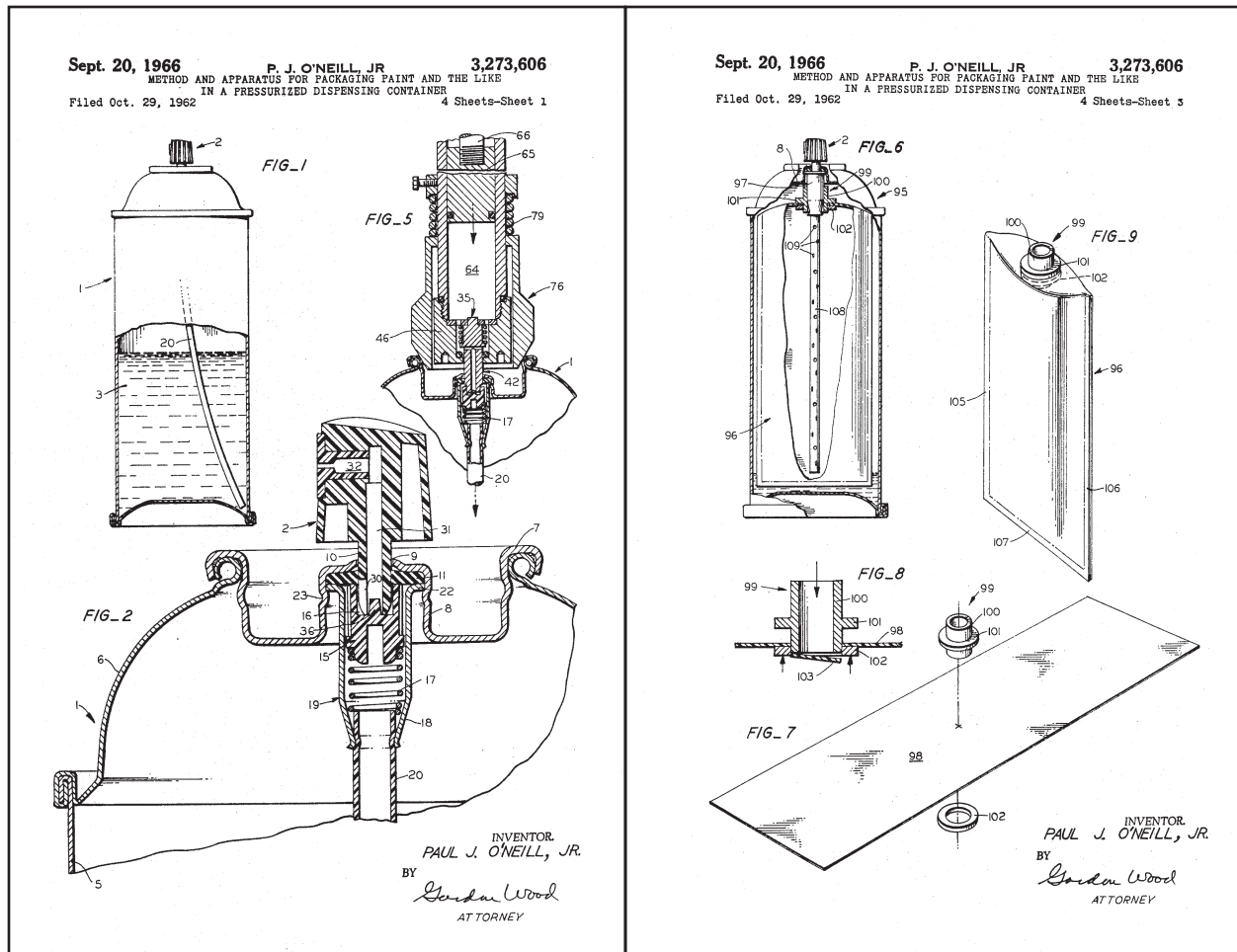


Figure 2.18 Spray can patent filed, 1962. Source: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

substrate. On a common concrete or plaster surface — a house facade, say, or a train tunnel — a typical 400ml can will paint  $1\text{m}^2$ .

Among the early adopters of spray paint was the automotive industry — it was great for touching up dinged fenders, for example. Because of this and other light-industrial applications, chrome was among the most widely available colors, and some historically minded graffiti writers like to say that tagging in chrome is thus a tribute to graffiti's roots. But even a chrome piece requires a black outline to be fully legible, and soon hobbyists, graffiti writers, and other aerosol artists were demanding a variety of colors and cap widths not produced by industry-focused (and graffiti-averse) U.S. firms like Rust-Oleum and

Krylon. By the 1990s, a number of firms outside the U.S. — notably Ironlak in Australia, Montana in Spain, and Molotow in Germany — were making spray paints and markers specifically for the “creative market” and were more than happy to be associated with graffiti. With higher-quality materials, there have been higher-quality pieces on the walls, and thus more recognition of graffiti as “art,” even if the manufacturers continue to promote illegal writing, if anything. (One marker manufacturer offers these recommendations: “After use, recap and be on the run!”) Traditionalists and hard-core anti-capitalists have plenty of license, and plenty of evidence, to critique the commercialization of graffiti, a practice born of disaffection and nearly synonymous with “anarchy” (see also Chapters 1, 3, and 4). Once when I was at a Berlin graffiti shop speaking to an employee, we were interrupted by a customer. The customer asked for two, special-edition MTN cans — which came to over 80 Euros. Later, at a different store, a young woman walked in with designs on a small arsenal of spray cans, markers, and other related appurtenances. The barrage of questions she subjected the salesperson to covered color, weathering, UV resistance, flexibility, reliability, drying rate, and ergonomics, and evinced a connoisseurship not usually seen outside of a high-end wine store. And yet the standard cans, still high-quality and available in a rainbow of hues from “apricot” to “anthracite,” are only between 3 and 7 Euros. Caps are about 50 cents. This is considerably less expensive than a lot of other art supplies or hobby materials. So, while the production of street-oriented aerosol paints has expanded the expressive possibilities of the medium and therefore attracted writers interested in things beyond “getting up,” the ubiquity of inexpensive spray cans has also led to more participation and more graffiti overall. Consider a hypothetical 1m-by-2m bubble-letter piece of average complexity: it might feature at most 5 colors, and thus require no more than five cans. The entire, rather large piece can be created for under 20 Euros — and probably completed in under 5 minutes. Needless to say, this kind of coverage would not be possible if graffiti writers had to work with standard paint and brushes, much less with ancient Roman styluses.

If spray cans were the only tool available, however, it might be possible to dramatically limit graffiti by banning spray cans, as was done somewhat effectively in the GDR (Joetze, 2015; Krekow & Steiner, 2002). But in recent decades graffiti writers and urban artists have expanded the repertoire of techniques for creating and installing pieces. And each of these techniques has expanded the visibility, legibility, and spatial distribution of graffiti in Berlin. Stencils and wheatpastes are not new techniques, but they have seen a renaissance with the rise of street art (see above). Stencil artists can create a crisp image or text in the quiet of their own home and then put it on a wall in seconds. A similar result is achieved with wheatpastes, essentially posters, affixed to the wall with a cheap slurry made of flour and water.

Other innovations allow people to paint where they were not able to before, or to achieve novel effects with paint. With a spray can, the graffitist must climb up or out to the target surface; even without fences, barbed wire, or electrified rails, gravity poses a constant danger. For this reason, the paint roller, well-known to interior decorators and home remodelers, has found popularity among graffitists. Attach a telescoping handle or even just a broomstick, and the second story of a facade becomes accessible while standing on the ground; likewise, great expanses of wall are reachable when leaning over a rooftop or out a window [Figure 2.19]. In the early 2000s, a group of artists from Bremen decided to stop working against gravity and start working with it. They fill large soda bottles with mixture of primer and pigment, creating a watery but still vivid emulsion, and then, from the roof of a building, let the paint drip down in a prismatic, tendrilled curtain. Thus an entire, multi-story facade is painted, by three or four people, in a matter of minutes [Figure 2.20]. Some writers have experimented with putting paint in a bike pump and squirting it up pneumatically, but this method is somewhat less exhilarating, I am told, than replacing the flame retardant in a fire extinguisher with paint, removing the safety pin, pulling the





Figure 2.19 The “U.t.” piece here was done with paint rollers rather than spray paint. Photo by author.

trigger, and attempting to write one’s message while fighting the kick-back. In Berlin, fire extinguisher pieces have appeared high up in the middle of walls where there has never been scaffolding [Figure 2.21]. Perhaps the most dramatic recent innovation is used almost exclusively by the Berlin Kidz/ÜF crew. If the early graffiti writers were influenced by the “wildstyle” lettering linked so strongly to the subways of New York City, the Berlin Kidz seem to have taken their inspiration half from the streets of Sao Pãolo and half from rock faces of El Capitan. Wearing harnesses, they rappel down from the roofs of buildings, painting spindly, exceptionally calligraphic letters that recall Brazilian pichação, and embedding pithy, often political slogans inside the larger text [Figure 2.22]. Some of these new techniques require more sophisticated and expensive materials; many of them involve





Figure 2.20 “Rainbow” mural, Berlin-Kreuzberg, 2014. Photo by author.

markedly greater risk for bodily harm. But they are all more difficult to buff and more visible, significantly contributing to the presence of graffiti in public space.

A discussion of technological change and graffiti would be incomplete without mention of the various ways in which electronics have expanded the forms, possibilities, and even the definitions of “graffiti” and “street art,” to say nothing of their impact on public space. New innovations include “LED throwies,” small bundles of LED lights that can be thrown up onto a surface, where they will continue glowing for up to a few weeks. Laser projectors





Figures 2.21 and 2.22 ABOVE: A variety of techniques, including fire extinguisher, Berlin-Friedrichshain, 2017. BELOW: Berlin Kidz pichação-style pieces, along with muralism, fire extinguisher pieces, and traditional bombing, Berlin-Kreuzberg. Photos by author.

combined with a computer or tablet interface allow a user to write or draw at the interface and have the resulting “tag” temporarily projected onto a distant wall. Writers are just beginning to test the potential of remote operated drones for carrying paint to otherwise impossible to reach places. At least one mural artist, INSA, creates murals in a sequence of iterations, which are each photographed and then composed into brief animations, graffiti made captivatingly kinetic as “gif-fiti.” But gifs are actually an exception when it comes to the presence of graffiti and street art online. Vast troves of graffiti photos are shared online by creators as well as fans. It is beyond the scope of the present project to explore fully the relationship between the virtual spaces of the Internet and the real urban spaces where graffiti and street art occur. But as mentioned above, photo sharing sites like Flickr and Instagram have proven incredibly active “spaces” for the dissemination and consumption of graffiti and street art and have undoubtedly contributed to the mainstreaming of urban art overall (e.g., Honig & MacDowall, 2016; MacDowall & de Souza, 2018).

In the preceding several sections, I’ve outlined some of the conditions — physical, economic, socio-cultural, legal, and technological — that relate to the spread and persistence of graffiti across the world, and in particular in Berlin. It is impossible, I believe, to begin understanding graffiti without reflecting on these factors, on this social and historical context. Like any social practice, graffiti emerges from a complex system. But *what* graffiti can mean, and *how* it can mean — to both practitioners and lay people — are questions we are only now set up to consider. How has graffiti transformed public space in Berlin, and how has it changed how we can know and related to the city? How do graffiti writers understand their interventions in the appearance of the city? What are the implications of a continued, vibrant graffiti scene for a growing, ever more capitalized and privatized metropolis? What are the connections between graffiti and public life in Berlin? These are the questions that we must turn to now.

# CHAPTER 3

## *BACKJUMPS: ZINE AS PLAN*

### INTRODUCTION

Adrian Nabi and his friends pasted together the first issue of *Backjumps* on the floor of his Kreuzberg living room. It was early 1994, and weeks of work leading up to this moment had left Nabi sleep-deprived. As he writes in the editor's letter, "There's so much I want to say about what we want to make happen with the mag, but for now I just don't have the head for it." To judge by the front cover, the new magazine would be in the business of burnishing graffiti's reputation for aggressive posturing. A collage, it includes two drawings of words distorted beyond easy legibility, an aerosol figure of a sneering, hooded youth, and a spray-painted message that reads in part, "bitch-ass toys, just shut the fuck up."

But the collage on the back cover is somewhat more difficult to parse. Four photos are pasted on a background that appears to be made up of one or more pages from other magazines. Each of the photos features examples of exuberant style writing, but the most interesting aspect is the geographic melange the back cover presents: two closely cropped photos are identified as being pieces by a graffiti writers in Paris and Heidelberg, one photo of a long wall of pieces by numerous writers is labeled "Berlin," and a fourth photo, featuring a piece by the legendary Berlin writer POET, includes the looming facade of a modernist apartment building in the background. In the background, meanwhile, several lines of text in Japanese are visible and, in the very top right corner, the words "South Bronx" are just legible [Figure 3.1]. At least six distinct geographic references,





Figure 3.1 The back cover of the first issue of *Backjumps*. (Unless otherwise noted, all scans made by author at the Archive Youth Cultures, Berlin.)

spanning Europe, North America, and Asia, are being made here. Is the point that graffiti is a global phenomenon that instantiates in particular urban centers? That it is a translocal phenomenon? That Berlin plays some particular role in this phenomenon? As will become more clear in the following discussion, these questions relating to the spatial nature of graffiti practice and its implications for the city are not simply the idle musings of a scholar — they were central to Adrian Nabi, his *Backjumps* project, and thus to the greater graffiti culture in Berlin and ultimately the city itself.<sup>1</sup> If, as I've proposed, graffiti in Berlin

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Nabi, the founder of *Backjumps*, never responded to repeated requests to be interviewed for this project. All quotes are taken from other published interviews. Likewise, I was not able to establish contact with Poet (aka, Jimmy), the lead designer and eventual editor-in-chief of *Backjumps*. Suppositions about their editorial and curatorial intents are based on those interviews and signed pieces in *Backjumps*. Stefane Bauer, the director of Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien and host of the *Backjumps* "Live Issue" exhibitions, also never responded to repeated attempts at contact, though his attitudes toward and intentions for the project can be surmised from various written statements (e.g., Bauer, 2007). An interview with former Kunsthaus employee and "20 + 1 Issue" curator Melina Gersteman corroborated many of the written statements and added substantial detail, especially as regards the development of the Live Issues and the decision making around the "20+1" anniversary festival discussed at the end of the chapter.

represents an example of subcultural urbanism, then *Backjumps* can be understood as that community's comprehensive plan: a document summarizing, in words, images, and maps, the community's social and aesthetic values and outlining its visions for the future.

#### ZINES AND SUBCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

But let's start at the beginning. Over the course of two decades of activity, *Backjumps* became many things, but it began as, and always retained some of the spirit of, a fanzine. A fanzine, or simply zine, is typically distinguished from a commercial print magazine by being the product of amateurs driven by little more than their desire to share their enthusiasm for some topic — punk music, science fiction, football (soccer), or feminist politics, to name just a few of the classic zine subject areas. The quintessential zine is “somewhere between a personal letter and a magazine” (Duncombe, 1997, p. 11). It is hand-produced without the aid of design software and often employs collage, cutout letters, hand-written or type-written (as opposed to word-processed) text, “plundered” material from other media, drawings, and photocopied photographs and other images, creating a expressive subcultural bricolage. Thanks to a convergence of certain subcultural movements (e.g., punk and feminism) and technologies (e.g., the Xerox machine), many scholars point to the 1970s as a golden age for this type of zine (e.g., Duncombe, 1997; Triggs, 1995 and 2006). Though *Backjumps* came along some time after this so-called golden age, Nabi referred to the design aesthetic of the early *Backjumps* as “copyshop style” (Celik, 2004).

Because of their association with movements like punk and feminism, there has been a tendency in the anglophone literature on zines to mythologize them as emblems of a disaffected subculture (Atton, 2010; see, e.g., Dumcombe, 1997; Jary, Horne & Bucke, 1991; Tkach and Hank, 2014; Triggs, 1995 and 2006). Zines come into existence at least



in part because there is no outlet in mainstream media for the ideas and images that are of interest to zine producers and readers, or perhaps because there would be some risk in publicizing such ideas to a wide audience. Zines are at the very least alternative. But this status has led some theorists of outsider media to see zines as utopian sites for the formation of alternative publics (Hamilton, 2000). Zines may be self-indulgent expressions of the whims of their creators, but at the same time they “are democratic in that they provide accessible forums for writing through their anyone-can-do-it production strategies, [and] they also encourage participation (e.g., readers’ letters) and suggest reflexivity (or reflectivity in this case) in terms of their autobiographical manner of communication” (Triggs, 2006, p. 81).

This framing is based on a number of assumptions, some of which need to be overcome in order to understand graffiti magazines and *Backjumps* in particular. First, it is assumed that zines are necessarily oppositional. To be sure, many zines have been engaged with the oppositional politics and promoted direct action. The British animal rights zine “Fight Back” captures the breathless tone associated with such zines:

Sitting at home listening to your Crass records isn’t going to change the way things are, neither is going on the CND march every October. There are many ways to fight back [...]. You could do individual protests, do graffiti, glue locks, smash windows etc whatever takes your fancy. You could join an organisation such as the A.L.F or the Hunt Saboteurs, its [sic] up to you. Use your imagination. Don’t talk about it, do it!” (quoted in Roscher, p. 193).

While such impassioned imperative is characteristic of some zines, being alternative or “outsider” does not equate with oppositional politics. In particular, this assumption precludes exploration of zines that reflect “everyday” themes and activities (Atton, 2010). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and will be elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5, graffiti has been a practice that is sometimes associated with conscious and overtly oppositional politics, but which is just as often a comparatively quiet and intimate practice, one that involves more hours spent alone at home with a sketchbook than spent out running through railyards from police. And in its early years *Backjumps*, as will become clear in the

following discussion, more or less captured this spectrum. In other words, *Backjumps* as a zine cannot be used as a neat stand-in for an oppositional or anarchic positionalities.

There is a related limitation to this standard theorization of zines. In assuming that zines are dependent on outsider status, the standard theorization willfully ignores zines and their associated subcultures that flirt with or aspire to more mainstream acceptance. In this standard theorization, to be a zine is to be subcultural, full stop. Again, the standard theorization is supported by cases from the aforementioned golden era of zine production. The British punk zine *Sniffin' Glue*, discussed by Triggs (2006), ceased publication in the fall of 1977, “about the same time that [the publisher] suggest punk had been assimilated into the music industry.” As Triggs puts it, “Like punk itself, fanzines moved from positions of independence to rapid co-option into the mainstream” (Triggs, 2006, p. 72). And this is the end of the discussion. But this is a relatively absolutist conception of what a zine is and the conditions in which it can meaningfully exist. It misses an opportunity to examine exactly *how* such a publication might transform from a DIY *objet* rich with political meaning into something more “mainstream.”

It assumes that once a zine becomes mainstream it is somehow deneutered. And, curiously, it asks us to assume that the individual and subcultural agency that was so boldly evident in the zine in its pure “position of independence” could undergo such “rapid co-option” into a (presumably capitalist) system. This stance “essentializes production and creativity at the level of class and ‘resistance,’ ignoring personal histories, interactions, or trajectories” (Atton, 2010, p. 519). Rather than simply fading away or being co-opted completely, a zine might also evolve — and not thereby necessarily lose its character. The case of the British football zine *WSC* offers an illustration. On the occasion of an anniversary issue one commentator wrote, “*WSC* has not gone legit: not in any establishment-loving sense. This is

a fanzine that has grown up and lost its pimples and started to shave.” (Simon Barnes, *The Times*, 10 April 1991, quoted in Haynes, 1995, p.69).

*Backjumps* also offers a illustration of a “third way” for a fanzine. What I will argue in the following discussion of *Backjumps* is, first, that this zine was never entirely naive or purely dependent on an “outsider” identity. It had perhaps “lost its pimples” by Issue #1. And second, I will argue that its transition from a subcultural organ into something far more mainstream was not a simple co-option but a transformation over time and one in which the creators of the magazine exercised considerable intent and agency. I argue that, quite the opposite of ceasing to have important cultural meaning once it became more mainstream, it is exactly in this process of transformation that we can recognize the meaning and impact of this particular publication.

A final problematic feature of the typical treatment of zines is the “homologous” approach, the assumption that a zine is representative of the subculture it reports from. Again, this is an understanding gleaned primarily from punk zines, and drawing primarily on their aesthetics and visual characteristics, which were thought to be “homologous with punk’s subterranean and anarchic style” (Hebdige, 1990, p. 112). Again, the homologous approach not only diminishes the agency of individual zine creators, it diminishes the particularities of individual zines within a given subculture or theme. While certain zine scenes are known to have a cooperative, sharing spirit and engage in exchange of knowledge and resources (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2000; Duncombe, 1997; Haynes, 1995; Kempson, 2015), it cannot be assumed that every zine scene does. The German graffiti magazines that formed the milieu from which *Backjumps* emerged, for example, frequently used editorial space to taunt other zines as “wannabes” and to proclaim their own superiority.

The homologous approach also assumes that zines have a one-to-one correspondence with their given subculture, or at least represent a straightforward ex post reportage. This assumption enforces a stasis and ignores the capacity of zines to influence their readers and to set aesthetic, political, or cultural agendas in much the same way mainstream media are readily understood to do (e.g., Croteau and Hoynes, 2003). Atton, channelling Walser, argues, and I agree, that a more robust and fruitful way to understand the relationship between a zine and a subculture, especially an artistic subculture like graffiti, is “as a primary site for ‘discourse about discourse [through which] concepts of genre are formed, transformed, and defended’” (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 1993, quoted in Atton, 2010, p. 523). There are multiple threads to this argument. One is to emphasize the contested, or at least unfixed, nature of cultural practices. This allows for a recognition of cultural complexity and exploration of power structures (Couldry, 2000). It also invites scholarly attention to the diachronic development and transformation of practices. This is exactly what I undertake in the following discussion of *Backjumps*, with special attention to its spatial sensibilities.

Another suggestion in the argument is that zines function as social sites in which processes of transformation are revealed. The cultural theorists who refer to media as “sites” tend to be speaking metaphorically (e.g., Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpenter, 2007; Barnett, 2003; Couldry and McCarthy, 2004); the material and spatial qualities of the media are not the same as those of public and quasi-public spaces like coffee shops, streets, or plazas. But the implicit idea is that media perform something of the same function of these other familiar sites in the sense that media serve as meeting places for certain publics, forums where ideas are exchanged (see the lines quoted from Triggs above). As Duncombe put it,

Underground culture creates a space in which to experiment with novel forms of social production and organization. Practice such as non-alienated cultural production and the non-spatial community of ‘the network’ are perhaps indicators of the directions in which a future society could go, or utopian ideals after which to strive. (p. 205)

The apotheosis of this metaphor is the concept of the public sphere, but a thorough exegesis of the Habermasian public sphere is not only beyond the scope of this project, it would be somewhat contrary to what is important in the case of a graffiti magazine like *Backjumps*.

Namely, a graffiti magazine, in printing photographs and sharing accounts of regional styles or reports from specific places, does not represent an abstract, flat, placeless public sphere; it presents a reconstruction of real (usually urban) spaces. This reconstruction, an actual re-presentation of the physical world, is of course heavily curated and highly idiosyncratic — and therein lies its interest. The process of selection, of inclusion and exclusion, and the literal view of the city presented in photos all come together to form a compelling document that is an image of a city. To put it another way, since graffiti is an expressive genre that literally *takes place*, in specific settings, the subcultural public that negotiates this genre via zines like *Backjumps* is simultaneously negotiating a practice of interaction with the city (see Chapter 1). In its way, then, *Backjumps* was indeed a utopian project, albeit one whose vision and ambition changed dramatically over the course of the 20-some years in which it was active.

To summarize, what I will be doing below is not reading *Backjumps* as a homologous stand-in for the graffiti scene in Berlin. There is not and never was a monolithic graffiti scene in Berlin. Adrian Nabi, the creator of *Backjumps*, is not an uncontroversial figure, and not every graffiti writer would have or even could have seen, read (or contributed to) the publication or its later “live issues.” *Backjumps* was, however, incredibly influential; one person I spoke to described it as a “little bible”. It reveals the ways in which graffiti writers participated in an evolving understanding of what graffiti can do in the city.



## GRAFFITI AND FANZINES IN GERMANY

The media landscape into which *Backjumps* emerged in Berlin in early 1990s was complex. Berlin, and Germany overall, may have resembled most other highly developed, democratic places in terms of the sheer range of television, radio, and print media voices — with some exceptions. Most notably, the East had had its own media organs, some of which were shut down, but some of which persisted into the new era, such as *Berliner Zeitung*. Schonebach, et al., have argued that while in the US newspapers tended to play a role in social distinction, those in Germany tended to serve as social integrators (1999). But the legacy of division in Berlin, including the legacy of separate, ideologically defined, and occasionally openly antagonistic official media, suggests that readers there might be far more conscious of the ways in which newspapers and magazines are linked to social, political, and geographic identities. Until this day, nearly three decades after reunification, *Berliner Zeitung* is read more in the neighborhoods of the former East Berlin, while the *Tagesspiegel* and *Berliner Morgenpost* have more subscribers in the former West, even though all three papers ostensibly report on the entire city (“Hier hat die Berliner Zeitung die meisten Leser,” 2016; van Laak, 2017).

The legacies of suppression and popular dissent in the GDR also had implications for unofficial, alternative media. The divided period had seen a small flowering of underground, oppositional literature in the East, and these protest efforts found no small number of supporters and sympathizers in the West (Dale, 2006; Flam, 1999; Neubert, 1998). In the estimation of Ehrhardt Neubert, “several tens of thousands of copies of samizdat works, magazines, books, and multi-page newsletters were distributed” in 1988 alone, “and that is without including the ecclesiastical half-samizdat” (1998, p.752). This is especially astonishing given that print runs of more than 100 required government approval, which could not have been attained given that GDR officials would surely have such publications as seditious. These publications were all political, but represented a

unified front only insofar as they shared a kind of transcendent anti-communist ideology, an ideology which lead some publications to focus on religious freedom, others on human rights, and others still on topics as diverse as the environment, German-Czech solidarity, denuclearization, abstract art, or Paul Celan poems. Subcultural zines such as *mOAning star*, which more closely resemble the zines discussed throughout the rest of this chapter, were also important during this period. Even during the GDR era, people on both side of the Wall started collections. The euphoria of reunification has for 30 years bathed such forms of peaceful protest in glowing light (see Chapter 2).

And yet the period around reunification also saw regulatory changes which brought a boom in new, private, for-profit television stations, while reunification proper demanded rapid transition to capitalist market logics for former communist media (Humphreys, 1996; Humphreys & Lang, 1998). This created an overall “entrepreneurial” media environment in Germany. These three factors — sensitivity to the socio-political-geographic specificity of media, the lasting enthusiasm for “alternative” or “underground” media, and a climate of proliferating and competing media — help explain and understand the emergence and reception of zines like *Backjumps* in Berlin. The fact that the latter two factors might even seem to be contradictory (“Aren’t underground media almost by definition anti-capitalist?”) will prove to be especially relevant for the evolution of *Backjumps*.

*Backjumps* was not the first graffiti zine, but graffiti zines were never as prevalent in Germany as were those linked to other subcultures (Neumann, 1995). Common zine topics were punk or hardcore music (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2000; Dietrich & Mey, 2015; Ott & Skai, 1981; Schmidt, 2005, 2006; Shahan, 2008); sci-fi fan fiction (e.g., Both, Neumann & Scheffler, 1998; Cuntz-Leng & Meintzinger, 2015; Fritzsche, 2006; Sülze, 2018), feminist or queer themes (e.g., Drücke & Zobl, 2012; Zobl, 2007), oppositional politics on both the left and right (e.g., Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Freistaat Sachsen, 1999; Moldt, 2005),

and football/soccer (e.g., Lötze, 1995; Raap, 1999; Schlobinski & Fiene, 2000). The possible reasons for this are several: that graffiti writers already had a platform for communication in the city itself (i.e., the trains, walls, switch boxes, etc.); that the confined space and low production values of zines, combined with the static nature of print, would have seemed a step backward for a culture known to be interested in dynamism, color, and flamboyance; that graffiti writers' creative energies found enough outlet in graffiti alone; that graffiti was being accepted into the mainstream quickly enough not to need "alternative" media; or, contrarily, that the official illegality graffiti made practitioners cautious about offering authorities a literal paper trail of their infractions.

Whatever the possible disincentives there might have been to produce them, these were evidently out-weighed in many cases, and by the mid-1990s there were numerous graffiti zines (and a range of more formal publications) available in Berlin. *Achtung* (Leipzig), *Beastie Boyz* (Hamburg), *Bomber* (Nijmegen, Netherlands), *On the Run* (Munich/Badenheim), *Overkill* (Berlin), *True 2 the Game* (Berlin), *Tuff Stuff* (Hamburg), and *Xplicit Grafx* (Paris) are among the prominent publications of the time that may have influenced the creators of *Backjumps*. Given the generally small print runs, the ephemerality of the media, and the marginalization of the subculture, not many of these publications survive. This analysis presented in chapter is possible only because the entire run of *Backjumps* is held at the *Archiv der Jugendkulturen* in Berlin; the archive holds the entire run of only a few other graffiti-related periodicals, but those had much shorter existences and fewer total issues. (Several — but not all — issues of *Backjumps* have been scanned by fans and are viewable online.) The fact that the *Backjumps* corpus exists is in part due to the fact that it was produced in comparatively large numbers for a fanzine; the early issues had print runs of 3,000, and it had grown to 10,000 by the last issue (see below). And yet these numbers are still paltry by magazine standards — in the same period around the turn of the millennium, *Der Spiegel* sold over a million copies a week — and so the holdings in the

archive must be understood as a testament to the importance of *Backjumps* to the history of graffiti, street art, and youth culture generally in Berlin

While it is therefore impossible to say very much in detail about the entire Berlin graffiti zine ecosystem, for the purposes of the argument I want to present in this chapter, it is worth noting a couple trends in *Backjumps*'s contemporary zines that indicate the both the general atmosphere as well as some important specific modes of presentation and thematic stresses that are relevant to the discussion of *Backjumps* that follows. In many respects, some German graffiti zines of the early 90s had a familiar zine aesthetic: low-budget, black-and-white production, collaged and cut-out photos, handwritten texts [Figure 3.2]. Even when they were able to print in color, they retained a certain homemade look. They tend to emphasize photos, commonly printing pages of tiled, close-cropped photos of graffiti pieces [Fig 3.3]. There is a heavy emphasis on graffiti on trains and subways. Editorial material entails almost exclusively interviews with well-known writers or crews (or writers and crews the zine wants to promote), with occasional forays into other related urban subcultures such as skateboarding or hip-hop music. The content of these interviews is varied, but frequently the "heroic" qualities of the writer are accentuated, and sometimes the tone becomes somewhat misogynistic; *Der Bahnarbeiter* [The Rail Worker], out of Munich, even interrupts its graffiti-related content with the occasional photo of a partially nude woman.

But like *Backjumps*, many contemporary zines also demonstrated distinctive spatial sensibilities. A few anecdotes serve to illustrate the range of spatial thinking — the range of ways of knowing space and place through graffiti — that these zines trafficked in. In general, all zines are of a particular place and focus on recent graffiti in that place, yet they are also very interested in exchange with or reference to other places and times. Later in the chapter, I will explore *Backjumps*'s fetishistic nostalgia for New York City, but that

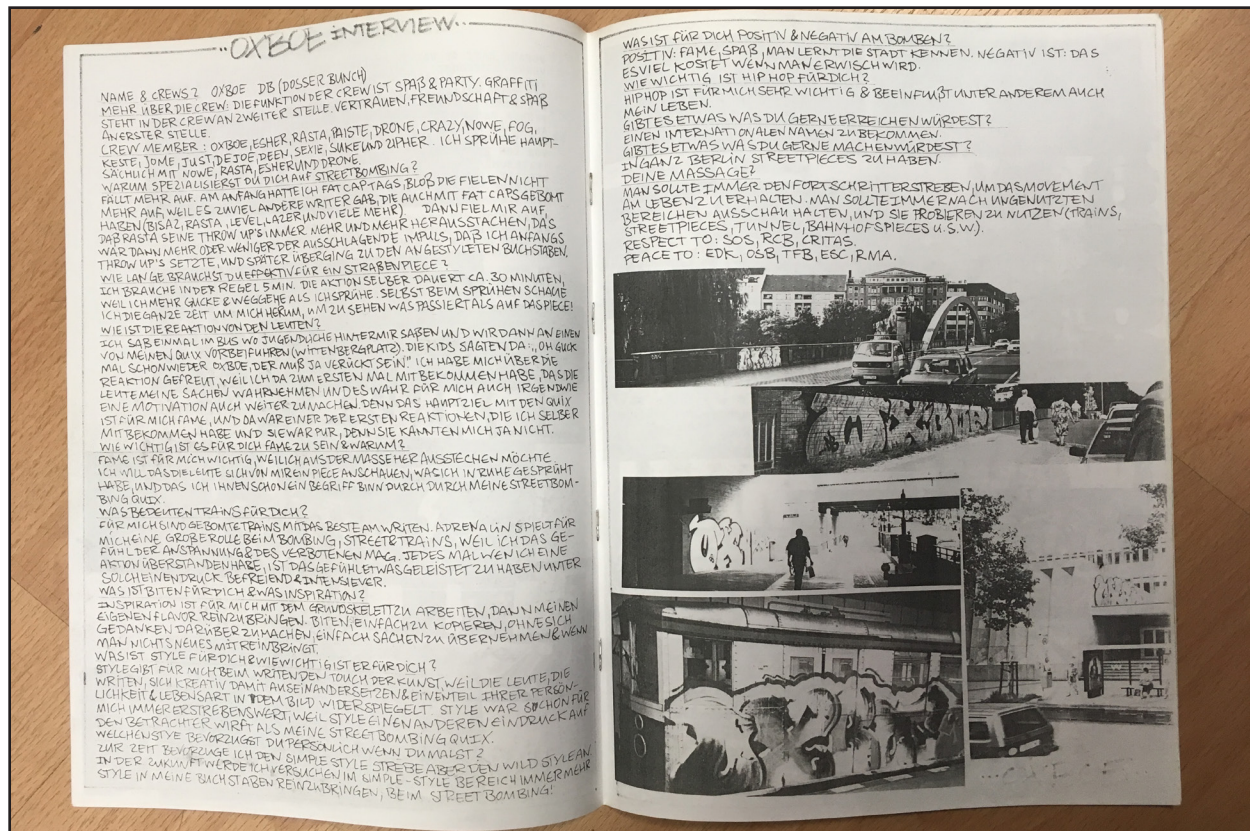


Figure 3.2 A typical spread from a German graffiti zine.

nostalgia was not entirely unique to *Backjumps*. Many publications also ran stories about locals' trips to other places or traveler's impressions of the hometown. A kind of hierarchy emerges. Berlin publications, like *Backjumps*, *Overkill*, or *True 2 the Game* paid special attention, in these years, to New York City, and when other places are mentioned, they tend to be exclusively other major cities of Europe: Paris, Barcelona, Rome, Vienna, Athens. Meanwhile, publications based in other German cities tended to look to Berlin. One of the first issues of *Rock n Roller*, out of Hamburg, devoted its entire back cover to a reproduction of the Berlin transit map. The map, from 1992, looks different from Berlin's current transit map, because many lines have been extended since then, but the image is unaltered. It is somewhat surprising that the designers were able to repress the instinct for remix and collage that usually characterizes zine design, but the result can be read as a refreshingly matter-of-fact message to readers: what you need to know about graffiti is nothing more





Figure 3.3 A typical photo collage from a German graffiti zine.

and nothing less than the Berlin transit system [Figure 3.4]. (The importance of train writing and Berlin's transit network and echoed in the interviews presented in Chapters 4 and 5.)

But Berlin was not an all-powerful metropole in terms of graffiti and graffiti publications' conceptions of relationships between places. One compelling alternative narrative is presented in *12° Nordost* [*12° Northeast*]. Published from the late 1990s into the early 2000s, it took as its turf the entire northeastern portion of Germany. (12 degrees on a compass would usually be considered north-northeast, *Nordnordost*, but using that term would ruin the catchy choriamb of the title they chose.) Every issue began with a map indicating the places featured in that issue. What is notable is that, while the biggest cities

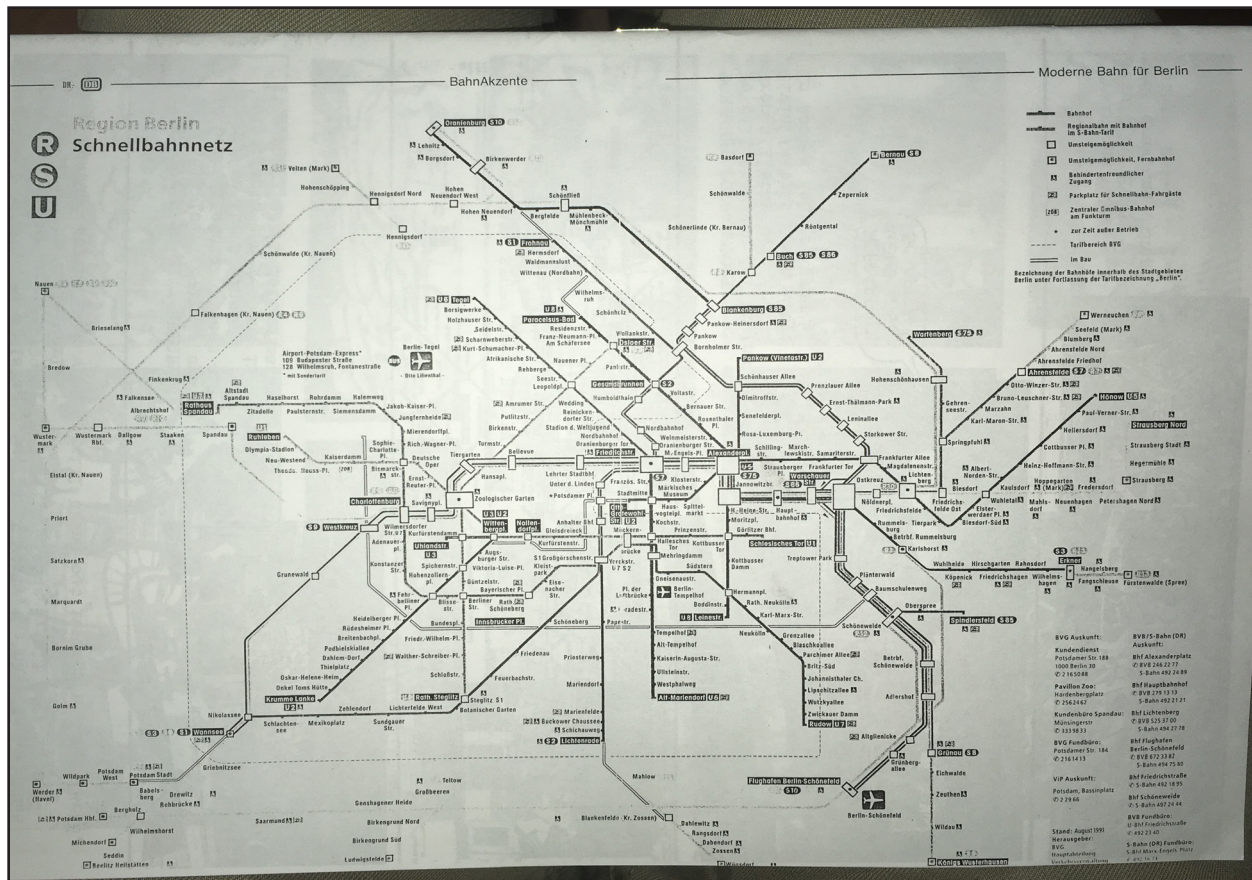


Figure 3.4 A 1992 issue of *Rock n Roller*, a Hamburg graffiti zine, reprinted the Berlin transit map on its back cover.

like Berlin and Hamburg are included, they are given no more cartographic emphasis than comparatively miniscule places like Wismar. Each dot on the map is linked to a photo of a graffiti piece taken there, the place names paired with and overshadowed by crew names, so that Wolfsburg practically becomes MUN, Hannover becomes FCK, Osnabrück becomes TNC, and so on [Figure 3.5]. This method of photo-mapping represents an analog anticipation of the digital photo map features that Google and Instagram made possible and popular a decade later. What is more, in *12° Nordost*, the classic graffiti dictum to go “all city” is in a sense amplified; graffiti writers are going “all region” in northeastern Germany. And not only that, they are doing so in a way that is essentially flat, rhizomatic, and free from fixation on central or iconic locations and place hierarchies. Additionally, each new issue featured a slightly different group of cities, each paired with different graffiti pieces



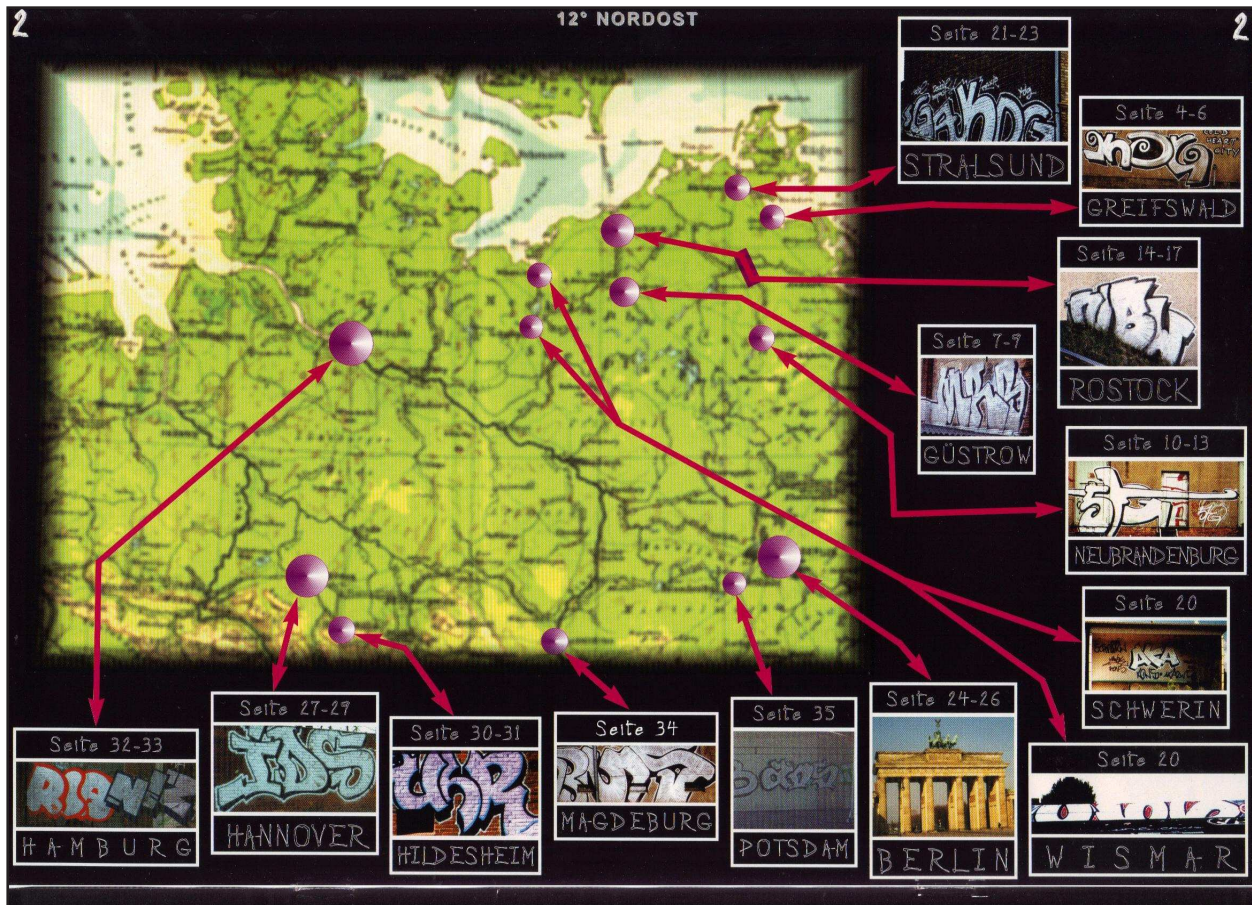


Figure 3.5 The graffiti zine *12° Nordost* emphasized regional identity.

[Figure 3.6]. The effect is to turn a static map into a roiling surface, an even-shifting topos. In other words, *12° Nordost* offered a redefinition of what is important in the landscape, another way of reading space through graffiti that shatters centuries-old paradigms in architecture and urban design that gave primacy to permanent structures, vertical landmarks, and edifices that represent the power of church or state. (Again, we will see more on this theme in Chapter 5).

One last trend in the design of contemporary graffiti magazines is worth highlighting here. Many of them, including the first sixteen issues of *Backjumps*, were produced in landscape orientation (typically A4 size). There may have been practical or economic reasons for this choice, but from a design perspective, it tended to emphasize the horizontality of whatever



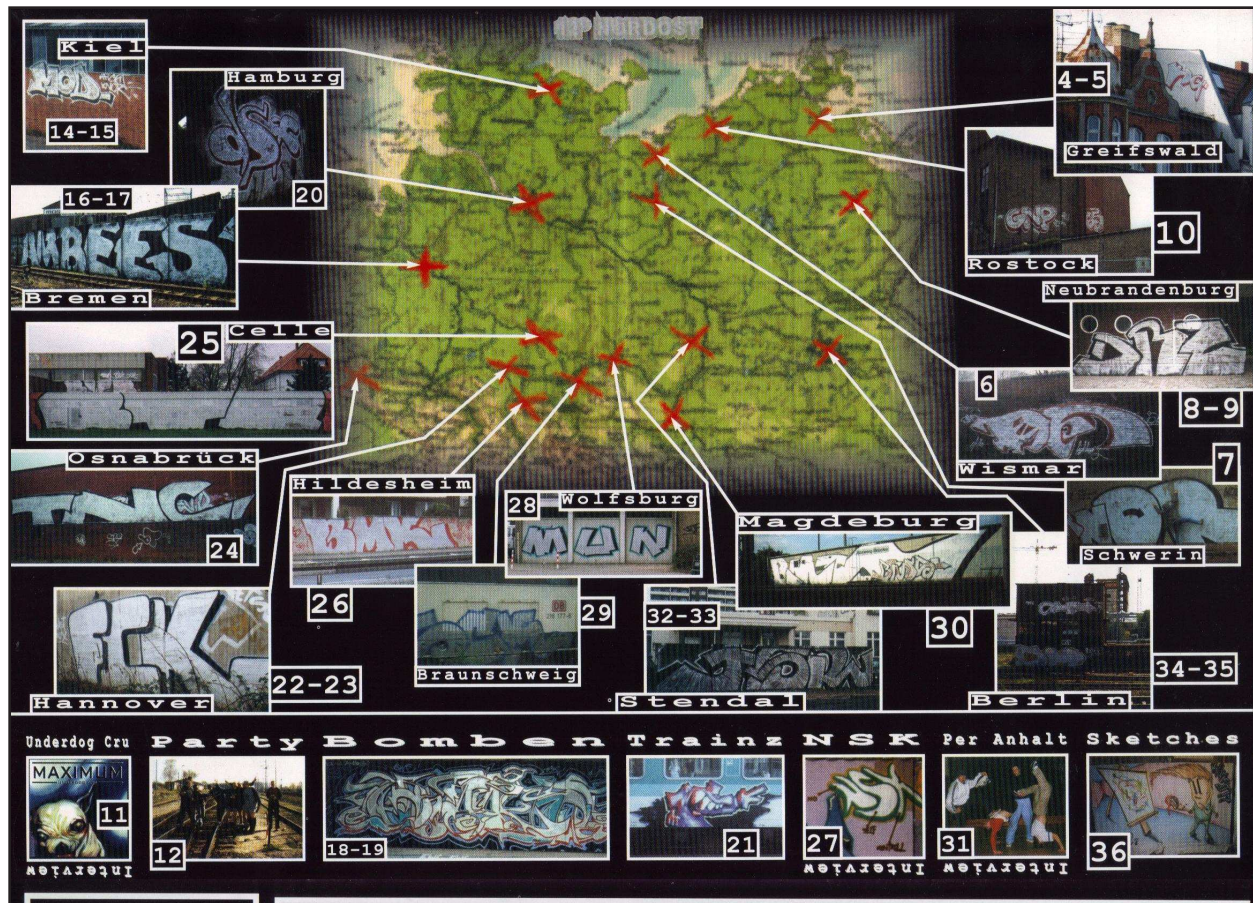


Figure 3.6 12<sup>th</sup> Nordost highlighted different small cities and towns in each issue.

was printed. An A4 sheet has an aspect ratio of about 1.41:1; a full spread thus comes in at about 2.82:1. (Standard television and computer monitors are 1.33:1, while films are usually projected at 2.41:1). This was a felicitous situation for the early graffiti fanzines, as the photographs they ran were almost always of train cars and Halls of Fame — imminently horizontal features of the urban landscape. A typical Berlin U-Bahn car has a length of about 17.5m and a height of 2.5m; cropped closely, four of them could be stacked per page and eight arrayed on a spread, but if the photos were taken from further away, sixteen cars might be shown on a spread. One magazine I read had even made a special issue with double fold-out spreads — over a meter wide altogether, a veritable railyard, with trains running off the edges of both sides of my desk. Again, this horizontality — linked to the transit systems — is part of rhizomatic worldview expressed through graffiti in this era.

Specific examples from Backjumps are explored below. Taken alone, the fact that graffiti was most evident on horizontally oriented landscape elements and that graffiti fanzines tended to have landscape formats might be interpreted as coincidental, trivial, or even tautological. But, as I will show later in this chapter, when the most influential graffiti magazine in Berlin changed to a vertical format, this format change corresponded to a change in the conception of what graffiti (and street art) can and should be in the urban environment. The change to a vertical format brought corresponded not only to an interest in the vertical plane but, therefore, brought into focus a heretofore latent volumetric dimension to graffiti and street art.

### 1994-1999: *BACKJUMPS* FANZINE

I am not going to offer a full, close reading of every issue of *Backjumps* — that would be neither possible nor useful. But I am going to look closely at several moments in its pages and in its history in order to demonstrate the opportunities for understanding the evolution of the graffiti subculture and its place in the city. By offering close readings of the magazine's visual and textual content, in its urban context, I aim to show how such a reading opens up ways for understanding the impact of graffiti on space and the vision certain graffiti writers had of — and for — the city. Some important questions already came up when considering the front and back covers of *Backjumps* #1, and Nabi's editor's letter in that issue is the best place to proceed. Here is the text in its entirety:

*Nun ja, hier ist nun die 1. Ausgabe der Backjumps. Wurde auch langsam Zeit. Ick will hier einen IntroText hin slamin, aber mein Kopp ist ziemlich leer vom janzen rumjearbeite. Da ist so vieles, was ick sagen will, was wir mit dem Mag rüberbringen wollen, aber dafür jetzt keenen Kopp hob. Ick werd's mal probieren. Unser HauptZiel ist es, den Leuten aus dem Movement ein Mag zu geben, wat ihnen ouch wat bringt, denn unserer Meinung nach reichen Fotos allein nicht. Wat wissen wir denn schon, über die Bewegung und ihren Ursprung?..! Wie Doc (tc5) schon mal gesagt: „.. um zu wissen, wo es hingeht, musst du erstmal wissen, woher es kommt (oder sowas ähnliches)“. Also werden wir versuchen, so viel uns möglich, auch im schriftlichen Bereich uns zu bewegen (es fehlen uns leider immer noch genug gute Leute, die schreiben können). Es spricht auch wirklich nichts dagegen, ab und zu mal 'ne SpezialAusgabe zu machen, wo nur Fotos drinne sind. Aber immer nur Fotos und ab und zu mal ein lausiges Interview ist doch für'n Arsch, oder? Respect to allen Mags, die*



*es vor uns gepeilt haben. Bla, Bla, Bla und vieles mehr — wie gesagt, der Kopp ist leer. Out.*

[Well, here now is the 1st issue of Backjumps. It's about time. I want to slam an intro in here, but my head is a bit empty from the whole slog. There's so much I want to say about what we want to make happen with the mag, but for now I just don't have the head for it. I'll give it a try. Our main goal is to give the people from the movement a mag that also tells them something, because in our opinion photos alone aren't enough. What do we really know about the movement and its origins?! As Doc (tc5) once said: "in order to know where it's going, you must first know where it comes from (or something like that)." So we're going to try, to the extent we can, to work in the textual realm (unfortunately we never have enough people who can write). Though there's nothing to be said against having a special issue with only photos every once in a while. But always only photos and now and then a lousy interview sucks, too, right? Respect to all the mags that have come before us. Blah, blah, blah and much more — as mentioned, my head is empty. Out.]

For someone with an "empty" head, Nabi manages to convey a tremendous amount in these few lines, as much through his style and tone as through his overt content. Nabi's unguarded language is typical of fanzines' tendency to establish an "affective alliance between fanzine writer and reader" (Haynes, 1995, p. 77). But more interestingly, even a reader who had not looked at the back cover would understand that this publication places itself in Berlin. In the third sentence, there are no fewer than four instances of Berlin dialect: *ick*, instead of the standard German *ich* [I]; *Kopp* for *Kopf* [head]; *janzen* for *ganzen* [whole, all]; and *rumjearbeite* [slog, in my translation above], which could be more literally translated as "work'd 'round" and has no equivalent at all in standard German. Numerous other instances of Berlinerisch occur throughout the paragraph. Clearly, Nabi is signally his credibility and membership within a linguistic community (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Stockburger, 2011), but for our purposes here it is important to recognize that this community is associated with a specific geography. Meanwhile, Nabi also uses numerous terms drawn from American urban slang: *slamin*, *Respect*, *out*, even *Mag* as a designation for his project. The contribution from Doc (tc5) that Nabi refers to is in fact printed in its original English — it is only here in the editor's note that Nabi gives an approximate translation of its key message back into German. Prior research on German fanzines has suggested that "linguistically, fanzine texts are basically colloquial standard German,"

albeit with a “particular style resulting both from their lexicon and idiomatic usage (music jargon, youth slang), and from various orality features (e.g., conversational formulae, discourse markers, spellings representing colloquial speech)” (Androutsopoulos, 2000, p. 520). *Backjumps*, at least in the first lines of its first issue, seems to belie these conclusions, or at least beg a refinement of them that draws attention to geographies in general and specifically to a Berlin-US vector of co-identification and exchange.

That vector is not merely hinted at linguistically. Nabi writes that *Backjumps* will have a pedagogic component (“a mag that also tells them something”). The lesson materials will be both written and visual (“photos alone aren’t enough”), though the centrality of the visual is acknowledged (“there’s nothing to be said against having a special issue with photos once in a while”). In fact, the interaction between photos and texts, and especially the way this interaction reveals a spatial sensibility, are what I will argue is the most important part of *Backjumps* and its influence on graffiti practice in Berlin.

What *Backjumps* sets out to teach readers, starting from this first issue, is the history of “the movement.” *Backjumps* will be both prospective and retrospective — in fact, it claims to be prospective by being retrospective, an approach captured in Doc’s railyard koan (“in order to know where it’s going, you must first know where it comes from (or something like that)”). And the history that readers of *Backjumps* will be told, they begin to learn within a couple pages, is that of what is constructed as the golden age of graffiti writing in New York in the 1970s and 1980s. The letter from Doc (TC5) is not just pedantic in tone; he literally assigns readers homework:

My trip to Berlin, artistically, has been quite a revelation. On a global scale, I [sic] that something that started in the 5 boroughs of N.Y. has grown all over in a positive way. They say in life, that to truly understand you must see with your own eyes. I came, I saw...and I am proud to say the scene is very legit. In the past I have dissed the international graf scene, but after seeing it myself the only difference is the lack of knowledge of history. Once the international scene catches up on the history it will be lethal. But you must understand me, the international scene is only 50% responsible for its lack of knowledge of graf history, because the initial exposure was

on a commercial level. But the other 50% is the responsibility of the artist to learn the history. To know where you are going, you must know where you have been. So for homework, lesson #1 you must learn about - Slave and Slug (Fab Five), Butch and Case2 (TFP), Kade and Chain3 (TMT), Part1 and Kool131 (TDS).

Doc's analysis is telling. The scene in Berlin is "very legit," lacking only a knowledge of history. Doc's prescription, reiterated by Nabi in the editor's letter, is to learn the history, specifically by studying the styles of a number of key figures he selects. But what is fascinating is that Doc does not need to tell readers that these figures are from New York. Readers who had encountered only the most famous documents of New York graffiti culture at that time would have heard of Doc himself, along with Slave and Slug (who were all featured in Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's 1984 book *Subway Art*) as well as Case2 (a.k.a., Kase2, featured in the film *Style Wars*).

Even more interesting for the present discussion is the way text and images interact on the page to signal the spatial aspects of the history lesson. Doc's letter, handwritten and in its original English, is cut in half, its two parts pasted at the top and bottom of a full-bleed photograph. The photograph is unlabeled, but is taken from the platform of an elevated train station, with the tracks, a train, and a row of lamps converging toward a vanishing point in the distance, near which we see several modernist high-rise apartment buildings. Readers might immediately recognize this as the New York City subway, famous from *Style Wars* and myriad other mediatized representations. But the attentive reader would also notice that in the foreground of the photo, the train's line number and terminus are just visible: this is the 1 line bound for Van Cortlandt Park [Figure 3.7]. Well-traveled readers may have known instantly, but anyone could have found out easily, that not only is this New York, this is the Bronx, the legendary birthplace of modern graffiti and the greater hip-hop movement. The history that Doc (and Nabi) are insisting Berlin graffiti writers learn is not just a history of graffiti writing styles; if that were the case, it would have been sufficient to print Doc's letter with examples of the work of writers like Slave, Slug, and Case2. The history is one that is tied up with a specific time and place; it is only comprehensible, so

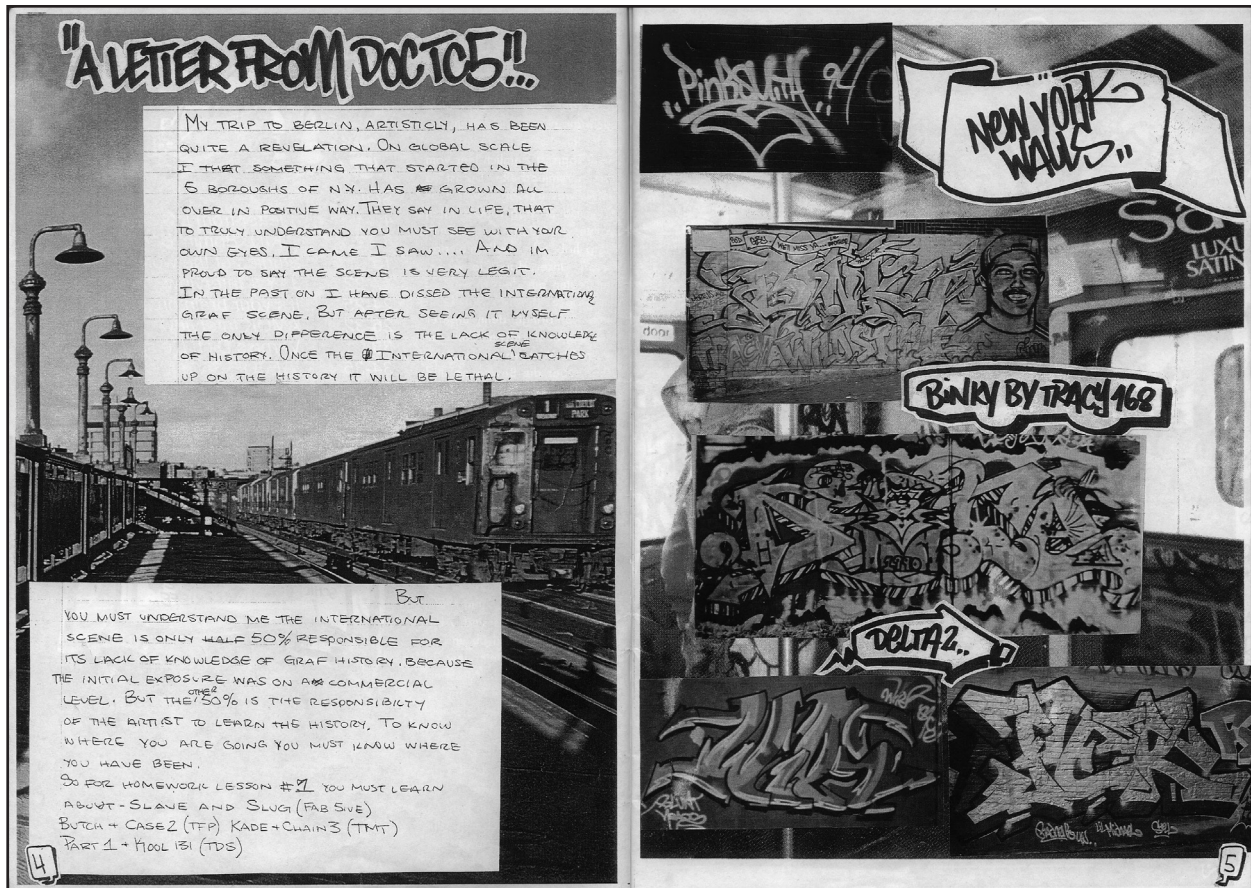


Figure 3.7 *Backjumps* featured words and imagery related to the graffiti scene in the Bronx.

the message seems to be, within its geographic context. And that geographic context is not simply “the 5 boroughs of N.Y.,” if that were the case, a generic establishing image of the Statue of Liberty or the Empire State Building would have sufficed. Instead, readers are given a partly explicit, partly implicit injunction to paint as the writers of the Bronx did: with intimate knowledge of their immediate urban context, with the transit system both in the foreground and defining the greater landscape.

The implicit nature of the message is caught up with the visual mode of representation. The image of the train platform merely shows; it does not tell. But the image has the power to instruct, in this case on two levels: at the level of reference or allusion, which would resonate only with those in the know, and at the level of teaching people *how to see*, which





Figure 3.8 *Backjumps* offered readers regular opportunities to compare Berlin with New York City.

is relevant to all readers. At the first level, readers who had seen films like *Style Wars*, read Henry Chalfant's books, or otherwise already engaged with New York graffiti culture might have understood the reference to the trains of the Bronx, and might have remembered how writers in the Bronx in the '70s and '80s had sophisticated knowledge of the transit system's layups, schedules, and security measures, as well as the visibility and accessibility of other paintable surfaces in the neighborhood. But at the second level, all readers were at the very least being taught a way of viewing the city. Elevated and yet flat, the view hints at the panoptic position of power while remaining grounded, the great depth established through perspective encompassing an expansive area that is nevertheless composed of modest elements like a subway platform and train tracks. And surprisingly, in a city with one of the most dense concentrations of famous landmarks in the world, the viewer's



attention is directed not at some architectural icon but at the nondescript rooftops of a working-class neighborhood.

Facing Doc's letter is another collage of several examples of style writing, this time labelled "New York Walls." The label is helpful because it would not otherwise be clear from the closely cropped photos where the pieces were made. Oddly, the background of the collage seems to be the interior of a subway car — the paintings made on exterior walls somewhere in New York are placed, in this collage, back inside the subway. The point seems to be that all New York graffiti must still in some fundamental sense be understood to be train writing. The entire spread — Doc's letter and its background and the facing page of "New York Walls" — presents somewhat paradoxical lessons about graffiti in New York: it is *of* the subway in an inextricable, historical sense, but it is not limited to it; and it is *of* the city, and yet not the easily identifiable skyline of Manhattan but rather the comparatively anonymous skyline of the Bronx; it is elevated and empowered, taking in vast territory, and yet it is hard at work among the industrial clang along the train tracks.

How exactly were Berlin graffiti writers to interpret these lessons? An answer of a sort is given on the very next spread. There, on the verso, a collage emphasizes the Berlin transit system: one shot includes the platform at Yorckstraße, another an unidentified platform with a fully-tagged ticket automat and newspaper kiosk. The collage on the recto is labelled "Berlin Walls" and includes close-ups of five pieces, with what appears to be a page of a comic book serving as the background [Figure 3.8]. The parallelism in the two spreads is obvious, but not exact — and the differences are telling. Where the Bronx trainscape is presented with expansive perspective, the shot of Yorckstraße is no more than a few meters wide and a few meters deep. And the cartoon that forms the backdrop to the "Berlin Walls" spread includes a figure, slouched and sweating, with a speech bubble verbalizing his exasperation: "Godamn'!" [sic]. The cause of the figure's exasperation is

not clear; perhaps he's bowled-over with the high quality of the pieces, perhaps overcome with disappointment. The entire composite of the spread presents a view of graffiti writing in Berlin that is simultaneously proud and defeated, simultaneously of its place and yet spatially constrained.

When other Germanophone graffiti zines praised the culture's New York roots, they did not always present such stark lessons for the local scene, nor were they quite as concerned with geographic specifics. A 1992 issue of *14K*, out of Zürich, was devoted entirely to New York — without comparisons to Zürich — and celebrated New York writers who had gone “all city” as opposed to those who were more closely linked to the cradle of the culture, the Bronx. The opening two-page spread there also includes a collage of text, photos, reference to the transit system, and a map, but the map, though it is reoriented with east at the top, is of Manhattan — the borough with perhaps the least claim to hip-hop's roots. And the train line featured is, for some reason, the Manhattan-Queens 7 line [Figure 3.9]. While there is a similar nostalgic, even elegiac tone in the intro piece (the decline in train writing, the suicide of a well-known New York writer), there are no interviews throughout the rest of the issue, and when places like “Long Island” and “Harlem” are used to label a few later photos, those labels serve more to evoke general associations with certain areas rather than to actually place the corresponding photos on a map. It is not likely that Nabi and Poet had seen this issue of *14K* — it had a run of just 1100 copies, presumably distributed almost exclusively in Switzerland — but it is nevertheless an example of the kind of approach being taken by other magazines, and an indicator of how distinctive *Backjumps* was. This distinctiveness may have been subtle to a lay reader, but would likely not have been subtle to active members of the graffiti subculture or other readers attentive to the visual cues of the 20th-century metropolis.

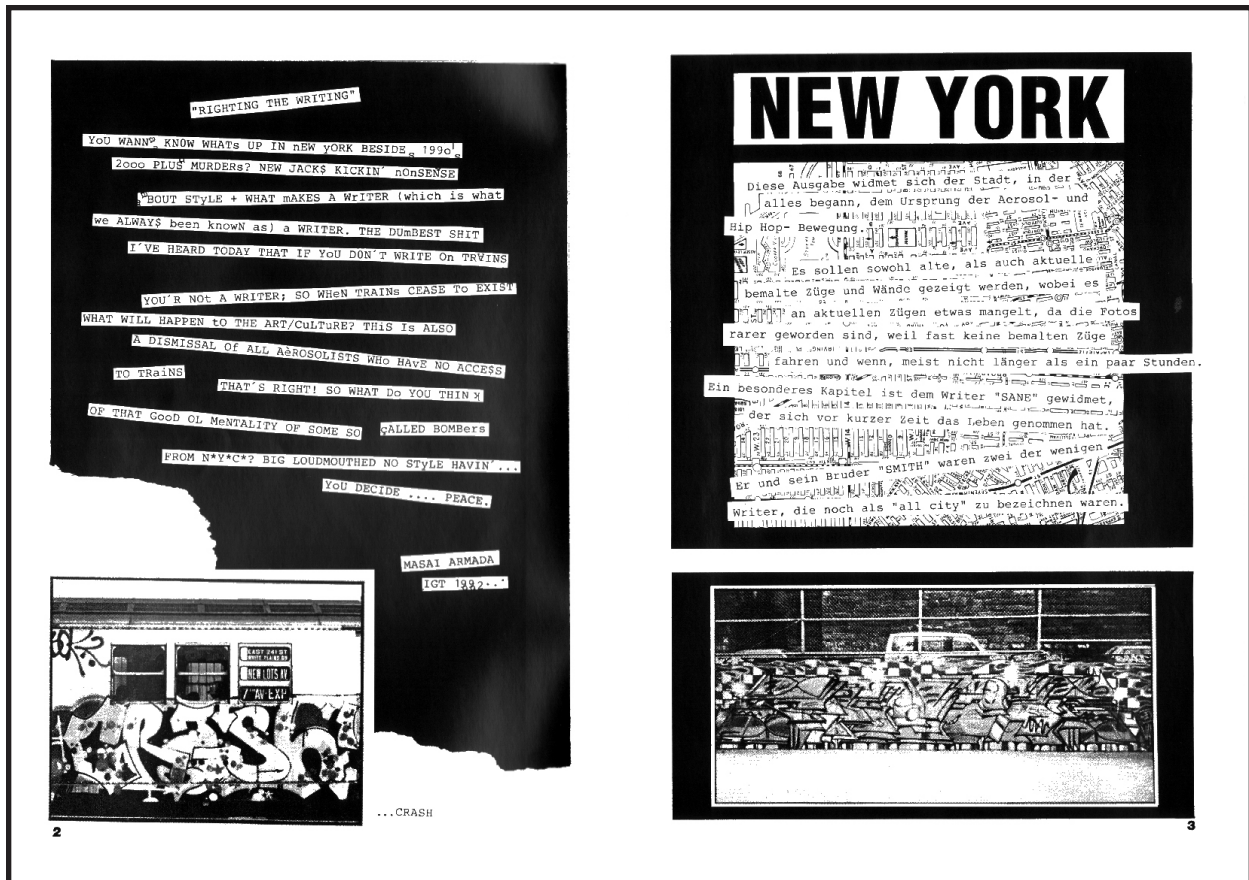


Figure 3.9 Other zines, like 14K, out of Switzerland, referenced New York with less precision than *Backjumps* did.

And so the juxtaposition between the two spreads in *Backjumps* — the spatial ambition evident in the Bronx against the spatial constraint of Yorckstraße — represents, I argue, a potential difference of tremendous cultural voltage. If *Backjumps* envisioned a Berlin graffiti scene like that of the Bronx, and if the Bronx's was confined neither to subways nor walls, then Berlin's would, someday and somehow, have to change. It would literally have to expand its frame of reference and the purview of its practice. The course and ramifications of that expansion — for graffiti writers, graffiti readers, and the city — are what this chapter explores.

Before leaving Doc's letter altogether there is one more detail to examine. Doc says Berliners were only 50% responsible for their ignorance of history because their

understanding had come only through “initial exposure on a commercial level.” Presumably Doc is referring to various fashion brands, music videos, films, and marketing campaigns — maybe even also to *Subway Art* and *Style Wars* — which had co-opted and disseminated graffiti aesthetics worldwide (e.g., Lombard, 2013). Perhaps the founders of *Backjumps* shared Doc’s non-commercial ideal. But this first issue was the last that would be entirely free of advertisements. The number and variety of advertisements printed in subsequent issues of *Backjumps* is itself a strand of the story that will unfold throughout the rest of this chapter about the relationship between the magazine, the practice of writing graffiti, and the city. If I have spent considerable time on just the first few pages of the first issue of *Backjumps*, it is to illustrate the way a close, contextualized reading of this pillar of Berlin graffiti culture can help understand the way in which graffiti takes place in the city.

There is a risk of overreading the intentions of the editors here. It is possible Nabi, Poet, and their partners just found what they thought as an attractive photo of a New York City train platform. It is possible that the handmade, collage elements of the layout — which Nabi called “copyshop style” (Celik, 2004) — were not part of a conscious, anti-establishment aesthetic and were rather only the result of lack of time, technology, or experience (Atton, 2010). But whatever the intent, I argue that *Backjumps* can be *read* as promoting a particular way of doing graffiti in the city that is inseparable from a way of viewing the city.

The second issue contains several reinforcing and refining instances of the Berlin-New York dynamic that characterized this early phase and are worth highlighting. It opens with an editor’s statement that introduces further installments of the New York history curriculum and also a moral admonition. Here is the first part of the statement:

*Yo, here we go again...Dit hat zwar ne’ Weile gedauert aber hier isse “Backjumps Nr. 2” In Zukunft wird sich dit doch ändern, hoffentlich, und “Backjumps” wird alle 2-3 Monate erscheinen. In dieser Ausgabe erzählt RAC7 [New York] in einem ausführlichen Text, wie es zur 156 Crew kam. WESP [Berlin] verteilt in seinem Text noch ein Paar*

*Arschritte und ihr erfahrt mehr über die Berliner Writercrew - "T2B." Ebenfalls dabei ist "ZEPHYR," der euch von New York "back in da days" erzählt. Wusstet ihr schon das [sic] "ODEM" Psychiater ist. Wenn nicht, dann müsst ihr euch auf alle Fälle den Artikel reinziehen. (Aber es ist nicht alles Gold was glänzt auch bei möchte-gerne Psychiater "Odem" nicht. An dieser Stelle noch was in eigener Sache: die nächste "Backjumps" wird ein "Berlin-Train Special" mit unveröffentlichten "Burnern" wovon ihr garantiert Augenschmerzen bekommt. Also chek your local "D" coming out soon!*

[Yo, here we go again...That took a while but here's "Backjumps Nr. 2." In the future this with change, hopefully, and "Backjumps" will come out every 2-3 months. In this issue, RAC7 [New York] tells in an extended text how the 156 crew came to be. In his text WESP [Berlin] doles out a few kicks in the ass and you learn more about the Berlin writer crew T2B. ZEPHYR is in there and tells about New York 'back in da days.' Did you know that ODEM is a psychiatrist? If not, then you definitely have to check out that article. (But not all that glitters is gold, not even with wannabe-psychiatrists like ODEM.) Here a bit more about our own matters: the next "Backjumps" will be a "Berlin Train Special" with unpublished "burners" which are guaranteed to make your eyes bleed. So check your local 'D' coming out soon!]

At this time, the print run was 3,000 copies, and Nabi and associates handled distribution themselves, often through one-off events like art shows or parties, so the idea that readers might simply be able to check their local dealers for forthcoming issues was a sign of their ambitions. In any case, RAC7 and ZEPHYR pick up where Doc left off, elaborating on the social, spatial, and stylistic characteristics of their New York scenes. Both interviews are printed in both their original English and German, making them accessible to locals, Berlin's sizeable English-speaking community, and any other non-Germans for whom English might have been the international lingua franca. RAC7's interview focuses more on crew dynamics and style ("You really wanna make [arrows] look suave"). ZEPHYR, on the other hand, places nearly all of the elements of his story in their geographical context ("When the first wave exploded riding the subway became a carnival. Graffiti became the passion of young kids like me throughout the city. ... It was the mid 70's and I was attending school in the Bronx. The #1 yard was right there - 242nd Street and Van Cortlandt Park. Around the neighborhood I met some of the local writers. ... Around this time my friends and I were hanging out behind the bandshell in Central Park at 72nd street.") And while his featured pieces are presented in a close-cropped grid, his portrait echoes the image included with Doc's letter in the prior issue: a slightly elevated, wide-angle shot of train tracks and a long



depth of field [Figures 3.10 and 3.11]. ZEPHYR himself, in three-quarter portrait, gazes out across his domain. Again, the message is that in the Bronx graffiti writers' perspectives took in the entire city.

It is curious, then, that Nabi did not also call attention to the geographic components of the ODEM article that follows. ODEM sets up an explicit parallel between the "golden age" in New York and the Berlin present, and Berlin does not benefit by the comparison:

*1974 N.Y.C.*

*Einige Jugendliche sind gerade dabei eine außergewöhnliche Kunst- und Lebensform zu entwickeln.....Sie leben einfach ihr Umfeld und ihren "groove" aus.....Sie halten der ganzen Stadt einen Spiegel vor.....Faszinierend, kreativ und genauso hart und rücksichtslos, wie die Menschen der Stadt es mit ihnen gemacht hatten...Einmalig und genial...*

*1994 BERLIN*

*Einige Jugendliche sind gerade dabei eine ganze Kultur zu übernehmen; zu "bitten"...Sie tauschen ihre Kultur aus gegen eine, die aus einer ganz anderen Welt stammt. Es muß ja nicht unbedingt negativ sein.....aber kaum einer versucht etwas eigenes, persönliches daraus zu machen.*

[1974 N.Y.C.

Some kids are in the process of developing an extraordinary form of art and life..... They're just living out their environments and their "groove".....They hold a mirror up to the whole city....Fascinating, creative, giving it back just as hard and recklessly as they had taken it...Unique and brilliant...

1994 BERLIN

Some kids are in the process of borrowing an entire culture; of "biting"...They trade their own culture for one that comes from a completely different world. This doesn't necessarily have to be bad.....but hardly anyone is trying to make something of his own out of it, something personal.]

[I have rendered my own English translation, which I believe is an improvement on the one that ran in the issue. Ellipses in original.] ODEM's assessment is rooted largely in a romanticized view of the graffiti practice in New York in the 70s. But his diagnosis is not that Berliners should attempt to recreate the New York of two decades prior. In fact, he seems to be saying that they are already trying to do that, and that the result is an unoriginal, decontextualized appropriation. He is saying that something good could come of being *inspired* by the "kids" in New York, if only the "kids" in Berlin were to "make... something personal out of it." ODEM does not explain exactly how to do this; the bulk of



Figure 3.10 ZEPHYR's pieces are shot close up...

his article is a rambling diatribe against the “half-serious,” “ridiculous,” “stupid,” “wannabe” graffiti writers he sees in Berlin. But it is clear by the end of his article that, in his eyes, the way to make the best and most “personal” graffiti is to do it with an authentic sense of one’s geographic context:

*Die “style-wars” von New York sind vorbei seit sie nicht mehr auf den Zügen ausgetragen werden. In ihrem Eifer glauben die Berliner sie müßten auch die Berliner Züge voll sprühen...so ‘n Quatsch. [...] Berlin ist Berlin, NY. ist N.Y. und ich hoffe das [sic] es auch immer so bleibt. Hier gibt es kein Ghetto oder teilst du dir dein Bett mit Ratten und Kakerlaken, hast’ne cracksüchtige Mutter [...] Vergiß dieses dumms Ghetto-Gequatsche und sei froh, daß es nicht so ist. Denke nach über das, was du tust, sei dein eigenes Original.*



Figure 3.11 ...while his interview is printed with long shots.

[The New York "style wars" have been over since they stopped being carried out on trains. In their eagerness, Berliners think they also have to spray the trains...such crap. [...] Berlin is Berlin and N.Y. is N.Y. and I hope it stays like that forever. There's no ghetto here, or else you'd be sharing your bed with rats and cockroaches and have a crack-addicted mom [...] Forget this stupid ghetto talk and be happy that it's not like that. Think about what you're doing, be your own original.]

ODEM's umbrella, rather harsh characterization of "ghetto" life is probably of its time. But that notwithstanding, his point is clear: even in New York, graffiti practices have changed as the urban context has changed; Berliners should do the same, recognizing the



characteristics of their city and painting with them, rather than emulating a practice that is obsolete even in its place of origin.

I mentioned above that Nabi's editorial statement in issue #2 included a "moral admonition." Here is the conclusion of his statement:

*Und nicht vergessen, Writing ist ein Teil der Hip-Hop Kultur und nicht eine auszunehmende Bitch, wie manche annehmen, die sich kurz ein paar Jahre damit beschäftigen um die Strukturen der Scene abzuchecken, um dann auf den Zug aufzuspringen und den Kids die Kohlen aus den Taschen zu ziehen. Nimmst du etwas aus der Kultur, solltest du ihr auch etwas zurückgeben, sonst ist irgendwann nichts mehr da. ... Peace*

[And don't forget, writing is a part of hip-hop culture and not a bitch to be ripped off, like a lot of people think, people who take a couple short years to check out the structures of the scene and then jump on the bandwagon and steal the kids' lunch money. If you take something from the culture, you should also give something back, otherwise at some point there's nothing more there. ... Peace.]

Nabi's message, expressed with typical subtlety, is somewhat remarkable. He turns the heroic, ego-oriented framing of graffiti practice found in some other graffiti zines — and, as in ODEM's essay, occasionally in *Backjumps* — around and actually reprimands writers who do not recognize the social, cooperative nature of the subculture. He reminds readers that graffiti is part of something bigger. And he presents graffiti as a precious cultural resource, one that might soon be exhausted if we continue to exploit it but which could remain fecund if we steward it properly and "give something back." While as mentioned above, sentiments like these might be expected in zines that serve as subcultural safe spaces, I believe they contain within them the seeds of two important distinctions relevant to the story I want to tell here. First, Nabi recognizes and underscores graffiti's creative, constructive capacity. It is not, or at least in his view, ought not to be a kind of cultural onanism or worse, theft. It is certainly not to be destructive, in contrast to the way the media (and some graffiti writers themselves) have framed it (see Chapter 2). The idea the graffiti writers can be stewards of something was an important concept for Nabi, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, for many others involved in the scene. Second, Nabi's reminder that graffiti is part of the greater hip-hop culture foreshadows the role he will find for graffiti in the city overall.

To examine every photo spread, editorial, interview, and article in every issue of *Backjumps* with the depth I have so far would yield diminishing returns. Much of the verbal tone and content remained more or less consistent throughout the first 16 issues, through 1999. But it is possible to witness *Backjumps* evolving trajectory by homing in a few characteristics and plotting how they changed over the years. These changes were not always linear and were sometimes seemingly superficial, but taken in sum they illustrate the magazine's evolving worldview and ambition. The first of these characteristics is advertising.

As mentioned above, Issue #1 was the only issue to have no advertisements. By Issue #3, the editor's note was used, in part, to declare that "*die einzige wahre Writershop*" ["the only true writer shop"] in Berlin was Madflavor. As Haynes observed of football zines in the UK, zines often served to form closer connections between retail shops and their customers (1995). But in the case of *Backjumps*, what began as a rather intimate and perhaps sincere form of mutual endorsement gradually evolved into something far for expansive and impersonal. By Issue #6, ads for Madflavor, Downstairs, Da Finest, and other Berlin shops appeared beside ads for graffiti and hip-hop-related retailers in further-flung German cities like Bremen, Hamburg, and Heilbronn. (In an apparent effort to emphasize its connections to hip-hop's roots, the ad for the store in Heilbronn gave its address as "Heilbronnx.") In the double Issue #9/10, there was a quarter-page ad for a store in the actual Bronx. By this point the magazine had started paying honorariums and was "able to sustain itself financially" (Bauer & Nabi, 2007, p.15). Advertisement revenue from around the country, and increasingly around the world, must have been the primary reason for this. But these ads, though proliferating, were limited to stores focused on graffiti (i.e., stores selling spray paint and other materials) or sometimes street apparel.



With issue #11, however, Nabi gave the magazine a new subtitle, a subtle change that nevertheless portended a major turning point in terms of scope. The magazine would now be *Backjumps: Aerosol Culture & More*. The full impacts of this change were not immediately apparent; Issue #11 still featured numerous of close-ups of pieces on walls and trains, still included articles like a nostalgic report by Crash about New York in the 1970s. But Issue #11 was also the first to include ad for an *art gallery*, which happened to be in New York; the gallery placed ads for the next five issues. Other galleries advertised in subsequent issues as well, and in Issue #15 there were ads for multiple “creativity” agencies in Berlin. Even as the pages of *Backjumps* had become a platform for businesses with less direct connection to graffiti’s underground, all of these businesses had specific locations. They were of certain places, even if they knew that it was important to be seen in the now-more-widely known and distributed *Backjumps*. In Issue #16, however, included advertisements for brands like Stabilo (pens and markers), Montana and Felton (spray cans), and Carhartt (apparel), which, given their international distribution, were effectively placeless. (The ads listed no addresses, for example. “So check your local ‘D’ coming out soon!”) To judge by the advertisements alone, over the course of five years, the magazine went from a more or less local, non-commercial outlet focused on stewardship of subcultural heritage to a platform for an international, consumerist lifestyle.

But the reader of *Backjumps* had more to digest than ads. Throughout this period of growing commercialization, the magazine also began to more explicitly look at urban features other than trains, and to link graffiti practice with political engagement and the image of the city. One early and enduring focus was on legal walls, or Halls of Fame. Already in Issue #2, the interview with T2B crew links quality of pieces to available surfaces. “*Leider ist sehr viel nur silber und quick mäßig, aber wenn unser Senat mehr legale Plätze schaffen würde, dann würde sich das Stadtbild ändern und viele Leute würden schöne bunte Bilder machen*” [Unfortunately a lot of it only silver and quickly done, but if

our Senate were to make more legal places, then the image of the city would change, and a lot people would make beautiful, colorful paintings] (p.26). While these has always been some ambivalence among graffiti writers about the provision of sites for legal painting (see Chapter 4), a recurring theme in the pages of the magazine is for decriminalization of the practice (see Chapter 2). More interesting than the call for “*legale Plätze*,” however, is the argument linking legal writing to a transformation of the entire *Stadtbild*, which would in turn result in more aesthetically pleasing writing (“beautiful, colorful paintings”). T2B crew is at the very least arguing for graffiti as a tool of urban upgrading. As we will see throughout the rest of the chapter, this is a possibility that the *Backjumps* project steadily began to embrace before ultimately realizing its limits and downsides.

But the sequence of events in T2B’s statement is telling. It is not that legality would bring beauty, which would change the image of the city, but that first the image of the city would change, and then beauty would follow. How the image of the city would change is at best implicit. In subsequent issues, other interviews and editorial statements began to sporadically unfolded a more detailed image of the city and of the magazine’s complicated role in shaping it. ESHER, interviewed in Issue #5, explained,

*Die Stadt Berlin ist das Medium, die Leinwand; man braucht sie sich nur anzusehen, die Straßen, die Züge, die S-Bahnstrecken, die Rooftops, die Halls of Fame. Was ich nicht glaube ist, daß Magazines repräsentativ sind. Magazine drucken die Pieces, die den Machern der Magazine am nächsten sind. Man sollte also nicht dem Irrtum verfallen zu denken, weil der ein oder andere viele Pieces in Magazine hat, ist er der härteste Bomber. Im Gegenteil, hinter dem beschränkten Horizont, dem einen die Magazine liefern, geht es noch eine ganze Ecke weiter.*

The city of Berlin is the medium, the canvas, we only need to watch it, the streets, the trains, the S-Bahn lines, the rooftops, the halls of fame. I don’t think that magazines are representative. Magazines features those pieces that producers of the mag had closest at hand. One shouldn’t succumb to the confused idea that because someone or other has a lot of pieces in magazines, he’s the hardest bomber. On the contrary, behind the limited horizon that one gets from the magazines, there’s a whole other world.

ESHER's message echoes that of the photo spread in the first issue, but puts into words what was only suggested visually there: the entire city presents a substrate for graffiti writers' creative practice. Neither specific landmarks, nor neighborhoods, nor even specific streets, but "the streets" in general fall under his gaze. The view of the city as a *tabula rasa* is the source of graffiti's liberatory and disruptive force. If these words came from someone in a position of power or, say, an architect modernist planner, they might seem insensitive and entitled, dangerous attitudes that could lead to socially disastrous slum clearance or urban renewal via freeway construction. But ESHER is not presenting a single new idea for the entire city; in fact, it is the opposite. He is saying that the new ideas are already out there, distributed across the landscape, and we will recognize them only by adopting a toposensitive lens. He uses a telling spatial idiom in his last sentence, which I have translated as "a whole other world." The German idiom "*eine ganze Ecke*" means "a lot" but would translate literally to "a whole corner." To the German reader, then, ESHER is making a kind of pun: there is a lot more beyond the photos in magazines, including actual corners of the city, the "writer's corners" of the graffiti scene.

By the last issues of this phase of *Backjumps*, a generalized call for toposensitivity began to morph into specific illustrations of it. While many issues in these early years included photos from Halls of Fame, those photos were almost always cropped tightly on the piece and therefore all but entirely decontextualized. This fits in a way with the "whole other world," rhizomatic understanding of graffiti's proliferation presented earlier — if pieces can be anywhere, they can be everywhere. And yet slowly this began to change. Issue #11 has a page on rooftops, the first feature on any kind of urban feature other than trains or Halls of Fame. These photos also include, perhaps by necessity, much more of the spatial context of the graffiti pieces [Figure 3.12]. There is nothing especially remarkable about this spread on any of the images in it, but it shows the magazine beginning to "zoom out,"



Figure 3.12 Later issues began to focus on urban features other than trains and rail infrastructure.

to show, in Berlin, a purview that took in something of the visual scope of that suggested by the photo of the Bronx in the very first issue which I focused on above.

Soon, the specificity of other sites in Berlin also began to receive more attention. In Issue #13, from late 1997, "Jimmy's Page," which functioned as a sort of secondary editor's letter, was devoted to a eulogy for the Hallesches Tor Hall of Fame. This essay is remarkable for several reasons. First, it marked the first full-throated defense of a graffiti site not on grounds of the quality of the works of art that appeared there or even because of the creative outlet they provided. Rather, Jimmy emphasizes Hallesches Tor's importance as a social space with a singular atmosphere:

The Hall of Fame had a very special atmosphere because it was located in the middle of a high-rise complex, one was painting so to speak in the courtyard. ... The Hall

of Fame was also a meeting point in the summertime and a great alternative to the corner at Friedrichstrasse (later Yorckstrasse). As soon as it got warmer people met there and hung out with 30-50 writers. Some philosophized about style and the rest of the world over a sip of beer or a joint. ... Writers exchanged ideas and got to know each other better by that. Which is very important for a functioning machinery, I think....Writers from all over Europe and the USA got together and painted fat burners together, which only happened there. [Again, I have made some grammatical corrections to the English version that ran in the original magazine.]

Almost off-handedly, he links the site's physical properties to its ability to stimulate convivial relations between graffiti writers. This was not a good thing for its own sake, pleasant as the mise-en-scene he describes may sound; it was important for the "functioning machinery" of the very culture, from mutual creative stimulus to transnational cooperation. This is the most direct echo of the lines from ZEPHYR, in the second issue, where he talked about the role played by specific sites in New York. The photos included of Hallesche Tor emphasize not pieces, but the overall setting and the people. In one, a visitor mugs for the camera; another emphasizes the courtyard, ringed by high-rises; in a third, apparently taken after demolition had begun, a lonely ping-pong table stands in for the now-vanished recreational thrum of the place [Figure 3.13]. Jimmy goes on to link the graffiti activity at Hallesches Tor to the evolving spatial politics of the city:

When Berlin boomed in 90-91, Hallesches Tor boomed too. ... I have to point out that when West Berlin was surrounded by the Wall there were no problems with walls to paint on because the Wall was always there to be used for that. Since the fall of the Wall serious problems with legal walls occurred. The Hall of Fame at Hallesches Tor was always more tolerated than really legal. Which takes us to the present. There is a battle going on in Berlin. Writers versus politicians. Who will get screwed has not been determined yet. Obviously, attempts have been made to eliminate the 'problem writing.' Thus it is no surprise that the Hall of Fame at Hallesches Tor was torn down, even though the people who live there tolerated and accepted it. Officials cited a law which predates the fall of the Wall: unused public space should be planted. In other words the Hall of Fames had to go for some flower beds. Consequently there is no official Hall of Fame at all anymore and the CDU politicians have gotten a little bit closer to their goal of destroying a place of tolerance.

Jimmy was writing in late 1997, during the acceleration of "broken windows" policing across the world. And yet he completely inverts that discourse, linking graffiti not to urban decline but to the "boom" following German reunification. The CDU, Germany's center-right party, has long cultivated a "tough on crime" image, but in Jimmy's telling, they are





Figure 3.13 A eulogy for a lost Hall of Fame.

thwarted by the difficulty of criminalizing graffiti directly and must rely on other, absurd legalistic measures in order to attempt to curtail graffiti. And yet while he decries the politicians' destruction of a "place of tolerance," he does not exactly paint graffiti writers as a persecuted population. In fact, they are presented as more or less equals engaged in a battle whose outcome is by no means certain. The politicians may have been able to tilt the field in their favor at Hallesches Tor, but the writers are in command of different fields, one of which is the pages of the magazine: "The next pages *Backjumps* will build back up for you what others destroyed. Because Hallesches Tor was not just any old Hall of Fame but it was the Hall of Fame of Berlin. Rest in peace."

The conclusion of Jimmy's eulogy marks a turning point for the magazine. What I have argued is that from the first issues up until this moment a somewhat subtextual current had linked *Backjumps*'s sense of history, its eye, its spatial awareness, its politics, its sense of its own role among Berlin graffiti writers, and its sense of its role with respect to the city itself. But here Jimmy states overtly that, first, graffiti can define certain spaces in the city on more than aesthetic grounds; second, that the spatial-political values of graffiti writers are valid based on norms of enlightened liberalism like free exchange, tolerance, and acceptance; third, that graffiti writers can and should engage with politicians and other power brokers to fight for these values; and last, that *Backjumps* the magazine can serve as a platform for building (or rebuilding) a city based on those values. As we are about to see, this overt statement set in motion a course of active engagement between the magazine and the city that would end up transforming them both in profound ways.

## 2001-2002: BACKJUMPS 2.0 GRAFFITI MAGAZINE

Jimmy's essay about Hallesches Tor dripped with social earnestness and political ambition. But as mentioned above, commercialism was also becoming an increasingly present feature of the magazine. Over the subsequent years, it would be the magazine's challenge to square its earnestness with the demands of commerce and its ambition with the opportunities afforded by "going big." After only three more issues, in 2000 the magazine passed another turning point, this time one that would have been obvious even to the casual and occasional reader. It gave itself a partial rechristening, along with a new, vertical format, far more pages, and dramatically improved production values. *Backjumps 2.0* also took a new subtitle: "Urban Communication and Aesthetics." As Jimmy retrospectively explained,

From here on, the magazine would present, embedded in a revolutionary new layout, varied topics such as street art, architecture, design and fashion in addition to its coverage of aerosol culture. As a magazine 'for grown-up graffiti writers,' it began to pursue themes that its readership (and the artists it had featured) had grown into, in both their professional and personal lives. (Bauer & Nabi, 2007, p. 15)

This explanation presents a curious blend of braggadocio and modesty. Though the layout was indeed different from the earlier incarnation of *Backjumps*, it is difficult to see what made it “revolutionary” (if anything, by adopting modern design techniques and software, it was more mainstream). And yet it also makes it sound as though *Backjumps* was merely catching up with its subculture, rather than setting a new agenda. Perhaps this assessment is refracted through the prism of hindsight, through 15 years of history in which the connections between “aerosol culture” and “varied topics such as street art, architecture, design and fashion” had to come be rather obvious to many. But according to people I spoke with who were involved in the scene at the time, *Backjumps* was ahead of its time in terms of street art. Had it come out ten years later, one person told me, it probably would have been a blockbuster. But as such, it instead was a bit premature for the street art craze and simultaneously managed to alienate a lot of its readers in the “hardcore” graffiti community. Indeed, Nabi predicted this response. “What happened to *Backjumps*?” he writes at the opening of the first editor’s note.

‘Progress’ is the answer to your question. Through constant interaction between activists and their environment, a culture is growing.

Our culture Aerosol was and has been the visually most obvious influence on the urban sphere. Its rapidly growing aesthetics and dynamics that have developed independently of mechanisms of the market and free from any outside rules now present themselves in so many areas (technology, graphics, architecture, fashion, art, advertising, etc.)

It is the fact that the format of the old *Backjumps* does not live up to our present understanding of the culture. After over thirty years of Aerosol culture, its influences reach far beyond the underground. This new format will enable *Backjumps* to accomplish what it could not do before, i.e., to create room and respect for individualism. Turbo-capitalism and mass production force any form of individualism to sink into anonymity. You have to go with the trend to be hip. Our magazine wants to give artists the possibility to break free from this ever faster spinning cycle for a moment, to pause in order to be able to be loud.

Using all the means of design that the digital age of media offers, *Backjumps* will document this new cultural progress with its now more mature understanding. Each edition will come with a CD-Rom that allows us to transport information with a different and more direct design.

Finally and most importantly, we thank all our faithful readers for supporting us over the years. You will get even more out of *Backjumps* than you were used to. Let the picture language take effect on you and you will realize that a little is a lot and a lot can be little. Enjoy!

The irony that this anti-capitalist cri de coeur followed a two-page spread for the apparel brand ecko, unltd., and introduced an issue that would have more ads than any before cannot have been lost on many readers. But Nabi's analysis of the development of "our culture Aerosol" over time, and *Backjumps's* role in that development is telling. After 30 years, its influences did reach far beyond the underground, in both senses of the term. Aerosol art was no longer limited to a subculture and no longer limited to the subways. The horizontality that defined the magazine's design and worldview earlier was, flatly, two-dimensional. In order to respond to — and remain on the cutting edge of — the expanded influence of graffiti, the magazine needed to go up.

The design possibilities of a vertical format and its implications for the graffist's view of the city were made clear just a couple pages later. Readers moving through the start of an article on São Paulo turn the page onto a stunning photo of the city, printed across both pages of the spread. A bit of ledge is visible in the left foreground, but then the view drops vertiginously out across countless high-rises as they sprawl into the distance. An indefinable haze thickens the depth of the field and blurs the horizon [Figure 3.14].

Compared to the shot of the Bronx in Issue #1, the photo is all the more striking. If the Bronx was metonymic for the entire process of urban renewal and disinvestment that fated so many neighborhoods in the deindustrializing world of the late 20th century, surely São Paulo can stand in for the almost incomprehensibly vast and rapid expansion of developing world megacities in the early 21st century. The view of the city now being exalted is no longer from a train platform but from the rooftop of a skyscraper. Just as in the Bronx photo paired with the letter from Doc, there is no actual graffiti visible in this photo of São Paulo; the reader is allowed to imagine his or her own work into the scene. If the erstwhile graffiti writer could dream of knowing, even commanding the entire surface of the city via his or her engagement with a horizontal transit system, now, having matured into an





Figure 3.14 Adopting a vertical format allowed *Backjumps* to highlight the verticality of the city.

“aerosol artist,” he or she might dream of influencing the entire three-dimensional built environment.

A subsequent article elaborates on how exactly this might be done. Titled “Bombing versus Architecture,” it pairs several shots of graffiti pieces with their creators’ testimonies about their graffiti works with, or against, the material city. The shots invariably place the piece in its architectural and urban context; these are no longer photos of graffiti but photos of urban places where graffiti writers have installed their work. The testimonies invariably express the writers’ efforts to overcome, through their practice, the sensations of disempowerment, anomie, and intimidation that come with living in a world designed by other people according to their interests. Here is Wesp, of the GHS crew:



In my daily life, I am confronted with architecture. Architects of our time put their ideas into reality in a way that I have to be able to deal with. It is a fact that a certain building has to be in a certain place: there are reasons for it! And this is just the way I deal with my job; I am a writer, I change my surroundings. However, contrary to an architect, I try to integrate my piece into its surroundings: there are reasons for it! So I sit down and think about how I can bring the letters and the building I want to paint into harmony. Of course I care more for the effect and the expression of my pieces than I care for the building. But if I want to do it perfectly, I have to bring both into harmony. I don't let the building intimidate me, let alone frighten me. I pay respect to the architect, yet I am convinced that every building can be painted, no matter how many corners, curves, projections, balconies or windows it has. It all and only depends on how much courage and creativity you have. What I do as a writer does not differ too much from what the architect does. The architect and I both try to create something for eternity that other people can delight in.

Perhaps the most profound part of this article is Wesp's existential proclamation. Graffiti is not just something he does; he is a graffiti writer. Changing his surroundings in the city is not just an occasional pastime or something undertaken at a once-a-year community planning meeting; it is an inextricable part of his identity. (See the lines quoted from writer-rapper Akte One in Chapter 2., as well as Chapters 4 and 5.) In order "to be able deal with" the city, he seeks to bring "harmony" and "delight" to it through his interventions ("for eternity," no less). It is worth reiterating how contrary these sentiments are to those often ascribed to graffitiists (and embraced by some). Wesp may prioritize his work over the architects', but his is by no means a fundamentally destructive approach. This is not about "bombing architecture" in any literal sense. Rather, his response to the imposition of other people's buildings in his world is to ornament them in ways that bring them into a conception of harmony that will not only alleviate his own sense of intimidation but also improve the environment for others. Wesp would probably consider his work generous. Others might also see in these sentiments the suspicious motivations of "upgrading." The tension between these two understandings would only grow over the following decades.

But Wesp's comments are also rather general — he is not talking about Kreuzberg, Berlin, or any place in particular. While he claims to work with attention to context, his overall view of the city is otherwise undifferentiated; he does not claim to have any more interest in certain sites than he does in others. And the GHS piece featured with his quote is indeed

painted on the mottled firewall of a nondescript apartment building on an unidentifiable street [Figure 3.15]. But more than that, his practice can be seen as homogenizing what would otherwise be considered distinctive features of a building (corners, curves, projections, etc.). If all buildings can be painted, and they can all be painted with “WESP” or “GHS,” even if these letters are brought into harmony with the structure, the result may be a kind of flattening or at least smoothing of the urban landscape. In a way, this is consistent with the horizontal “all-city” mentality of the transit-system-based golden age of graffiti long celebrated in *Backjumps* and represented pictorially in the early photo from the Bronx train platform. That mentality has now merely been projected upward onto a three-dimensional landscape. It might still be essentially undifferentiated, but it is now vertical



Figure 3.15 The structure and site could be almost anywhere: graffiti has gone “all-city” in the vertical dimension as well.

as well. The photo of São Paulo is a pictorial representation of this mentality taken to its conclusion.

But this is apparently only one approach. Drama, of the CBS crew, follows Wesp on the next page with a statement describing how and why what the magazine was now calling “grown-up graffiti writers” might engage with specific features of the built environment:

We understand ourselves as part of the cultural diversity in Berlin. We are fed up with restricting our communication to a small scene of insiders, we want to find new ways. We want the walls to function as a stage for the people. Berlin's new center 'Neue Mitte' has changed, and we come as the answer. Whether positive or negative, our aim is reaction. The painting on the wall of the Volksbühne is not perfect. Like us and our lives, it was born out of the situation (thank you to the Volksbühne for the paint that stood on the roof). The letters and the building complement each other, the building lives up to its name and our letters to the place they are painted on.

If the building featuring the GHS piece on the prior spread was all but completely anonymous, the *Volksbühne* [People's Stage] is by contrast one of the most recognizable



Figure 3.16 When the GHS crew painted the iconic *Volksbühne* theatre, it was a performance that resonated on many levels.



structures in Berlin. Its curved, deco-classical facade stands sentry over Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and interrupts the street of the same name, giving it decisive presence in the neighborhood. It is invariably described as “iconic,” both because of its physical appearance and its prominent place in the theater landscape in Berlin, a city that takes its theater very seriously. To scale this structure and paint it uninvited was an audacious act, to be sure [Figure 3.16]. But this also cannot be understood as “bombing architecture” in a destructive sense. Drama explains, this action was undertaken not just to prove it could be done but to challenge the theater to live up to its name. As “part of the cultural diversity in Berlin,” these graffiti writers want access to the same stages as other recognized players. They are interested in presentation and reaction. It is a concrete instantiation of Lewis Mumford’s figurative assertion that “the city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theater and is the theater.” That the art created may not be perfect is only natural (“it was born out of the situation”). Yet perfection was never the goal. “It is in the city, the city as theater,” according to Mumford, “that man’s more purposive activities are focused, and work out, through conflicting and co-operating personalities, events, groups into more significant culminations,” (Mumford 1937, p. 185). The “more significant culmination” in this case is a discussion about the rapid transformation of Berlin’s “New Mitte.” (Mitte was in East Berlin and has undergone far more renovation, infill, and turnover than any other neighborhood since reunification.) Drama and CBS offer “the answer” to these transformations in the form of an unsolicited but complementary addition to the famous facade. The extent to which their understanding of their addition was shared by the general public is impossible to determine. Perhaps by showing the hallowed institution to be more accessible than it seemed, perhaps by challenging a theater known for its avant garde productions to respond to an improvised and technically illegal “performance” on its own roof, perhaps by juxtaposing a crudely handmade yet deeply personal image with the newly beautified plasterwork and rising glass edifices of the surroundings, or, as they say, by challenging the institution to live up to its name, CBS really did start a dialogue about the future of the

city. At the very least they made clear the capacity of “aerosol culture” to assert itself in the mainstream of culture and the built environment.

That may seem a strange point to have had to make in the city that lived with and painted on the Berlin Wall for nearly 30 years. But one way to look at the entire history of graffiti and street art in Berlin post-wall is as process of recovering the spatial-political focus that it had during the era of the Wall. As Poet explained in the earlier issue, in the early 90s there had been abundant space and good feeling. But by the turn of the millennium, at least in neighborhoods like Mitte, growth pressures and upscaling were beginning to be of political concern. Despite ebbs and flows, they have remained so until today.<sup>2</sup>

Such demonstrations of graffiti and street art transforming specific, iconic sites remained rare in the pages of *Backjumps 2.0*, however. But that is not to say that its interest in the spatiality of aerosol culture waned. Quite the opposite is the case. Over the next few issues — which would turn out to be the magazine’s final issues in print — a series of feature articles and photo spreads began to connect the dots between the closely-cropped, decontextualized photos of graffiti pieces on one end of the spectrum and a the skyline-encompassing view of a city created by artists on the other. Part of this project was expanding the types of art covered and the audience targeted. As Nabi wrote in the introduction to Issue #001 — the new issue numbering system itself an indicator of his ambition — graffiti was by now beyond the underground. Issue #002 was the first to feature what is commonly considered street art: figurative pieces, wheatpastes, stencils, and the like. The classical graffiti artist Zedz is interviewed — but the subject of the interview is his interest in 3D modeling with software designed for architects. Issue #003 features an interview with actual architects. Partners at the Mauer firm, from Eindhoven,

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<sup>2</sup> To use the Volkstheater as a platform to make a comment about gentrification is, however, somewhat ironic, or at least an instance of history returning in echo. Although it was funded in part with *Arbeitergroschen* [workers’ pennies] when it was built just before the start of the First World War, the Volkstheater was part of a plan to revitalize the area then known as the Scheunenviertel, which was considered to be dangerously overcrowded with poor immigrants (Kirschner, 2014).



Netherlands, explain how they are trying “to end the hostile attitude between architects and graffiti artists...and try to make spatial graffiti accessible.” The visual material also begins to change. The same issue includes a tiled spread of street art pieces, all of which include much more of their surrounding urban context than the typical tiled graffiti spreads did [Figure 3.17]. A full page ad in the style of a single-frame black-and-white cartoon, *à la The New Yorker*, may indicate a play to a more sophisticated audiences [Figure 3.18]. In Issue #004, for the first time a sequence of graffiti pieces is shot from a considerable distance; the spread directs the viewer’s attention more to the pieces’ urban context than to the pieces themselves. A second feature includes photos taken at such remove that the graffiti and murals in them seem almost incidental to the landscapes, which are otherwise composed of waterways, boats, kayakers, cars, towering storage tanks, cranes, and generic

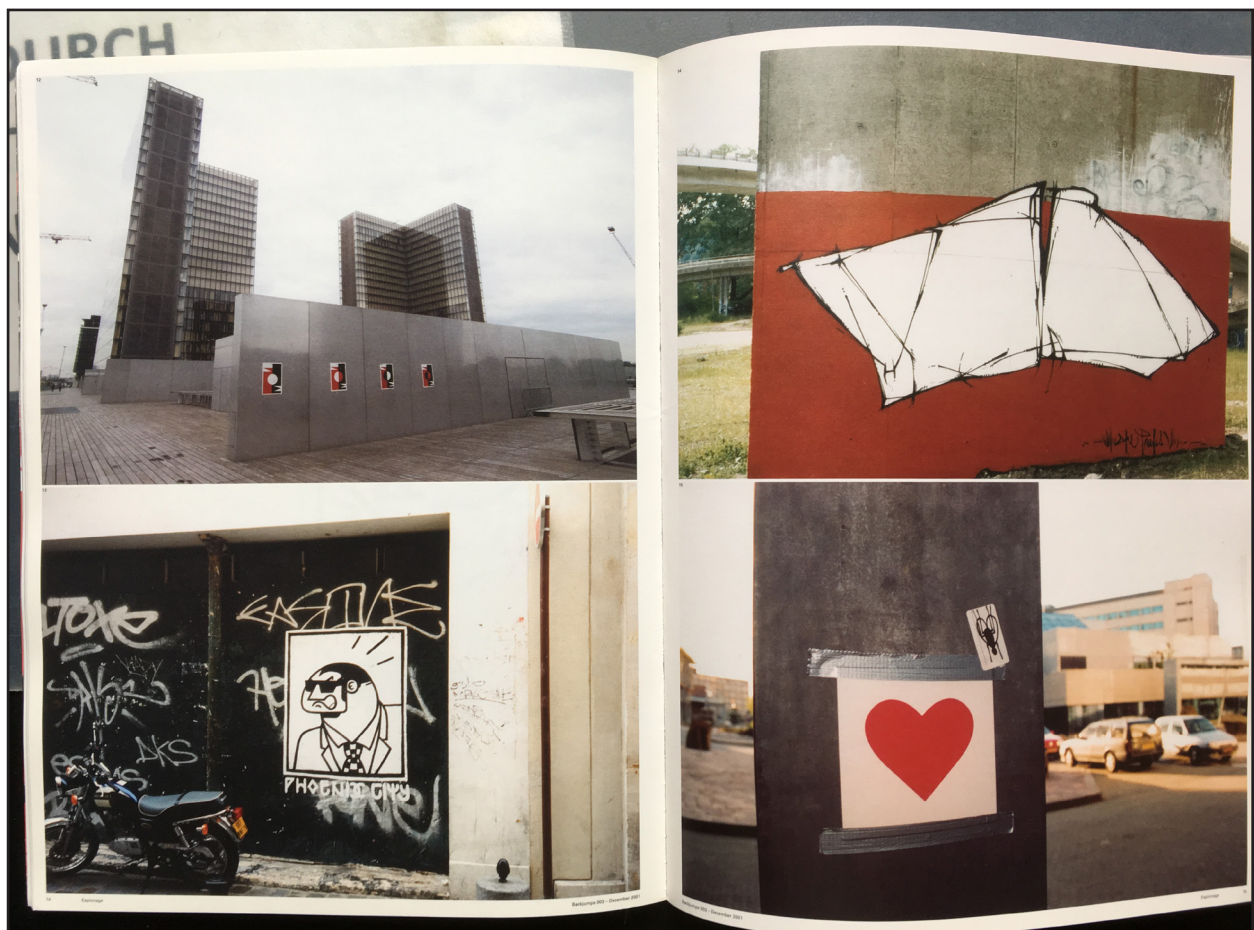


Figure 3.17 More and more photos included the urban context of the piece of graffiti or street art.

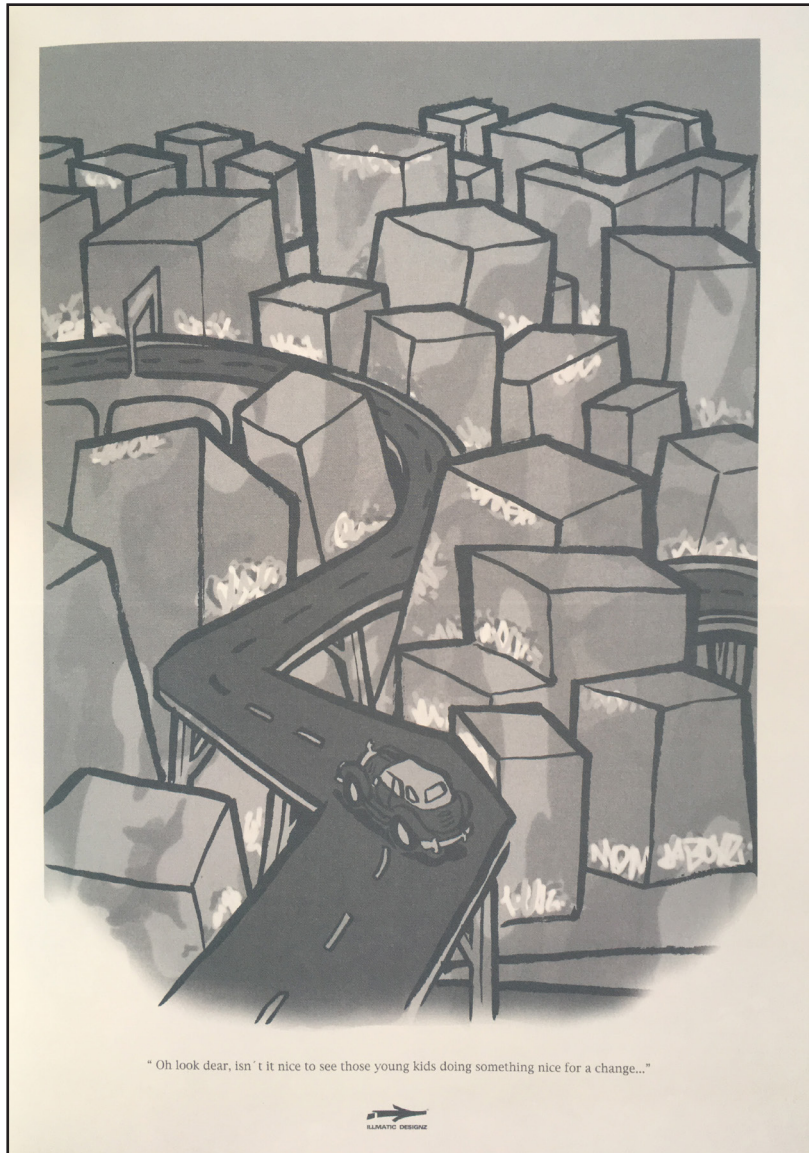


Figure 3.18 The ads in *Backjumps* 2.0 seemed to reference the cartoons found in publications like *The New Yorker*.

high-rise buildings [Figure 3.19]. Just as noteworthy about the former spread is the fact the urban contexts in question are places like vacant parcels, empty parking lots, and awkward, unused corners [Figure 3.20]. While many graffiti writers and lay people would intuitively know that graffiti has thrived in such “forgotten” places, what this spread does is urge us not to forget them at all. If anything, the photographer seems to be on the verge of fetishizing abandonment and decay — leafless trees, a half-built skateboard ramp, and a forsaken pram, its canopy faded to the color of dried thyme, are just as important to the composition of the photos as the painted walls. Again, the emphasis is on the ways that





Figure 3.19 Photos taken in ever more of the urban context surrounding pieces.

“aerosol culture” can transform the array of anonymous urban spaces in a city the size of Berlin (which in terms of land area, if not quite population, is comparably as vast as New York or São Paulo).

By this point the visual language of the print magazine had come as close as it would to linking actual painting to the entire cityscape. Though *Backjumps 2.0* Issue #004 had a print run of only 10,000, this made it one of the biggest graffiti magazines in Europe at the time, certainly the biggest in Berlin. Since Issue #002, it had no longer featured



Figure 3.20 While the urban context was becoming a more important subject for *Backjumps*'s photography, an empty lot was just as likely to be featured as an iconic building.

advertisements for Berlin-based companies, and by Issue #004 it included only ads for placeless multinational brands. It is impossible to say whether this represented a conscious distancing from the local scene, or was just a result of following the money. With more money comes greater expectations. This was 2002. Digital journalism was still coming into its own, but the upheaval of the media industry was immanent (Croteau and Hoynes, 2013). Maybe for these and maybe for other reasons, Nabi and his partners decided to retire the print magazine. They themselves would not be retiring, however. Instead, they would do what had been a latent suggestion since the very first issue: to “turn the city into a magazine” (Nabi, quoted in Celik, 2014).

## 2003-2007: THE “LIVE ISSUES”

Up until now, this chapter has been an exercise in reading *Backjumps* into the city, reading it as an attentive reader might have, in order to demonstrate how it developed a comprehensive program for using graffiti and street art as tools of urban design in service of an evolving worldview. In that sense, I have all along been arguing that *Backjumps* the magazine is, or aspired to be, *part of* the physical and social city in the same way that a city’s general plan or design regulations, by responding to historical conditions, establishing norms, and setting goals for the future, are caught up in its physical and social reality at any given moment. This is why I have focused so much on the actual document that was produced, arguing that it effectively represented the (sometimes merely momentary) concretized distillation of that combination of history, norms, and goals. If the magazine had ceased to be altogether, that would have marked a clear end for the exercise.

But it did not cease to be. In fact, it followed the trajectory it had been establishing for itself, metamorphosing “naturally” into something beyond a mere document. To use the terms from above, it ceased to write design regulations and began to do actual urban design in the city, in the form of a series of urban art festivals. I could simply point to this fact and, QED, conclude my arguments for graffiti and street art as forces of urban transformation. And yet this would be to ignore the considerable, as we shall see, telling, changes that the festival went through between its iterations, and to ignore the consequential impacts it had on urban space in Berlin. Just as the print magazine had played a central role in tracking and driving the evolution of the graffiti scene throughout the 1990s, the festival would play a leading role in establishing street art as a force for reshaping space in the inner city.

To track this leading role presents a methodological challenge, however. It would be impossible and irrelevant analyze the festival — or rather, the “Live Issue” of the magazine, as it was dubbed — in the same way as I approached the print magazine. A



closely analogous method might have been to experience the festivals first hand, to walk through the exhibition spaces and installation sites throughout the city, and to deliver a close “reading” of the “live issue” in the same way that I did for the print issues. But for obvious reasons — the festivals were held in 2003, 2005, and 2007 — this is beyond the metaphysical bounds of my project. What I do instead is to draw on a range of other extant print, journalistic, and photographic material to trace the festival’s evolving scope, expectations for itself, and impacts. As we have already seen above, Nabi, Poet/Jimmy, and many of their contributing artists had relatively well-developed self-consciousnesses, and they were not afraid to put their reflections in print. And, interestingly, despite supposedly giving up the magazine format, the curators of the “Live Issues” nevertheless produced a substantial amount of accompanying printed material, from posters to maps, newsletter-style broadsheets, and bound catalogues. I draw heavily on these documents to describe what the Live Issues were and to understand what they meant for art and public space in Berlin.

Around 2000, Adrian Nabi had befriended Stephane Bauer, the director of Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, a former hospital in northern Kreuzberg that had been squatted and then converted mixed-use cultural center. The Kunstraum had exhibition space, funding, and a directive to engage the public in conversations about art. And so Bauer and Nabi decided to make the Kunstraum the nucleus of a festival that would pick up where the magazine had left off, “entreat[ing] itself with the responsibility of communicating background knowledge of the scene, from where the street and the ‘white cube’ meet” (Bauer & Nabi, 2007, p. 9). Artists from around the world, including the very biggest names like Banksy, Obey, Nomad, Brad Downey, and Phos4, were invited to contribute pieces for interior galleries, to paint directly onto the gallery walls, or to do wall pieces or installations in various public spaces. The event ran for six weeks through the late summer and early autumn of 2003 and was seen by an estimated 12,000 people.



names are clustered in what might be “downtown,” while the name of the event — by far the primary feature of the poster — is carved into the urban features that sprawl out from there [Figure 3.21]. Graffiti and street art are empowered to do nothing less than make a new city. This new city, however, may be characterized more by an undifferentiated, post-modern sprawl (a la São Paulo) than hub-and-spoke or radially planned cities of modernity.

Live Issue #2 was held in 2005, again from late-August to mid-October. The poster made for this iteration represents the apogee of the vertical, city-making mentality I argued was evident from the issues of *Backjumps 2.0*. Aside from a few tiny lines of informational text, the entire poster is a line-drawing of a city, almost like an architect’s sketch. At the bottom, in the foreground, one finds the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, with its distinctive twin spires and broad front steps, while immediately behind it is the familiar peaked roof of the Kottbusser Tor U-Bahn station. Though in reality Kottbusser Tor is nearly a kilometer away, these two features serve to place a knowing viewer in Kreuzberg — but only as a starting point. Because from there the drawing ascends, up and up and up, across a skyline of increasing generic urban features — courtyard apartment buildings, a plaza with a fountain, smokestacks, a suspension bridge, and countless rectangular skyscrapers [Figure 3.22]. The scope of the event had expanded so much by this point that the hosts saw fit to also create an actual map which would help visitors find their way between the dozens of installations, event sites, and affiliated organizations like art galleries across four neighborhoods, as well as to be able to easily locate essential businesses like cafes, restaurants, and record stores [Figure 3.23]. In case the capacity of graffiti to create meaningful urban space had not yet been demonstrated sufficiently, the organizers invited several writers to participate in a group installation, the City of Names. Held in the park in front of the Kunstraum, the City of Names was a sort of encampment made up of the participants’ graffiti identities. Some brought or recreated urban features (like walls and even a subway) into the space and painted on them; others built themselves huts and





Figure 3.22 The poster for the second *Backjumps* “Live Issue”, 2005.



Figure 3.23 “Live Issue” #2, in 2005, featured a map to facilitate touring the event sites.

actually slept there for the duration of the event; SEAR and PHOS4 rendered their tags as three-dimensional, four-meter-tall “skyscrapers” of cardboard.

The explicit effort to construct a Graffitiville may seem quaint, but it was actually redundant. Berlin, or at least Kreuzberg, was already a kind of graffiti utopia — but this was a development that brought considerable circumspection from the very agents in part responsible for it. At least 25,000 people had experienced Live Issue #2. By Live Issue #3, in 2007, *Backjumps* (along with epigon urban art expositions) had had such an impact of both the art practice and the city that the organizers began to sense the negative impacts of this form of promotion. Strangely, Bauer opened his essay in the promotional broadsheet for Live Issue #3 by announcing that:



*Die dritte Ausgabe von Backjumps in 2007 wird die letzte "Live Issue" in dieser Form im Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien sein — die letzte dreidimensionale Ausgabe des Magazines. Sie markiert einen Einschnitt. Seit 2003 ist viel passiert und der Stellenwert von Street Art in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung und in der Kunstszene hat sich gewandelt. Der Hype um Street Art ist kaum zu bremsen und die Versuche der kommerziellen Vereinnahmung werden immer dreister und aggressiver. Wir möchten versuchen, mit einem kleinen Rückblick auf die vorherigen Ausgaben von Backjumps "The Live Issue" den Stellenwert dieses Ausstellungsprojektes zu untersuchen — zu schauen, was passiert ist, um vielleicht zu ahnen, in welchen Reibungsflächen sich die Rezeption von Street Art weiterentwickeln wird.*

[The third issue of Backjumps, in 2007, will be the last "Live Issue" in this form in Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien — the last three-dimensional issue of the magazine. It marks a break. Since 2003 a lot has happened, and the significance of street art in both public perception and the art scene has evolved. The hype around street art is unstoppable and the attempts for commercial gain are getting more brazen and aggressive. We would like to try to investigate the significance of this exhibition project by looking back briefly at the prior issues of Backjumps "The Live Issue" — to see what has happened in order, maybe, to guess across which contact surfaces the reception of street art will continue to evolve.]

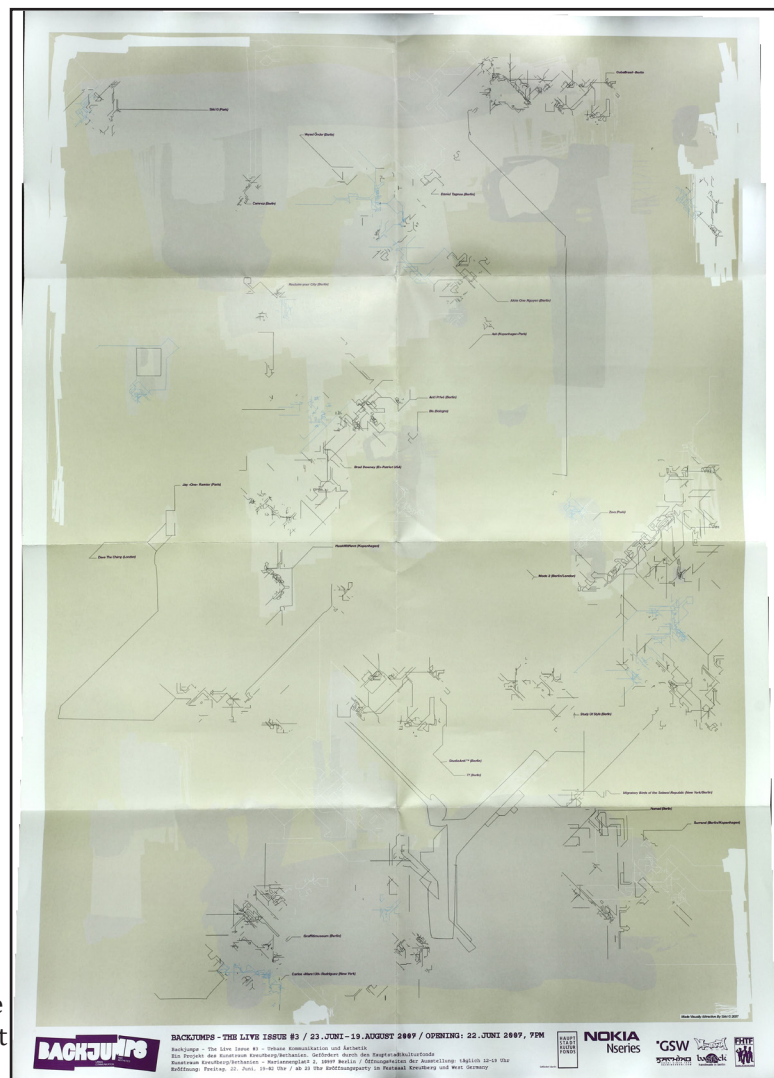


Figure 3.24 The poster for the third *Backjumps* "Live Issue", 2007, used some of the visual language of cartography, but was not meant to be a functional map.



Figure 3.25 “Live Issue” #3 generated some instant icons, such as Victor Ash’s *Cosmonaut*.

It is fascinating to see Bauer use almost the same phrasing that Doc had used in his letter in the first issue of the print *Backjumps*: to know where the practice is heading, we must look to its past. Bauer does indeed go on to reflect on the successes (and minor controversies) of the prior Live Issue exhibitions. But despite being announced dead on arrival, Live Issue #3 was still an ambitious undertaking. The poster again renders street artists as elements of an abstract urbanized environment, this time as spindly wisps of street grids scratched into an otherwise eerily empty desertscape [Figure 3.24]. And while again artists were allowed to take over interior spaces in the Kunstraum [Figure 3.26], the activist-artists





Figures 3.26 and 3.27 “Live Issue” #3 included artist takeovers of interior spaces (above) and political interventions by groups like Reclaim your City (below).

Reclaim Your City engaged in openly political public demonstrations [Figure 3.27], and the murals, like Viktor Ash's Cosmonaut, became some of the most photographed places in Berlin, even featured on the city's website for tourism promotion (see Chapter 2) [Figure 3.25]. Live Issue #3 had gotten so big that there were numerous affiliated and co-promoted events scheduled around the city at the same time. About 35,000 are thought to have attended the various events part of Live Issue #3.

Lest all the talk of hype and commercialization imply that the "Live Issues" were solely about cultural consumption, it is worth reiterating the degree to which *Backjumps* promoted and encouraged creation, not just consumption. The project was always more for practitioners, "insiders," than for lay viewers. Many people who remember the opening night of Live Issue #1 recall how, by the end of the evening, the attendees had covered every available surface of the inside of the building with tags and stickers. Each Live Issue featured workshops and hands-on sessions, some targeted at children. Even the catalog for Live Issue #3, a highly produced art book selling for 20 Euros, included 20 pages of sketch paper bound at the back. The Live Issues had thus continued the tradition of literally training graffiti writers, urban artists, and would-be-activists in how to intervene in their city.

#### CODE: BACKJUMPS LIVE ISSUE 20+1

But *Backjumps* was perhaps too successful in this endeavor. As already noted in Bauer's introduction to the third Live Issue, the organization had recognized the degree to which it had promoted the commercialization of the subculture. But over the coming years, the relationship between street art and some unwelcome urban dynamics — such as touristification and gentrification — only became more dangerous. When Nabi and associates got together to try to put together a 20th Anniversary Live Issue, they quickly decided that their past interventions in the city would be received differently now. They

could point to several other developments nearby as justification. The Cuvry Brache, a lot in Kreuzberg with a firewall that had been painted as part of Live Issue #3, had been sold and was set for redevelopment, which set off a fight over urban space, including a massive squat of the lot (see Carver, 2018; Henke, 2015). To reenact an installation like the City of Names would be insensitive in the extreme at a time when African asylum seekers had built their own completely necessary encampment just a few blocks away at Oranienplatz (see Bhimji, 2016). The festival culture — and gentrification debates — that Backjumps helped inspire had spread to distant neighborhoods like Wedding. And in general, neighborhoods like Kreuzberg were becoming less and less enthusiastic about being the party grounds for a continent's worth of EasyJet-enabled hipster weekenders (Colombe & Novy, 2016). What's more, this period saw the emergence of firms like XI Designs, an advertising firm founded and staffed by former graffiti writers. XI specializes in aerosol billboards painted directly onto facades, drawing on the visual language of graffiti and street art to create ads for companies like Adidas, Converse, and BMW. XI Designs may provide employment for aerosol artists and occasionally "give back" by donating a non-commercial mural, but they are nevertheless an understandably controversial factor in the graffiti and street art story in Berlin (see also Carver & Mugerauer, forthcoming).

And so the *Backjumps* anniversary issue that did materialize (in 2015, one year later than planned and thus named "20+1") was almost entirely indoors at the Kunstraum. Instead of involving renowned artists from around the world, it was an almost entirely backward-looking review of the history of the publication and Live Issues, with most of the exhibit made up of photos and other material from Nabi's personal archive. Instead of an abstract cityscape, the poster for "20+1" is simply a collage of old issues of the print magazine and other related ephemera [Figure 3.28]. There were again several auxiliary lectures, tours, and hands-on events. In keeping with its pedagogical spirit, Backjumps "20+1" featured the Junior Lab, a series of workshops for youth with topics like seed bombing and "Reclaim





media object that eschewed mediation altogether and became the events it had previously only reported on retrospectively. As its influence and scope grew, its ability to shape the city indirectly and prospectively grew until it was shaping the city directly and in the moment. It was, in the process, a victim of its own success. And yet, in the end, this ambition and success compelled *Backjumps*' creators — and readers — to new levels of spatial awareness, social consciousness, and self-reflection. *Backjumps* itself may be essentially defunct, or interested primarily in introspection rather than action, but it left behind a Berlin in which graffiti, street art, and muralism is at least as present as ever — and more perhaps more caught up with the processes of urban change than ever (see also Chapters 1 and 2).

I stated in the opening of this chapter that *Backjumps* is not homologous with the graffiti subculture in Berlin, and this is true. But its story provides one way to trace the development of graffiti and street art in Berlin throughout the post-Wall era that is of interest for this project. At the same time, it is tempting to look for the tidy narrative arc of the *Backjumps* story — of ambition, accomplishment, social awareness, and self-reflection — in the stories of individual graffiti writers. The fact is, however, that the dynamics of being a graffiti writer in Berlin are more complex than that, and the lives of individuals less neat and tidy. The complexity of those dynamics and the messy richness of the experiences of writing graffiti in Berlin are the subjects of the remainder of this book.

# CHAPTER 4

## NARRATIVES OF GRAFFITI LIFE

I AM THE CITY TOO" (LENNART)

"I'm a Friedrichshainer, a native Friedrichshainer, and these days I live just around the corner in Lichtenberg. So in the beginning, around '94, that's when I started with my first stuff. Everything was still so gray and DDR-like, everything was still falling apart a bit. When I think back to Simon-Dach-Straße, there wasn't a single real store. All the shutters were down, no one wanted to go there. That's what the city looked like then. Of course there was already some graffiti. There was DISNE, I thought he was great. The DMB crew was awesome too, 35 was quite present for me. They all made up my cityscape. So I was doing some stuff in Friedrichshain. Then we went up a bit further north, all the way into Prenzlauer Berg. Also Mitte a bit."

"So always the former East?"

"I didn't like the West so much. For me it was always a place I didn't want to go. Maybe you can say it was fear. It was just a bit too much for me. You heard stories that there was more violence in the West. And I didn't like that — anything that had to do with confrontation. That's not my thing. Or at least that's just how it seemed to me. And over here [in the East], I had my safe little world."

Lennart asked me to meet him at a small park near the Ostkreuz S-Bahn station.<sup>1</sup> Ostkreuz, in Friedrichshain, is one vertex of what has been described as the “Bermuda Triangle” of the present-day party scene in Berlin. To the northeast lies the heart of prewar Friedrichshain, with its largely renovated courtyard apartments and well-known cocktail bars lining leafy streets like Simon-Dach-Strasse. To the southeast, the turf is somewhat more heterogeneous, with some apartments, sports facilities, and a number of former factories and warehouses wedged between the River Spree and the railway. In those former factories and warehouses one finds clubs like Magdalena, Wilde Renate, and ://aboutblank. But one also finds the European headquarters of Universal Music, MTV, and Coca-Cola, along with a boutique hotel, all of which were part of the controversial “Media Spree” redevelopment project. Despite the fact that the project was broken off following extensive public protests and a city-wide referendum, it is a very different Friedrichshain from the one Lennart grew up in. Still, he wanted to take a walk there with me, in part because it remains very popular among graffiti writers and street artists. He also explained that his mind works better when walking. So we grabbed bottles of at a Späti and began to wander.

“When you visit an area like this, what catches your notice typically?” I asked. “How do you assess the scene in Berlin these days?”

“That’s tough. I’m a bit torn,” he said. “A little while ago — I was just telling a buddy about this — when I was riding the S-Bahn, I just had this sense of everything looking so dirty, so icky, so boring, just not at all interesting anymore. And there were also some really great pieces mixed in there. I don’t know what was up with me. Maybe it has to do with the fact that I’m trying to find a new way myself, to get away from the old stuff. Aside from that, everything really has gotten worse, in my opinion. But not because the people are worse or they no longer put in the effort, but simply because people don’t have time anymore,

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1 All of the names used here have been changed. While not everyone I spoke to asked to have their identities disguised or anonymized, I decided to change all of the names in order to be consistent.



because it's gotten more dangerous, because everything is buffed so quickly. You don't want to put so much energy into banging your head against the wall.

"But from a purely technical perspective, if we're talking about legal pieces, it's gotten unbelievably cool. Of course that has to do with the evolution of everything. When I look at the cans, when I look at the caps, a good deal has happened. And of course I think that all the people are becoming more open minded [*openminded*]. The great thing is also that so many people are breaking the barriers of what graffiti originally was, what the rules were, where the lines were drawn.

"And I find it awesome that it's developing more and more in the direction of art. Partly. I find it interesting. But I'm also still totally, totally into proper awesome street bombing things. Like what graffiti was back then: a little vandalism, a little bit of pissing in the corner, saying, 'Here I am. I am the city too. Take notice of me.'"

"So you must like the stuff the 1UP crew does," I suggested.

"Maybe. They go a little far sometimes. I saw recently that they'd held up a subway car in the station in order to paint it mid-route. Is that ok, is it not ok? They're of the opinion that urban walls belong to everyone and so you can paint them. I find this excuse awesome. But when you attack the functioning of the transit system — if that really happened — then that's kind of a shitty thing. You should be a bit more conscientious. I'm also of the opinion that graffiti, like from my day, it shouldn't make people angry, shouldn't disturb them too much. It's a little funny to say that about graffiti, because it always disturbs people! But I'm against painting people's cars or anything that directly has to do with private citizens, where it could cost them money."

“So a *little bit* of illegality, a *little* pissing in the corner, but not too much? You have to find a balance?” I asked.

“Ok, I’m thinking about it again, now that you repeat it back to me!” he said, laughing.

“Maybe it can be a little more than a little bit! But I think it just has to do with the fact that I’ve gotten older. If you’d asked me ten years ago, I’d definitely have answered differently: ‘Riot!’ and ‘Piss in the corner — but really, times ten!’”

We had made our way to the corner of Wühlichstraße and Böcklinstraße, where we sat down on a bench. This was one of the blocks where the corner building was destroyed during the war (see Chapter 2), so today there are two five-story firewalls framing what was once an empty parcel and is now a tiny playground. On a map it is a playground, that is, but in its three dimensions it is a niche, an amphitheater — an extremely attractive site for graffiti. The walls (and many of the playground features) had been turned into a de facto — though not entirely formalized — hall of fame, and Lennart wanted to check out what was new there. To me, it seemed that 95% of what was there would be considered “proper, awesome street bombing.”

“So how did you get started with graffiti in the first place?”

“I must have been 12 or 14 — I was 14 when I got going more. But I think I was 12, and I was coming home from soccer practice with a friend. He reached into his bag and pulled out this skinny Edding and started to write ‘RAVE’ on the door of the house. And I stared at him, like, ‘You can’t do that!’ I come from a relatively sheltered home. My parents were never there, they were always at work, but there was never really any major stress. At least superficially. And so it was completely unthinkable that someone just writes on the wall! And he told me, ‘Yeah, that’s the new thing, graffiti. You have to put your tag everywhere.

You start in a side street, you fill up all the entry ways, then you fill up the street, and then the next street, and the more you have, the more fame you'll be [*desto famer wirst du*].' And I said, 'Fame [*Fame*], what's that?' And he said, 'That you're more famous [*berühmter*]'! And that was the first introduction. But I quickly forgot about it. I thought, 'What is that shit? I don't want anything to do with it. It's illegal, it's not allowed — you just can't do that.' But then puberty comes around and you notice maybe it's cool what these people are doing, to do something counter to your parents, to rebel against your parents. You know, puberty-style."

At this point, Lennart began to talk more quickly and emotively, with no pauses to collect his thoughts. This story was evidently at the tip of his tongue.

"There was my cousin, he's three years older than me, I can remember this moment very well. We were at a birthday party and he sits down next to me and on his jeans were these little, like really tiny drops of spray paint [*Dosenfarbe*] on his pants. 'What's that? I asked. 'Well, I was painting,' he says. 'Painting?' And then he told me about how he and a buddy were down at Ostkreuz painting along the train line [*Line*] and had made a piece down there. I didn't quite understand, I didn't know at all what that meant, what he was telling me — but I found it quite interesting."

Lennart continued his breathless narration. "And he was a bit older than me. One tends to be into the things older people do — I don't want to call him my idol, but there was a bit of that. At some point he did a piece for me, and I tried to copy it, to recreate it, I threw myself at it again and again. I was in 7th grade at that time, and there was someone from the western part of the city in class with us. It was strange — he didn't have an easy time of it. I just never understood why people kept badgering him. For me, there's no reason to give someone beef just because they come from somewhere else. No idea. I just don't

understand it at all. I don't get why people have to get so worked up. But anyway, at some point during class, he saw [what I was doing] and said, 'What's going on here? I'll show you how it's done.' And at the end of the day he gave me a piece of paper that he'd drawn on with pencil. And I just stood there in awe — it was a godly drawing. Super simple, super easy, but in this style where I thought, 'Oh wow, what is that!?' And he'd written in there somewhere 'Fuck the Police.' And you think, 'Wicked! Wicked!' Yeah, I just found that super cool. And so it started slowly then.

"I met some people here in Friedrichshain who weren't from such a sheltered home, who maybe spent a bit more time on the streets. Maybe they'd had involvement with drugs, but in any case they were a bit 'rougher' [*rougher*], where I thought, 'Ok cool, I guess that's how it has to be, I want to be a part of that.' And so we made our first crew and we set out. In the proper old style: you make up some shit to tell your parents and just go! We were still really young, so we went out and tagged the walls, and we were really excited if we'd put ten tags somewhere, we thought that was really great.

"And then at some point — it must have been just before the year 2000 — everything everywhere in Berlin started to change. Buildings were modernized. Everywhere there was fresh paint, everything was new, everything was pretty, everything was — when I think back to what Oranienburgerstraße looked like, what the Hackescher Markt looked like, it's worlds apart from the way it is now. That was a development that wasn't so great. We didn't want that. It didn't have to be like that. Everything so sterile, so new. It felt like a kind of censorship, a ban, almost like the end of freedom for those people who had been tagging facades. One felt kind of hemmed in, because one started to think, 'Ach, I guess you can't do that anymore,' and it wasn't any more fun. Maybe it was even more dangerous. At the very least it would cost more if you got caught.



“But anyway, things went on like that. At a certain point you notice that there’s a new generation coming up, and I guess I noticed that I didn’t really like what they were doing. Everything looked kind of slapdash, more quantity than quality. By the 2000s, everything felt like a hit-and-run. And then came the stress, after I had gotten a bit of fame. You know, to go to the parties and hear someone talking about your work.”

“And to be able to say, ‘That’s me!’” I ventured.

“No, the other way around — that someone’s talking about you and doesn’t know that the person he’s talking about is standing right in front of him! That’s really more awesome. It gave my self-consciousness a push, and that was extremely important. It helped me lift myself up in general. But this stress — it’s like ‘more money, more problems.’ The more fame, the more people envy you, the more stress. And like I said, I didn’t like that part. I started to think, I’ve got to change — but of course I also didn’t want to! This feeling from graffiti: I wanted to hold onto it. Yet I wanted to avoid the stress somehow. But that wasn’t really possible. There came a time where it had just gotten nasty, probably around age 20.

“And then came the first contact with synthetic drugs, and then boom, into the techno scene. There’s no stress at a techno party! At a graffiti party, maybe you can have some fun at the beginning, but then someone figures out you’re there, you have to be careful who you talk to, who you talk about, do you reveal something, do you not. To say nothing of the stress from the police! And there was none of that in the techno scene. In the club it’s very anonymous, you’re alone, just dancing for yourself really. And I loved that.

“But I missed all of the graffiti stuff a ton. Even just sitting there, making sketches with your buddies, just during the daytime. And I didn’t have that anymore. Graffiti and techno don’t really go together, or at least they didn’t at that time. I felt a little bit lonely and left-behind,

which I think is pretty common in the techno scene. There were good people, but I couldn't talk to them about graffiti, they just didn't get it. There's less stress, but the creative aspect was also missing, which was a shame. I didn't want to go back to graffiti, but I was really in a funk. I don't know. I dropped out of high school [*habe meine Abitur abgebrochen*], then got some training, got a job, did that for many years, did a lot of drugs, alcohol, and was just really unhappy."

It seemed like time to keep walking. As we left the playground, Lennart held up his phone to frame a photo, but then didn't push the release. A dumpster was blocking part of the piece that had caught his attention. The piece had been rendered in bright aerosols, most likely by one person with no extra tools or ladders, to judge by its scale. The top half of the image was a wasp but it transformed at the bottom into a ladybug. The effect was less of an insect centaur than of one insect emerging from the other, a moment of metamorphosis. It was difficult to tell, however, whether the wasp was emerging from the ladybug or the ladybug from the wasp.

"I tried to get back together with my old crew. I had been painting myself a bit, just at home, though less and less. I wanted to find contact again. And they were welcoming — but it was the same old story with all the stress. I said to myself, 'I can't stay on this track. I have to find some other way to achieve a symbiosis between graffiti and my life goals, my expectations, some way to unify it with my dreams.' But I didn't really find legal graffiti that cool. I mean, I thought, 'You have to do graffiti in the sense of bombing, breaking things a bit.' Of course I was jealous of the technically accomplished pieces like that one," he said, gesturing back to the playground. "How do you do that? How does that work? And so I started to come back. And the first steps were through the Graffiti Lobby. But I noticed relatively quickly what that was all about. So much discussion — I can't take that. It's not

my thing. I think it's cool to put bring color to the wall [*Farbe an die Wand heranbringen*].<sup>2</sup> To make connection. But when it comes to the political, or 'We have to fight for this and that,' or this political convention thing they did a few years ago — those are things I really can't get into at all. It's nice that it's being done and it has to be done. It's nice that there are people are willing to do that, to engage like that. A lot of people profit from it. I hope they keep it up."

"Why does it have to be done?"

"So that graffiti achieves more acceptance and can come a bit out of this illegal track. So that people see, 'Yes, we too would like to change the city through graffiti.' So that we get away from these stupid, boring, grey-white walls, that we bring some color. It's a win-win situation for all participants. What the Lobby does, it's like a Graffiti 2.0 story. We're coming out of illegal scene, apparently, and screaming directly at the politicians. We're saying, 'We are here, take us seriously, we want to be taken seriously, and we're going to change things but we'd like to do it with your help.' There'll be less stress, less illegality — yeah, we're all getting older, we know it can't really go on like that. It's simply the same story just a level higher. Of course pure legality in itself it's a good idea either, but the idea is the same. 'We're here, take us seriously. Throw us a bone, we'll throw you a bone, let's shake hands. Come, together we'll turn the city into a playground. In a good way.'

"But I personally never wanted to put up political graffiti. I never wanted to say that my opinion is such-and-such. I don't want to force anything on anyone. The only thing I want to force upon people is, 'Here I am' and 'There's something going on here.' Maybe 'Pay

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<sup>2</sup> In German the word *Farbe* means both "color" and "paint." In some cases it was not entirely obvious in which sense my interview partner was using the term, as for example here where Lennart says he likes to "*Farbe an die Wand heranbringen*." This could be translated as either "put paint on the wall" or "bring color to the wall." The former is a more everyday phrasing and implies a concrete, material action, whereas the latter is slightly more poetic and abstract. Either makes sense in this context — as a contrast to the behind-the-scenes, nothing-but-talk nature of political discussion and lobbying. But because of Lennart occasionally produced poetic locutions elsewhere in our discussion, I chose to render it here as "bring color to the wall."

attention to me,' in some sense. But with a certain limit. All of what you see here," he said, pointing to a poster for the Warsteiner Brewery, one of the biggest beer brands in Germany, "they want to sell you something. And graffiti doesn't want that. It just wants to be there. No more than that. And the less legible it is, if it's well done, the more interesting it is, and the more you can lose yourself in it. I notice sometimes when I'm sitting or standing somewhere and I'm just dreaming about some tag. And if I take some time to decipher it, it's because I've just fallen in love with it, with the power contained within it. I'm swimming in the juice of the color [*ich schwimme in der Saft der Farbe*] and in the drips. And you just try to imagine, 'What has this person experienced? Are they male, are they female? Is he tall, is he short?' — and probably it's exactly the opposite of what you expect!"

"What kinds of people have you met through graffiti?"

"It's mostly men, true. I've never understood why there aren't more women. I mean, there's nothing hotter than a hot ass painting at the wall! But I don't really know what to say about racial makeup or whatever. That's something that I've also found totally fascinating about graffiti, that there are no borders, no barriers to communication. Whether you speak my language or not, we can both paint at the wall, we can both have fun. We can both experience something awesome together. And for me personally I don't give a shit how you look, where you come from, how much money you have, what you're wearing, what your skin color is, what language you speak, what's your profession — I just really don't give a flying fuck about any of that. And that's what's awesome about graffiti. There are so many different layers, so many different opinions, so many different personalities — graffiti is simply the world [*Graffiti ist einfach die Welt*]. There are so many who do it, but with graffiti you have the possibility to unite people.

"It's just so insanely fascinating, there's so much fascination in the whole thing. Even here you see these little flecks have come out of the can." He pointed at the area around the edge of a bubble-letter tag where some errant spots were just visible. "I find that super interesting. A person was holding that can! And advertising? It's just about money."

We had been out on our tour for well over an hour and our bottles of *Apfelschorle* were long since empty. Lennart suggested we turn toward the train tracks, where we might find a secluded lot with some bushes to relieve ourselves.

"Man, what a shame. This is all new. I had wanted to walk along this whole stretch of graffiti, because it also related to your questions. I like it when things are a bit dingy. And when you find these little streets, not so dirty but completely tagged, properly bombed, or even when someone's put some nicer pieces up on the wall."

"Like this one?" I pointed at a multicolor piece, one of the only pieces at all on a block of newly constructed condominiums.

"Well, I meant nicer than that!" He laughed. "But I wouldn't want to have to miss that. Graffiti is everything. I like it when everything's alive, when people have been there. For example, I like to use graffiti to orient myself. But it's crazy how much has changed here! There was a time when I'd meet with buddies and we wouldn't say, 'Meet me on such-and-such street or at such-and-such park,' rather we'd say, 'We're going to meet up by the ESK around the corner' or 'by the DISNE piece' wherever. And I found that awesome, it was fun."

"And I like it when the walls tell stories. When I look at this" — he sputtered in exasperation at a mediocre tag — "well, ok, I guess you can do that sort of thing. But it's just not alive. It's cold. But when I'm at a club or a cafe — like what was that cafe?"



K-fetisch or something, in Neukölln. A really awesome cafe. I went to the bathroom, and I'm standing there — and you wind up taking a half an hour for the bathroom because you're looking around the whole time! Who was here? What is there to discover? Who is telling what story? Who crossed whom? Why? Who's discovered something new? Who has a new style? I just love that, when it's on the street or in a cafe, when the bathrooms tell stories."

We had reached the tracks, and Lennart homed in on a zig-zag in a stretch of fencing. Vines at the peak of their midsummer growth brimmed over the fences, mostly obscuring the fly posters that could only have been pasted months prior. We were now literally pissing in a corner together.

"So when you're there trying to see the stories, do you recognize all the names?"

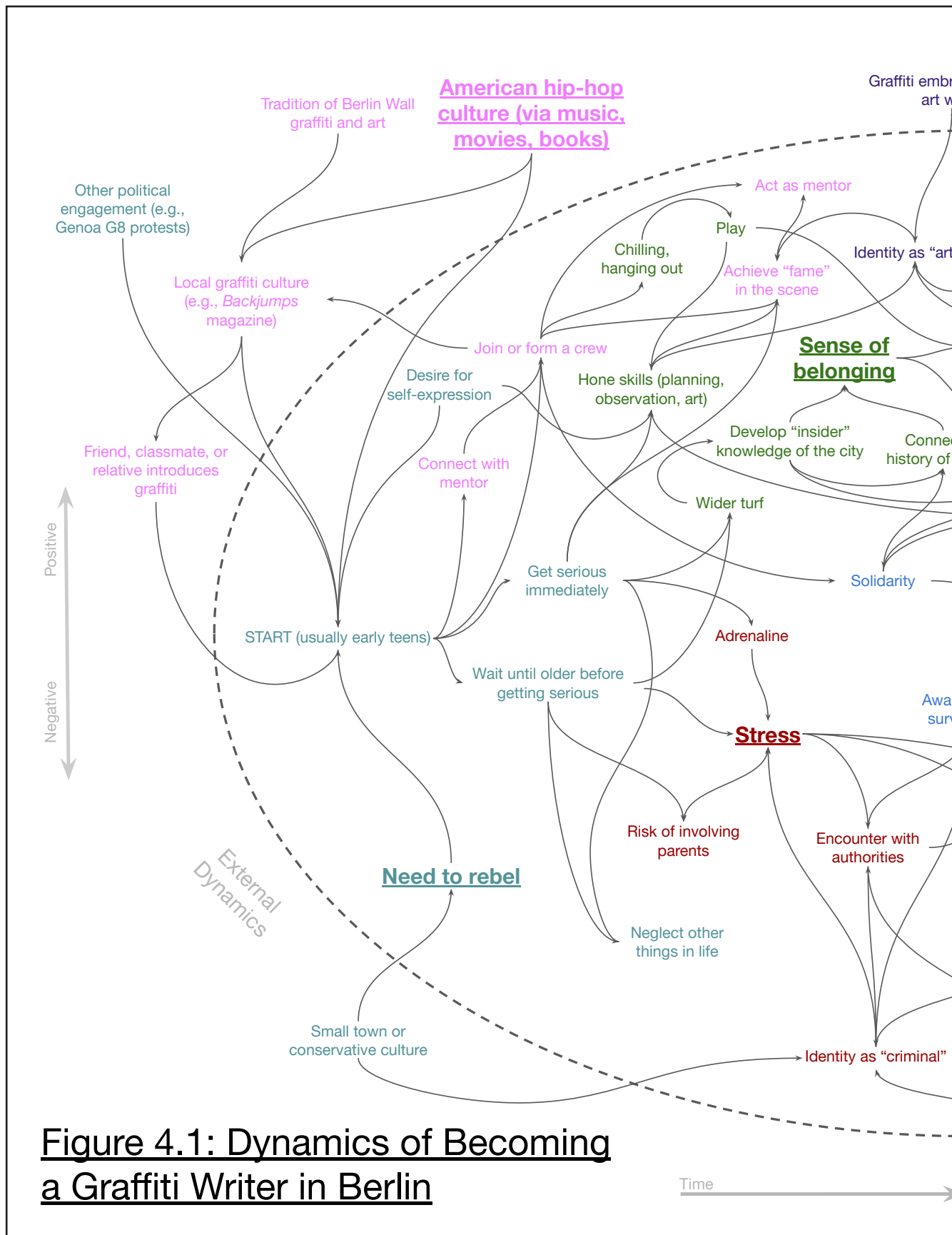
"No, not at all. And that's what's great, that so many come from other places, from other countries or other cities in Germany. That's just lovely. But of course I like it more when I do recognize them. The more you recognize, the better. I had this experience where I was in Southern France in some little town on the Atlantic. I don't know how many kilometers that is from Berlin, but it's quite a ways away. And at some point I see a piece from a well-known crew from Berlin. And I stood there and thought, 'How awesome is that?' Exactly that's the thing that I love about graffiti: you have this recognition value [*Wiedererkennungswert*] that allows you to see, 'Ok, someone was here too.' The world is somehow — it all hangs together, no matter how far away you are from someone. At that moment I actually kind of felt at home! I can't really describe the feeling I had. It was simply total joy."

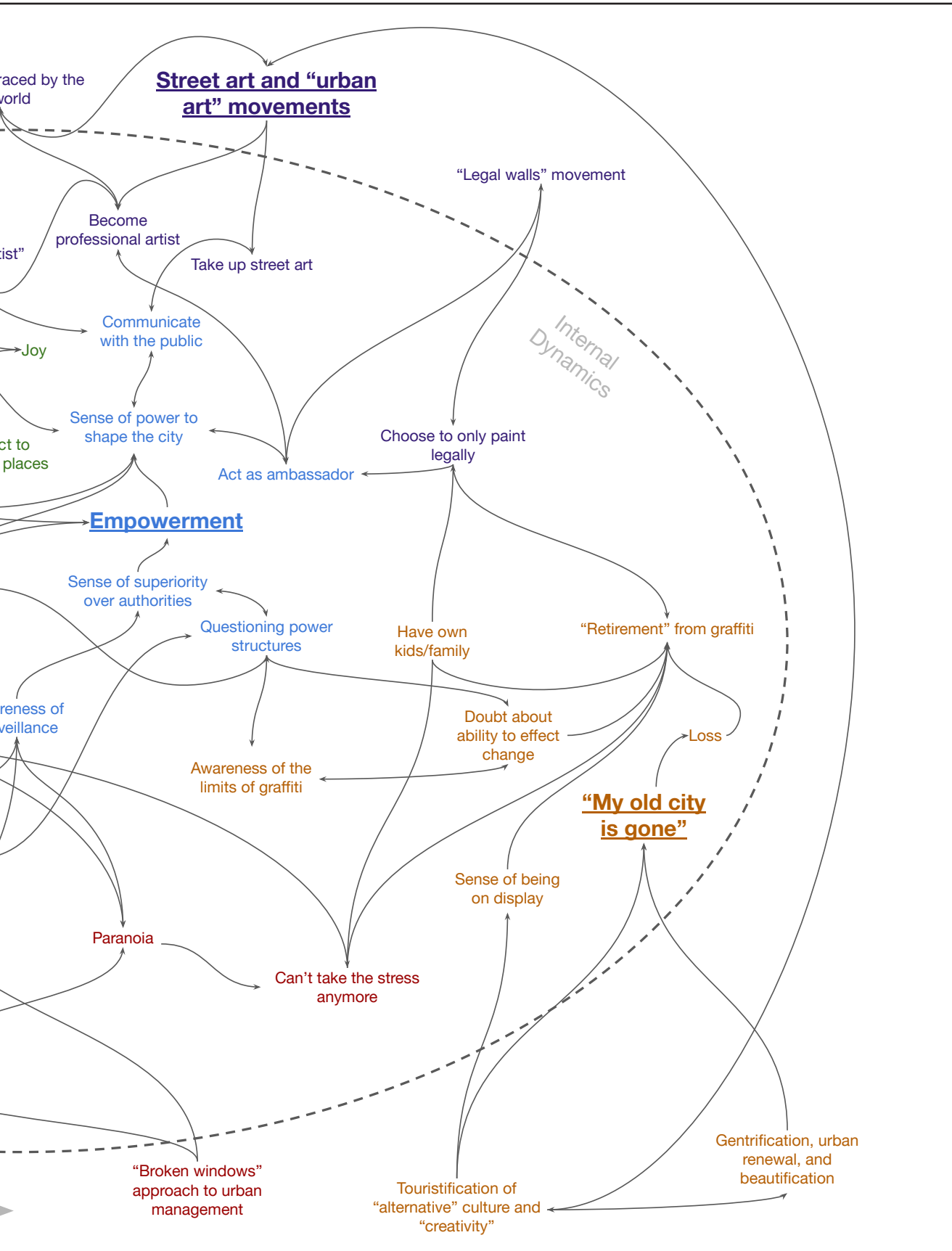
“THERE ARE REALLY TWO HEARTS BEATING IN ME” (HEIKO)

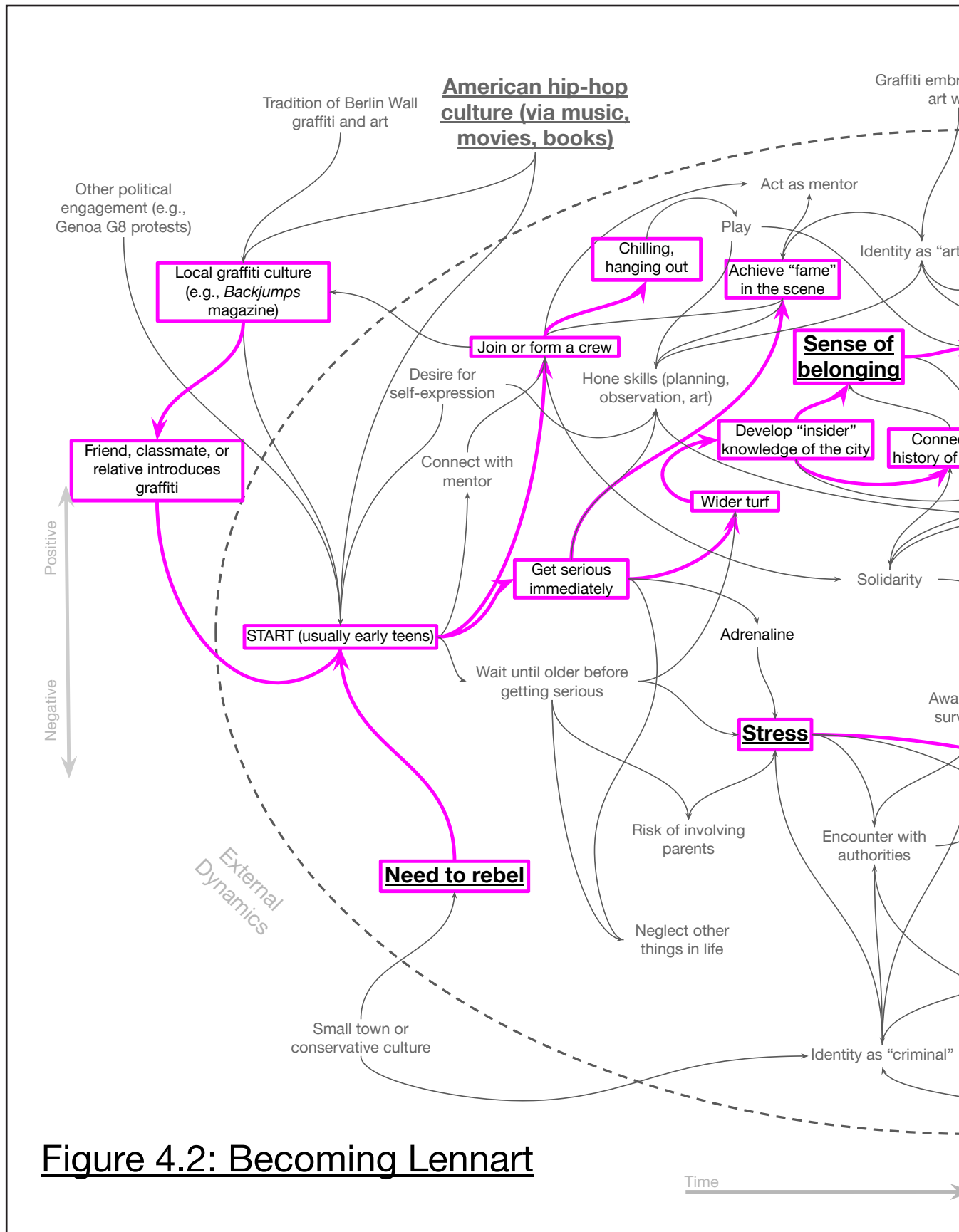
“When I started, classic graffiti was something I didn’t understand — what the letters mean, I didn’t try to understand the codes. But with street art, it was more easy to get into, the messages are more obvious, more images. It’s like it wants to be understood, while the graffiti scene doesn’t. Some graffiti guys are really like, ‘I don’t care what people think, we just do what we want.’ And that’s the difference with street art: it’s more art students, more people who want to do something pretty. And I saw some of that work and I thought, ‘Oh, that’s cool, I want to do some of that.’

“The first things I saw were stencils, and Banksy, and I thought that was cool — this is a nice way to interact with the city. And especially with Banksy, I think it was very easy to see that he put the artwork not just in any place, but there was always a relationship between the place and what he put up. Something like a comic book — I mean, to tell a story but tell it at the place where it happens. I really found that very nice. It was like putting a comic or cartoon in the real world. And when I saw that, my view of the city started to change, because then I was starting to look for those pieces, and then I started to look on the places like the backside of street signs, because I realised sometimes there’s interesting stuff there. So this change in my perspective, to look where I didn’t look before, it put a new level on the surface of the city.”

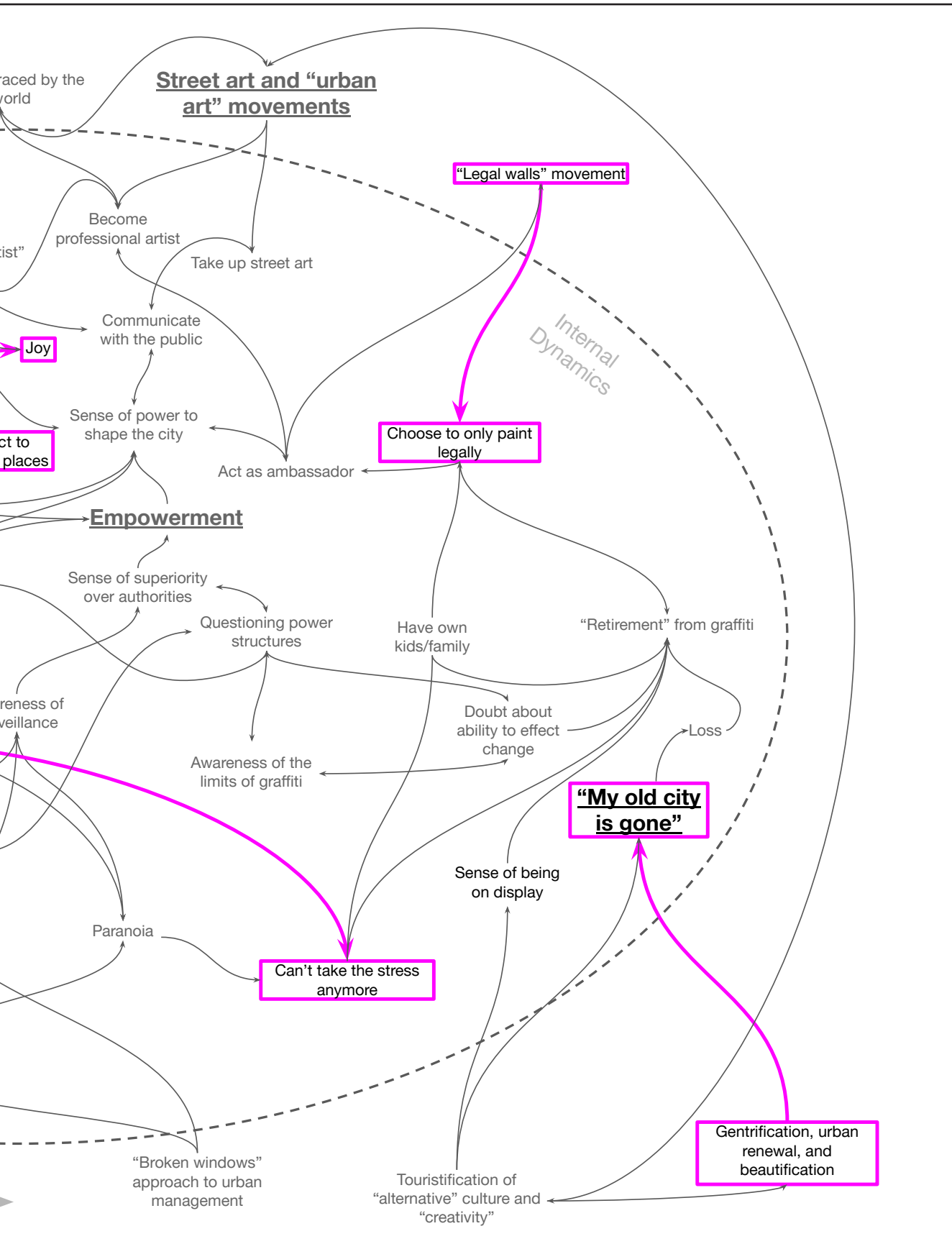
I had arranged to meet Heiko at Südblock, a pub just off Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg. Südblock feels like a cross between a retro 1950s diner and a nightclub supply store — some two dozen disco balls of various sizes hang above tables covered in red-and-white checked tablecloths. A glass vitrine displaying that day’s cakes and tortes points toward the doorway like the prow of a Pontiac. It is known as a queer- and immigrant-friendly event space as well as simply a lounge-y beer bar, and among a certain set, is its own kind











of landmark. One of my Berlin colleagues, emailing a group of us to set up a meeting, suggested three locations and offered justification for each: “Gastbrauhaus Doldenmäd: craft beer and pub food. Brauereikeller Eschenbräu: local brew pub with okay prices, offers different varieties of Flammkuchen. Südblock: No explanation needed.”

I had only had email contact with Heiko, but when I arrived, I quickly intuited who I was supposed to be meeting. Lanky, tattooed, with age-ambiguous salt-and-pepper hair, he was seated at a high table and hunched over in the pose of 21st-Century Thinker, his chin propped on a fist while the other hand thumbed a smartphone.

“This all started in Berlin for me. I’m from a small town in the northwest, but I’ve been in Berlin for 18 years. And at the time street art was getting big, you got the sense there were maybe 50 or 100 artists doing this, so there was so much to see. All kinds of places. What I liked about the whole thing, is it was very encouraging to do it yourself. I mean, I always had the feeling I wanted to do art, but I never had the courage. I didn’t feel like there was space for me. I didn’t study art, I didn’t think that anything I was doing was good enough to convince anyone to put in a gallery. And suddenly there was this huge gallery I could use, where I didn’t have to ask anyone, I could just put it up there, and maybe people like it and maybe they don’t. And this opportunity was just great, to show my art and not to have to ask anyone. And of course hoping that someone likes it, but not having that be the first consideration. And of course I saw the other advantages. The gallery — the white cube — takes art out of context. Street art was a way to put it in context, to use it in communication with the space where you put it. It really counted where you put it. That’s how I got into it.”

We were seated near the windows, with a view out at the Zentrum Kreuzberg, a massive apartment complex built in the early 1970s. The building spans Adalbertstraße, recreating, in a way, the Kottbusser Tor of the 18th Century, when the city’s tax wall ran through here

and Kottbusser Tor really was the gate into the city. Today, however, it is a junction rather than a gate, with a notoriously busy U-Bahn station and a reputation for crime. For some people it is a no-go zone; for others it is a great spot to get cheap falafel and fresh squeezed pomegranate juice; for thousands of others, including many Berliners of Turkish descent who live in the apartment complex, it is simply home.

“There are different categories of spaces. Of course there are spaces where a lot of other artwork already was. So, just to add your artwork, to say, ‘I’m here.’ And this is similar to graffiti. I put it a lot in spaces that were close to where I live, so like ‘marking your territory,’ in a way, but really it’s just practical. I mean, where you are most of the time, that’s where you put your artwork. Then it evolved more and more that I started to look for places that I found fascinating. I always tried to put it in places that were worn out, old, kind of decayed. And especially when I started to work with fur — I used colored fur, mainly pink but also other bright colors. Then put it on walls of buildings that were very decayed, very gray. To have this contrast between this soft fur and also this bright color on this old building. I had this character, this bunny. So I cut out this furry bunny and put it everywhere.”

“I’ve seen the furry bunny! But it’s not very pink anymore,” I said.

“And that’s the great thing! They age, like animals or like humans, because they go grey, they lose their colors. Which was really a nice coincidence. I mean, I think they really just suck up the whole air pollution and turn grey, but they really look like old bunnies after some time. And you really start to develop this relationship to your artworks. For example, I went out at night, I put the stuff up, then the next day I’d go out to see if it was still there. And if it was still there I was happy, and if it was gone I was sad. And this is really a different way to experience the city, if you have your own landmarks and just look for them, if they’re still there or if something’s changed.”

“What are your some of your landmarks?”

“That’s hard to say, because a lot of those landmarks have changed. For example, when I was doing the bunnies there were a lot of abandoned buildings, or spots where there had been a building, maybe bombed in WWII and never rebuilt. So there were a lot of spaces like that, where there were decayed or abandoned buildings. And I put a lot of stuff there, but a lot of these landmarks are gone, because now a lot of these free spaces, there are buildings there now, and a lot of those decayed buildings that had been there now are brand new.”

“Clearly landmarks are important to you.” I pointed at Heiko’s left forearm, where a tattoo of the Berlin Fernsehturm stretched nearly from elbow to wrist. “Can you tell me about your tattoos?”

“Yeah, the Fernsehturm is the most obvious symbol of Berlin! I think the important part for me, and I think for most people who do this, is to accept yourself and also your former self. I got one tattoo here — I wouldn’t do it again. But I’m happy with it anyway. It’s like accepting something I did in the past, and I’m fine with that, it’s part of my history. But if you can’t do that, I’d never come to the point of wanting to erase the tattoos, though that’s possible now. It’s like accepting yourself and accepting your decisions. I think these tattoos,” he said, pointing to his other arm, “are much better, but maybe I’ll also come to a point where I like them less.”

“That one seems to have a nautical theme,” I said. Some sort of sea vessel was enveloped in a tangle of squid tentacles.

“Exactly. I was reading *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* a few years ago on vacation. And I really liked this idea of the submarine, The Nautilus, where you explore the world and see things nobody else has seen. And I really wanted this spirit, this idea to never stop being curious and always wanting to explore and see the world and never stopping. I also like the Captain Nemo character, because he’s not this pure nice person. He’s obsessed, he’s a misanthrope. And I also like this. Not that I think it’s good to be like that, but I like characters that are human in some way, not just shiny heroes.”

“What’s going on in this scene?” Next to the Fernsehturm there was a tableau that included a shield, or crest, with some text written on it.

“That’s Plattdeutsch — not a dialect, but its own language. So here I have a fishing boat which is common in Ostfriesland, a crab fisher. I wanted a tattoo where the whole reference was home, in a general sense. So I had the crab boat for the place I was born. And then also here the Fernsehturm. But here, in Plattdeutsch, it means ‘Courage and Faith’ [*Mood und Gloov*]. I did it at a time when I was really lost, in a way, and I was looking for something that was like home, something that stays. Because in Ostfriesland is my family, and in Berlin are my friends. And I got it because these are the things I want to focus on: being courageous on the one hand, and on the other hand having faith in myself and the people around me, even people that I don’t know. And maybe it’s necessary to have courage in the first place, to not only look at yourself but also others and realize you’re in a safe place. I’m not religious at all, but I liked that the two words are so close to each other, with the two Os and almost as many letters.”

“And they kind of rhyme. It’s like a mini poem,” I said.



Heiko grinned, nodded, and took a sip of his drink, a summery *Radler*, even though it was the middle of December.

“So anyway, the bunnies. Usually I was packing my backpack with some bunnies and some glue, and just going. And then if I found a place that was good, I’d just do the bunny on the wall and then continue to do the next one. And when all the bunnies were gone, I just went home. I’d do maybe between five and ten a night. Because there was always this adrenaline rush to not get caught, and I think maybe after four or five I was, like, ‘Ok, that was enough adrenaline for the night!’ And then I was just happy to have put those few up. A lot bunnies, I can tell you where I put them — but the spaces now are totally different. A lot of places, the walls are not there anymore, or changed so much that it’s not really the same place anymore.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I think like I said, I liked the idea of having this thing that was bright and colorful and soft against a building that was old and cold and grey. And nowadays, the same bunny wouldn’t look good on a brand new building with a nice colored wall. The contrast is not the same. And also, these old buildings were really saying something like ‘I had better times,’ or something like that. I always think of them like old people, they have this history and you could really see the history on the building. And these new buildings, they are just very nice, but more like models — you don’t see any scars or any wrinkles. They are just very clean and you don’t see any — they are not at all like humans.”

“Sort of like Barbie dolls?”

“Yeah, right,” said Heiko. “And so I always wanted my pieces on these old people because I liked these old people, I liked what they represented. And this is also a reason why I don’t do this kind of stuff anymore because I think the spaces where you can do it are just getting fewer and fewer, and I don’t want to put it just on the wall of a new condo building.”

“What does that do to your relationship with the city?” I asked.

“Currently I’m struggling with me and the city. Because Berlin really has changed quite a lot. And a lot of what I liked about the city, like this huge subcultural scene, like opening up bars in cellars and having illegal cultural places and stuff like that — if you come here, you might feel like there’s still a lot of that, but from my point of view it’s getting less and less. And with my artwork it was the same: at that time, there was so much free space that you could use for that, so much unused space. And also so much space that was kind of ugly in a way that really screamed, ‘I want to be nicer, help me out!’ So that’s becoming less and less. And on the other hand, these were spaces where people with no money could really just do what they had in mind. And these spaces are disappearing, it’s getting harder to do this kind of work.

“And it’s also this time where everyone was doing this street art, this underground, illegal stuff, this is the time where this legend about Berlin being such a great city was created, and that led to so many now rushing in here to see this. And I really have issues with being — well, at some point I started to see myself as some kind of animal in a circus, where you do your tricks and a lot people are watching you. When I had started, I never had the feeling I was doing it for spectators; I was doing it for other people like me. People like me who live in the city, but also for people like me who do this artwork. And I think right now I have the feeling that this has changed. There are so many more people, and you have the weird

feeling that you are being employed by the city to do these 'weird' things, where tourists can come and say, 'Wow, this is so Berlin.'

"But right now, I'm trying to be more positive. I will leave Berlin in February for a year, but with the idea to come back and have a fresh start and do something new. I think there's still a lot of things you can do. And I think also there's the opportunity to use the way the city has changed in your artwork. Right now I have no idea how, how to get out of this cycle of feeling like a circus clown who's doing something for people who are just watching, but I think there must be ways to get something back of this freedom and of this subversiveness. Because Berlin really embraced its graffiti and street art scene, they advertise. And so this is a point where you ask yourself, 'One reason I started doing this was to do something that people don't like, to question property and stuff like that.' And then the city starts to say, 'Wow, that's so cool, we'll start to advertise it.' And you think, 'Maybe that's not what I planned!'"

"What do you mean by questioning property?" I asked.

"There are a lot different aspects. If you live in a dense place, a big city like Berlin, a building is not only the property of someone but also the boundary of the public space. So I think there are different interests in what the walls of the building look like. Of course the people who live in the project or who own the building might say, 'We want to decide what the walls look like.' But I think the public also has the right to say, 'These are the boundaries of the public space, this is what I see everyday, I want to have the opportunity also, even if I don't own a building, to decide what the place I live in looks like. I want to have my share of it.' And I think this is what graffiti artists just do. I think a lot of them don't think about it a lot, but they just grab their part of the public space and say, 'I want to be seen, I want to

make this my own space.’ And I don’t see why only the people who have the wealth to own these buildings should be able to do that.

“But I also think this whole scene does not need to be a consensus of everyone. I mean, on the one hand, it’s a youth culture. And it’s a way of stepping across boundaries that are not good for everyone. And I think this is something that young people should be able to do. For me, when I see this stuff here,” he gestured toward the doorway, “someone’s just tagged here, and I really have the feeling of, ‘This is a place filled with life.’ And so I never have the feeling that some people have, who first got in contact with graffiti in movies from the US where graffiti always meant” — he adopted the low, foreboding voice of an imagined, fear-mongering newscaster — “‘Brooklyn’ or ‘Queens’ or some place where there was violence. So I think the first association with graffiti for a lot of people is, it’s the place where crime happens. And for me, it’s never been that way. And so now when I ride through the city and I see a district or street where there’s no graffiti at all, that’s a dead place for me. I really have the feeling that there’s not so much life happening. Graffiti represent life no matter how bad they are: there are people who go through the city and they want to be seen and they started to write stuff there. And I think that’s a value.”

“What has it meant for you when you do it?”

“It really opened up space for me,” Heiko replied, “space where I can discover things that I didn’t think of before, and also space where I could be active in the urban sphere. Playing an active role. I think that’s very important. You start to see walls differently, they mean different things to you, you start to see places differently. At some point, you start to think not only ‘This is a nice place,’ but also, ‘This is a nice place for one of my pieces’ or ‘How can I get there in order to put a piece?’ or also ‘Which artists do I know have put stuff here?’ It really added this rich layer over the city that I can explore. It really changed my whole view.

“And to have a secret, which was also very nice. Because at first, I wasn’t telling anyone. And at first just that was nice. To be part of a conspiracy, not only with yourself but — I mean, sometimes I was sitting there and people were talking about my artwork, and that was so much fun, to not say anything and see that your artwork was recognized not just because people knew you. It was also a very honest way to get recognition because nobody knows that you were doing this. I’ll never forget the first time I did an LED installation. I did it on a bridge. Görlitzer Park. If you start from Görlitzer Bahnhof and go straight through Görli, then you come to a bridge at the very end, a bridge that goes over a canal.”

“At Lohmühle?” The spot is well known because the Berlin Wall passed here along the canal, and a sizeable experiment in ecological communitarian living, the Lohmühle Wagenburg, is located there.

“Yeah, right there, where there’s the bridge over the street. I did it in the afternoon, which is great with LED, because they’re bright enough you can see them in the day time but then in the dark they really start to shine. So in the evening I went back to that spot and I sat there with a beer. And people were coming by and they were saying, ‘Oh look. What’s this?’ And it was so awesome to be the artist but not reveal yourself as the artist. To get this recognition but to be anonymous. It was awesome. In times of social media where everyone is so concerned about communicating, ‘This is what I do, this is what I do, this is what I do,’ to do the opposite: to do something but not promote it. That was really nice.”

December in Berlin has a way of eating under your skin. The cold is moist, and dark descends early. It might have been only 9pm, but it felt late. And anyway our pints were empty. We decided to meet again the next day, at noon at the same spot, and weather permitting, to make a little bike tour of Heiko’s favorite haunts.



When he arrived, Heiko explained that he wanted to try to find some remaining bunnies, and then to visit his former apartment building, a squat. We set off, riding first along the canal.

“Do you think the memories of home and the ocean affects the way you live in Berlin?” I asked.

“The Spree is a big disappointment! It’s like not even a real river. If you see the Rhein, that’s a real river — it has current. But the Spree, sometimes you don’t even know which direction it’s flowing! And so, no. There are really two hearts beating in me, because I really also love this urban environment. So this sabbatical will also be for me to figure out if there’s some kind of tendency in one or the other direction. If I say after two months that I need to go back to the city, I really miss the crowds or the culture or whatever. Or after two months I say it’s so great to get rid of the stress, to be at the ocean, to have this experience of nature, to be close to yourself and to nature and not being disrupted by all the other people and this noise and the pollution and stuff like that. Because of my biography, growing up in a small town, big cities were always something to look toward. I was just yearning to get to a bigger city and see what’s there, to get somewhere that’s not small and boring and provincial like my hometown. So this was really driving me. And when I got to Berlin I had the feeling, now I’m in a city that’s really big and there’s a lot of things happening, and this is something that matters to me. I’ve always wanted to go to New York; I’ve never been. It’s a city that might be even more like that. It’s a city that’s the cradle of so much, of so many cultural things that I grew up with, like hip-hop, graffiti, old break dance stuff. And I have the feeling that most of the things I love come from America and a lot of that comes from New York. So someday I have to go there and see it!

“Now that I know I’m leaving in February, I’m visiting my friends more. And that’s something where you think, I could have done that without my plan to leave! But it’s great that you start doing these things because you know your time somewhere is limited. And it’s good because as I explained, I was really frustrated here in Berlin the last several months, this feeling that everything I like is diminishing, but now with knowing that I will leave, I start to like it again. It’s really great. And it’s interesting to see how your perception of the environment changes — not because it’s changed in any way but because you start to change.”

We rode on, passing a construction site along the river.

“This whole area used to be different,” he explained. “It was just like what you see over there: a bunch of walls that divided different dumping spots for sand or coal or whatever. And since it was an empty space, with nothing happening here for years, it was used a lot by graffiti people. And it was a nice spot to hang out because you had free space right on the water. You can see, there’s still a wall down there with graffiti. But you know, this is part of that feeling I had, that everything is disappearing. Because now they’re building some office buildings here and you won’t have the space anymore. Of course other people will say, ‘Oh, it’s great, more jobs.’ And in some ways it was a sad place, nothing was happening here, it was just leftovers from an old industrial area — but still it really depends what you make of it. For some people it was really like a park, a place to hang out, to relax, and do some graffiti.

“But I think what’s obvious is that there is still a lot of space there, space that will never be taken — the streets, the parks. Just because there’s less, doesn’t mean there’s nothing left. And as you said, for people who are new to the city, it still seems like something special. I

mean, I really want to avoid becoming a grumpy old guy who just talks about the past — there's no use in that! It's still good to see how much graffiti is there."

"When you ride around, do you see other work that inspires you?"

"Actually at the moment I've sort of stopped looking for stuff. I mean, I like the whole 1UP crew, because it's very basic graffiti but usually in places that are hard to reach, like rooftops. So if I see a new one, that's always nice. And I like the simplicity — they only put up their name, that's all, no fancy message. Though there are also people who are doing these rooftop messages, and I like them, I think they have some nice ideas in terms of what to write. For example, on Schlesische Straße, which is one of those places where a lot of tourists go to party, there's one message that says, 'Fickt Euch Allee' — Allee with two e's, as in 'street.'"

The orthographic pun in German turns the phrase "fuck you all" into "Fuck You Street."

"So I really like this provocative thing on the one hand and in one sense, I really understand the sentiment: *ihr geht mich alle auf die Nerven* [you're all getting on my nerves]. And one other slogan they did was in Hermannstraße — it just got painted over recently — is was '*Kiez statt Kies*.' '*Kies*' is 'gravel' but it's also slang for money. So it's a nice pun, nice words that fit well together: 'neighborhood instead of money.' It was at the corner of Hermannstraße and Columbiadamm."

"Did it get painted over by other graffiti?" I asked.

"No, they cleaned the wall. But it was there for years. And it was such a prominent spot, so when you came up there from Hermannplatz, you saw it. And this was just the right

place for it, because this whole Schillerkiez, right by Tempelhofer Feld, is now massively gentrified. Since the airport closed down, the houses went from very low value to very high value, because what was the airport before is now a park. And the whole Kiez is changing drastically. Now it's almost impossible to get a really good cheap place there, where it was pretty easy in the past."

Eventually, we found our way to one of the last furry bunnies Heiko knew to be still up, on the very popular Oranienstraße back near Kottbusser Tor. The street has seen many of its affordable Turkish restaurants and dive bars replaced by espresso bars and boutiques, but facades tend to still be plastered with fly posters, tags, and other street art. When we found the bunny, it was indeed dingy and gray, a geriatric bunny if I'd ever seen one. Heiko speculated that it had lasted so long because this particular building had been a *Wohnprojekt* [collective living project] and the residents were not interested in removing anything vaguely artistic. This was a fitting segue to our next stop, so we set off for his former squat, which also usually had a lot of art on its facade.

"My first place was in Wedding, then I moved here and was here for five years. It's not a squat anymore. I guess even when I moved in it was legalized already — so it's a *Wohnprojekt* too. But the people who squatted it initially were still in there. And we had a typical squat or housing project structure. So we had governance meetings every week, and we had a bar and club area that we managed ourselves but were open to the public sometimes. I started to do all the street art stuff at that time I was in the squat. Because this is the same thing about living differently. In a squat, you do all this anarchist stuff without even knowing that it's anarchist stuff. You start to manage your own house, you start to discuss with your neighbors how to live, and so this really changes your way to act in society — without coming from the theoretical direction. I went to the squat, I

participated in governance — and then years later I started to read about anarchism and it was like, ‘Damn, I didn’t know what we were doing!’ It was a nice time.”

“Do you consider yourself politically active today?”

“Yeah,” said Heiko, “definitely. But I’m not that kind of theory guy. I would never think of going into politics and convincing people with words what to do. But I really like to do things, to live things that are close to my ideal of how I think society should be. It really feels natural. I think to do these things, to enjoy them or also to not enjoy stuff — I question myself a lot. And so I’m not so convinced about my thoughts or what I think is good that I could convince other people of it by talking to them. And so what I experienced in the past is that when I do things, I can convince people. Do you know Critical Mass?” he asked.

“You mean the bike ride?”

“Yeah. I have another bike, a cargo bike, that I use as a sound system for Critical Mass. I was thinking about it because I think it’s really close to all of this: people taking space, people experiencing their city in another way. And also people doing something that’s not 100% legal. I mean, *Deutsche Strassenverkehrsordnung* [German {Federal} Rules of the Road] sort of can allow multiple cyclists, but it doesn’t justify 2,000 cyclists! I really love it, I think for the same reasons. People are just grabbing their space, and enjoying it. And you’re doing something political without knowing it, or without — I mean, the majority of people don’t have ideas about empowering themselves, grabbing space, grabbing their share of the public space — they just do it, and they enjoy it.”



“So you must support *Volksentscheidfahrrad* too.” At the time of our interview there was a grassroots referendum campaign underway with the goal of dramatically improving bicycle infrastructure and safety.

“No, not all at,” he said. “They’re just a bunch of squares [*Spießer*].”

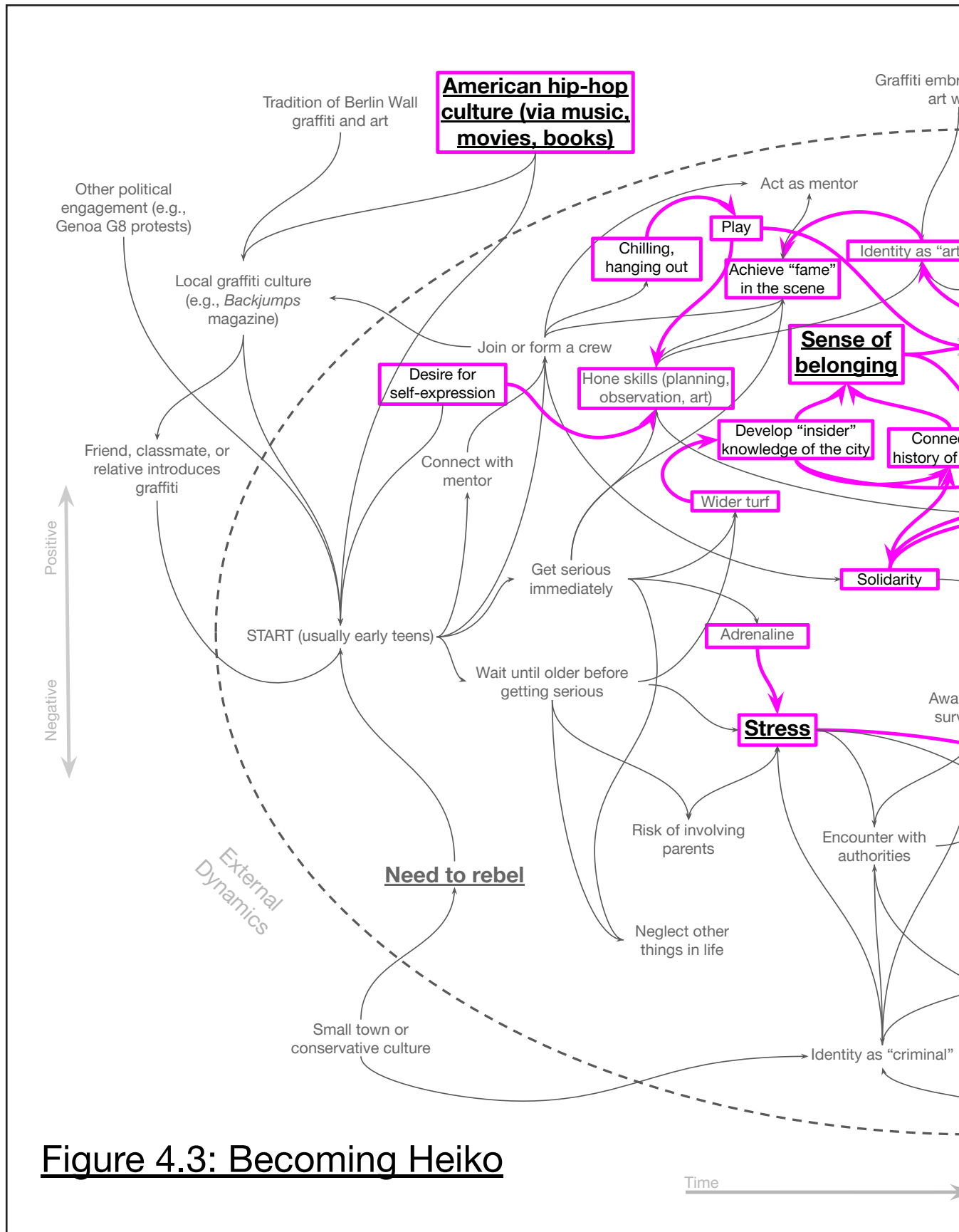
“But you’re so into Critical Mass,” I said.

“Yeah, but that's the great thing about Critical Mass as a movement is the different aspects that it has. To do this ride, you don't have to pinpoint people as to what they are, what they're for or against. I mean for me, of course it's about using the streets more for cycling and less for cars, but it's also about just doing something which is not allowed, and doing it anyway, and showing that it can't be stopped. And using public space for this kind of event which is totally uncommercial, just people coming together and having fun. And as I said before, the perception of your surroundings changes when you're doing that — it's some kind of self-empowerment, when you go in the street and just do this thing together with other people. I think for me it's less about cycling and more about public space and doing something at least a little bit subversive.

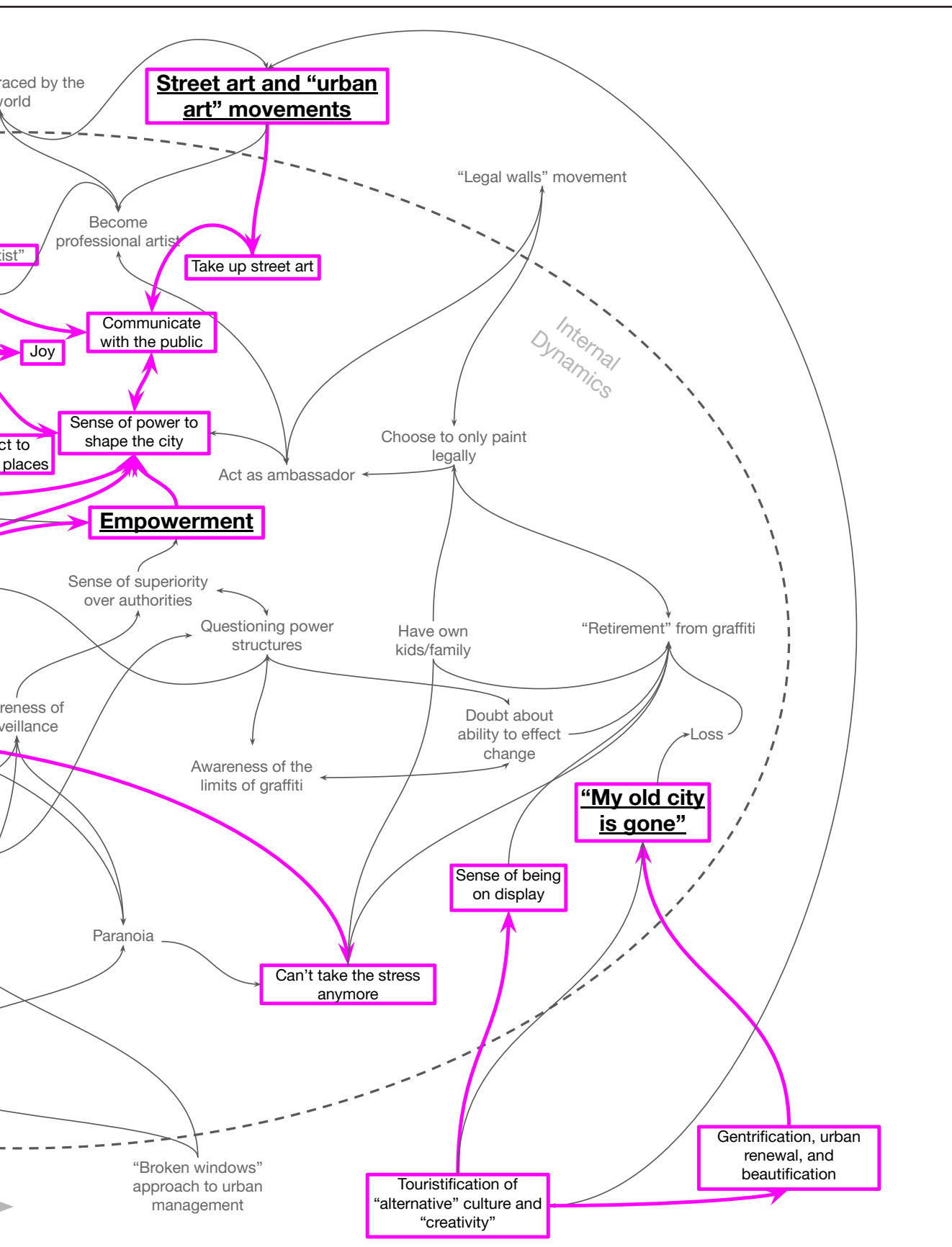
“And that's why I think something happens in a roundabout way. There's this leftist vision: people educate themselves, they read Marx, and they read all the theories about why capitalism is bad and how to get out of this. But I think the graffiti scene and other people who do these kinds of events, who take part, they do it the other way around: they do something and enjoy themselves and they transform society like that. Ok, just in small increments, but I really like this approach. To have people experience things and thereby getting out of this mindset of being only the consumer, realizing that this is a place that they can be creative, they can do something. And that's also pretty important for me. I studied

computer science. I never read Marx or stuff like that — I mean, I thought it might be useful but then I thought, ‘Oh no, I won’t understand any of it.’ But still I had the idea that I wanted another society.

“And so I always take people to Critical Mass, friends, I tell them they should try it. And when they do, I’ve never had anyone say they don’t like it. I really like this way of convincing people, by doing things. I’m not that person who’s so self-assured about any kind of theory. I don’t know if anarchy is a good idea, I don’t know if communism is a good idea. And so I would never be convincing in promoting it by talking about it. But I know that Critical Mass is a lovely way to spend an evening, so that’s what I like to do.”



**Figure 4.3: Becoming Heiko**



## “WE LOADED UP THE SPACE WITH OUR HISTORY” (LINUS)

“I moved to Berlin almost ten years ago, and before that had always come to Berlin twice a year, in part because of graffiti. I come originally from Nuremberg, in Bavaria, and there the urban realm is very different, very cleaned up. I go back these days and I think it consists of a ‘psychoarchitecture,’ a surveillance system — when one walks down the street, one feels observed. And that’s one of the biggest differences with the structure here, which comes across as uncontrolled. And that’s what graffiti always means symbolically, that it is uncontrolled. That ‘they’ have no power over space: each tag, each graffito is a sign that there are moments in time when something like that could be done.”

Linus and I were standing in line at Cuccuma, a coffee shop in Kreuzberg’s Bergmannkiez. Bergmannkiez is a sort of cultural antipode to the more Turkish, more political, grittier, and genuinely poorer Wrangelkiez at the other end of the district. In Bergmannkiez, streets of restored prewar buildings are lined with cake shops, sneaker boutiques, and restaurants selling ethnic cuisine to white customers. Gentrification would seem to have run its course here, though there are still tiny kebab shops and used bookstores between the organic grocers and real estate agents — and the kebab shops and bookstores seem much busier. The neighborhood also retains some of the politically engaged Kreuzberg cache, especially among people who lived there through reunification, some of whom still live there and continue to characterize the neighborhood culturally. (A Berlin friend of mine likes to share the anecdote about one of his aunts who has lived directly on Bergmannstrasse for decades. The only reason she is able to do so is because of her grandfathered lease, which pegs her rent to what it was when she moved in, “two digits in Deutschmarks,” as he likes to tell it. When the Euro was phased in starting in 1999, the exchange rate was set at about 2:1. This means that my friend’s aunt’s rent was at most 50 Euro per month. Even with the maximum increases allowed under law, she would still today be paying less than 200 Euro



a month to live in one of the chicest parts of Berlin. I have no way of determining the truth of this anecdote in its specifics, but it does illustrate the perception that Berlin remains an affordable place to live for some lucky individuals.)

“So Berlin was a center of attraction [Anziehungspunkt], also because the graffiti scene in Berlin was very diverse, in that there were always very good, progressive artists here. There were these art centers, like Urban Art Info, that was the first cool street art gallery, where Swoon and people like that had shows. That was in Mitte on Brückenstraße. We came regularly whenever something was going on, and went through all the streets, photographed everything. It was always a huge source of inspiration. I mean, the graffiti scene, there are always a bunch of total idiots, to whom I wouldn’t ascribe much consciousness, for whom it’s just about being cool. But there was always a sector in the scene that went further. And we tried to instill that back in Nuremberg, but at some point you don’t want to do everything yourself anymore, and Berlin just has this sucking effect that makes you want to come.”

We had reached the front of the line, and each ordered cappuccinos. Cuccuma is the kind of coffee shop with a 20,000 Euro espresso machine and couches rescued from the street. Other elements of the decor recall the street, too, including a series of framed collages that mimic the palimpsests of shredded fly-posters seen on fences and lampposts around the city. For all its shabby-chic affectations, Cuccuma is one of those “third places” whose function as such seems genuinely under threat given how much actual work is done there. On the day that I met Linus, a phalanx of laptops loomed down on us from a lofted seating area as we ordered our drinks at the bar below. There were so many “freelancers” there, in fact, that the only space available for us to sit was underneath the staircase leading to the loft, between the bus bins and a table piled with pseudo-intellectual, glossy periodicals.

“When I started, I was 16,” he explained, “so that’s 20 years ago. And I was 27 when I moved here.”

“So you were painting for ten years years in Nuremberg?” I asked.

“Always in phases, I’d say. When I was 16, I would have said that I sprayed a lot. But then I got more politically engaged. In 2001, I was in Genoa at the G8 conference. And afterward, it all slid more in that direction, that I pursued the political aspect more. And partly also — I’ve become in retrospect much more paranoid, because I’ve learned a lot about surveillance. And I think I had this mindset that at some point there would be no more graffiti. Today I think it really is the case with me that there’s a surveillance system, but graffiti shows the holes, and I think there will never be an end to this contestation [*Auseinandersetzung*] between the two. At least I hope. But since I’ve become more politically engaged — arranging demonstrations against Nazis or whatever — and then the paints, the cans became more a tool for the propaganda. Still, I tag and paint every now and then in my neighborhood. I always say that I’m a graffiti sprayer in retirement! In part because I can no longer endure all the excitement, so I seek out places that aren’t surveilled.”

Linus was one of the few people who had told me his illegal sprayer name. As far as I could tell from what I had seen around Neukölln and Kreuzberg, he was leading a very active retirement.

“How do you find those places that seem less surveilled?” I asked.

“Well, in Neukölln, when you walk around you find places, maybe where trees have grown together and you can stand in a corner and then in the winter when the leaves fall down,

your piece is in a great spot there. I'd say that recently I've definitely the sense in my head to paint *with* the city. I can look at the city, how it's evolving. So now there's the Autobahn construction site, for example. Back there they're building the Autobahn, and one can tell what will remain standing and what will get torn down. And one thinks along a little bit [*ein bisschen mit denkt*] and visits the places frequently and inspects them, then one can paint places that will really last. On the one hand, it's the personal fear that prevents me from painting here on the street, big, among the top ranks, and at the same time a consciousness that the city is a river and is in motion and that a lot is happening and that there will always be new spaces that are potentially available."

Linus sipped his cappuccino. It was the middle of January of what long-time Berliners told me was not a particularly cold winter. And yet the damp continental chill can have a way of settling around one's shoulders like a shroud, and the shroud can be difficult to shed. Linus kept on his hat and coat as we took our spot under the staircase. As he sat down, he swung a brown case, like a slightly boxy fanny pack, around to his lap. Throughout our conversation, he fidgeted with it periodically. I saw a lot of Berliners, of all genders, with this type of accessory. Often the contents were simply tobacco and rolling papers, in addition to the Tempo *Taschentucher* [tissues] that ever-practical Germans invariably have on hand. Linus, however, carried a few additional tools: permanent markers and correction pens, along with a small camera.

"Others have told me they like to paint where people have painted already," I said. "It sounds like it's different for you."

"Definitely. I go on the streets and you can put a tag in places where there are other tags and you know it won't be removed. It's easy to look at a building and say, 'This one gets cleaned, this one doesn't get cleaned.' But take over by us in Neukölln. There was hardly

any graffiti there when I moved — but now there's been an explosion. I think that has something to do with all the young people moving there, the neighborhood is getting more attractive, but I think it's a question of time before it's everywhere. North Neukölln — it's already everywhere. The south looks a little different. It has to do with the built character also."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I think the attractive sites, the *Altbau* from the *Grunderzeit*,<sup>3</sup> one wants to be there, so to speak, so then the scene concentrates on those areas. Down in Rudow, by the single family houses, teenagers may at some point come out of those houses and spray the walls. But I doubt it'll be a mass phenomenon. It has to do with density of the city, with anonymity — the smaller and fewer the houses, the less anonymous is the space, and I think the anonymity is a very important criteria. Felt anonymity — it doesn't have to be actually. Meanwhile, I think there's a greater acceptance of graffiti, that the people who meet up on the streets at night, these people accept graffiti, accept it as part of a praxis [*Praxis*]."

While I had come to understand the scope of Linus's independent, illegal graffiti praxis, I had first come into contact with him through a group of artist-activists whose work on urban issues I'd heard about. He described to me how he'd gotten involved.

"In 2008, we made a video about Media Spree. I was relatively green, but I think we were able to authentically portray what this space had meant to us. I mean, the East Side Gallery, in the 90s, was just one of the biggest Halls of Fame in Germany. On the back side. And that was all just a total Brache, you could just walk through. And I think you can see that in the film, what that free space means for us. I'd say we portrayed a bit of Automatism. Then we

<sup>3</sup> *Altbau*, literally 'old construction,' is usually translated as 'prewar,' though in this case Linus doesn't mean all buildings from before 1939 but specifically buildings built during the *Grunderzeit*, or 'Founding Era,' the heady final decades of the 19th Century following German unification in 1871.

made a film, 'What is Gentrification,' where we showed a house in its different phases, how it changes, and that became my bachelor's thesis in geography.

"But now I've been here for 10 years in the neighborhood and I see that quite of lot really is durable, that is doesn't have to unfold like it did in Prenzlauer Berg. Even on Boddinstraße [one of the most thoroughly upgraded streets in Neukölln], there are a bunch of buildings, corners, that are in an aged condition. And if you go up Greifswalder Straße [in Prenzlauer Berg], there are still huge graffiti bombings there on the street. Sure, there has been a crazy transformation in parts of the city — Friedrichstraße," he said, referring to the boulevard in Mitte that has undergone a wholesale refurbishing and been transformed into Berlin's 5th Avenue, complete with Swarovski and Gucci stores, "that's all become truly ugly, I'd say. But I wasn't so emotionally involved over there."

"What are the other places you were emotionally involved with?"

"The Spreeraum was always a big playground, the Cuvry Brache — do you know that story? This story with the Blu murals, and everything that happened afterward, and the blacking out, and then what the Berlin Kidz did? This painting of Blu's, I found that so crazy with these masks, how they're simultaneously pulling down each other's masks. What a locally specific view, exactly on the spot where before the physical boundary was, East Side and West side are ripping the masks off each other's faces! I found that just great. And then to have it painted over, that gave the artwork a completely new meaning. Crazy. That was just really good. And that's exactly what that site [*Fläche*] had earned. It was fought over for a long time. There were a couple big exhibits, these *Backjumps* exhibits, where they did the Blu wall, the first Blu wall. They asked the Senate whether they could get some funding for it, and they said, 'No, we can't give you any support,' and then they went and did it anyway illegally. They pulled back the fence, got their scaffolding in there, did it in two days. And



two months later a photo of it was on the website of the Berlin Tourism Board! It became a very popular motiv. I think there at the Cuvry, so much turns around it. It was a symbol, of course.”

“Had you painted there yourself?” I asked.

“No,” he said.

“Why not?” I asked.

“Well, at one level, I find crossing [*übermalen*] stupid. Then there’s the competition thing with the graffiti, and I find that totally daft. There are enough surfaces, one just has to find them. You seek them out and you find them. And the reason you do that is to make the city more colorful, not this one-against-the-other thing, with these weird rules, like ‘Mine is better than yours or I’m greater than you.’ And it also has to do with the fact that I want my pieces to last. So I don’t paint where three weeks later I’ll get painted over [*überbemalt werde*].”

“You’re talking now about your own graffiti, not the political pieces with the collective?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “I do it just because it’s fun. I mean, you could explain it politically — the appropriation of space, appropriation of the city — I would see that as a political moment, but in fact, just writing my name everywhere, as much as possible, it’s a little limited. These days, it’s more about the experience for me, standing at the wall, then coming back later and taking photos in different light, and then two years later and it’s still there but it looks totally different.

“And I have a list of spots in my head that I’m observing permanently,” he went on, “I could go any night, actually, and finish pieces. The more one does, the more one sees, of course, and one finds oneself within a kind of logic, which is also good. There are phases where, within two months, I paint three or four paintings. That’s cool. And then I chill out for a bit. Then there are phases where I go out again.”

“Which spots are on your list now?” I asked. Most people I talked to did not like this kind of question. The worst thing to do, I had been told, is to tell someone your sprayer name. The second worst thing is to tell someone where you paint. But Linus was not so reserved.

“Hmm, there were several in my head,” he said. “The Autobahn construction site fascinates me a lot. You can really check things out there. I mean, I can process the city there [*die Stadt auseinandersetzen*]. Last week I was in the Infobox exhibit for the Autobahn, and there one can see the whole thing in the plan, and you can see the buildings that are no longer in the plan and those that still are there. So there are a few spaces I’d like to paint.”

Linus was interested in something beyond painting, however. “And then in the spring — behind the construction site there’s an abandoned stretch of train tracks, partially over the construction site then back to the coffee factory. A train goes through there, has access to the Ringbahn, and there are some spurs, and then there’s an empty tunnel. And there’s a wall that a famous crew painted a while ago, The Diamonds.”

“I don’t know of them,” I admitted.

“Oh, a great, great group of sprayers. From the first or second generation from Berlin. They have a Tumblr called something like *Diamonds Schönheiten*, you can check it out. And they’ve all become artists, they developed their painting much further, but they painted this

long wall along the tracks. There's a little tunnel there. And my idea is to build a little bar there, a little structure, and in that sense the whole tunnel should become a little nicer.

"I've known the spot for a long time," he continued. "You can paint well there, and you can take nice long walks on paths that go parallel to the normal city. It's really nice, I'm there a lot. You can see the construction, and there's a lot happening, but I've recognized that these train tracks — they're blocked, no changes can happen, the lots on the left and right on either side are allocated already. You could maybe make a bike path, but beyond that, nothing is possible. And so I see some potential there. So I'd like to build a little hut and then one night — I'll invite you. And then you walk back there, drink a beer, and just experience a moment. That's what it's about for me, I think."

Our spot under the stairs had forced us to sit quite close to one another and to lean toward each other slightly, lending the scene an unearned intimacy. I thanked him for the invitation.

"The collective went to Liverpool over the summer," he continued. "We helped them do this kind of parade in the Docklands area. And afterwards we talked about the idea of the 'utopian moment': to experience something together that one wouldn't have predicted. And so it enriches both the individual and the group. Afterwards, as we go through the world, we have this feeling we achieved something cool. Through that collective experience we loaded up the space with our history. And that alters our future views of this part of the city extremely, I'd say."

"Does focussing on those moments make it easier to accept it when your pieces disappear or when the city changes?" I asked.

“Yeah,” he said, and then paused. “No, actually not!” He laughed at himself. “Recently we were in Nuremberg and then we drove home and we passed Autobahn stretches where I’d painted a lot on the noise abatement walls. And everything had been painted grey. For the first time the term ‘censorship’ popped into my head. How can they do that? What right do they have to determine how that looks? This shitty Autobahn. Ok, one can find name writing daft, in itself, but I find it a great contribution. I understand why there’s no guarantee for life-long preservation, because the city consists of ownership and non-ownership and whatever. But in itself, we would all wish that it’s more colorful. Ok, I’m not so completely convinced that a democratic discussion of the public realm would produce what I want — I think graffiti is about ‘I transgress the boundaries, I don’t accept this.’ And so if my neighbors and I were to get together on my street and decide to paint something collaboratively then no doubt an atrocious picture of a flower would come out and our buildings would be covered with flowers. I’m not sure if I’d find that so beautiful! You can also see it at the big murals, there’s graffiti sprayed along the bottom. It’s kind of a reaction to that, sort of ‘You’re doing something legal and pretty, and maybe you painted over something that was here before. And the only reason the mural is here is because there was illegal stuff there before. And so we keep the pressure on the streets and we don’t accept the legal.’”

“Do you always know what the ownership situation is where you paint?” I asked.

“It is definitely not something I’m conscious of. If I were to reflect on it, the spots I select, they generally have the impression of being unowned. They’re not actively owned or occupied by anyone. And no one’s caring about them. These are exactly the places I seek. It could be an old derelict rail depot, or something that seems disused. Exactly this ‘unownedness’ [*Besitzlosigkeit*] guarantees that it’s open to be painted.”

“After painting, do you have the feeling you’ve acquired some sort of ownership?”

“Yeah, absolutely,” he said. “The city becomes my own. When I sit on my bike, I rap. I’m a hook line rapper, I focus on the hook lines. And my hook line, it’s even in English. So if I’m on my way back home from painting, I’m singing, ‘I ride around in my hood, graffiti makes it look good. Summertime feels so fine, in a city that’s mine.’ So there you are. In any case, the feeling that ‘this is my city’ increases extremely. It influences how I move in the city and where I feel at home and how I’m emotionally connected, definitely. That’s always how it is. Behind every piece there’s a story I have in my head, and I frequent the places, and check out what’s going on, and that connects me to the place somehow. I don’t think I would seek out the place if my image wasn’t there anymore. If the physical possession were to disappear, then probably my history with the place would move on. Because I’d say, ‘That was once my spot. Now it’s been cleaned.’ And the relationship would change.”

“For example those Autobahn walls in Nuremberg?” I suggested.

“Exactly,” he said. “Like, ‘I was there, and I was there — and now everything’s all beige,’ Ach!”

“But that’s still a story in a way,” I ventured.

“Ok, definitely. An invisible one. That’s graffiti in general. It’s a communication system in the city, an anonymous communication system, but only people who can read it are part of that, part of it in a literal way. And it’s somewhat limited what it can say. But I’m happy when I see graffiti at all, even if it’s horrible. I’m happy when I see new graffiti. I’m happy when I see it on the S-Bahn — we can see it well from our balcony — and every time, it’s super.”



“So what’s the relationship between the activist stuff with the collective, with a message, and your own illegal graffiti?” I asked.

“I told you about the tunnel where I want to make the hut. And this is actually a motivation, this appropriation, this doing something which maybe goes beyond the law but which is nevertheless not unfriendly — I was maybe more radical once, but I don’t want to bust anyone’s chops. To take these places and to shape them somehow [*formulieren*] — I have a strong motivation for that. And the autonomy — when I think back on graffiti, that’s what I have gotten from it, this doing something, thinking of something, and no matter who it belongs to, I’m doing it. This definitely had an influence on my personality, on my shadow. Nowhere is my motivation so high as when I can determine what I want to do. So if I were to talk to my neighbors about how we should paint the building, it would probably be a very interesting process socially [*gesellschaftlich*]. But such processes are incredibly stressful. And often some sort of compromise is the result, and compromises are a bit of a problem for me.”

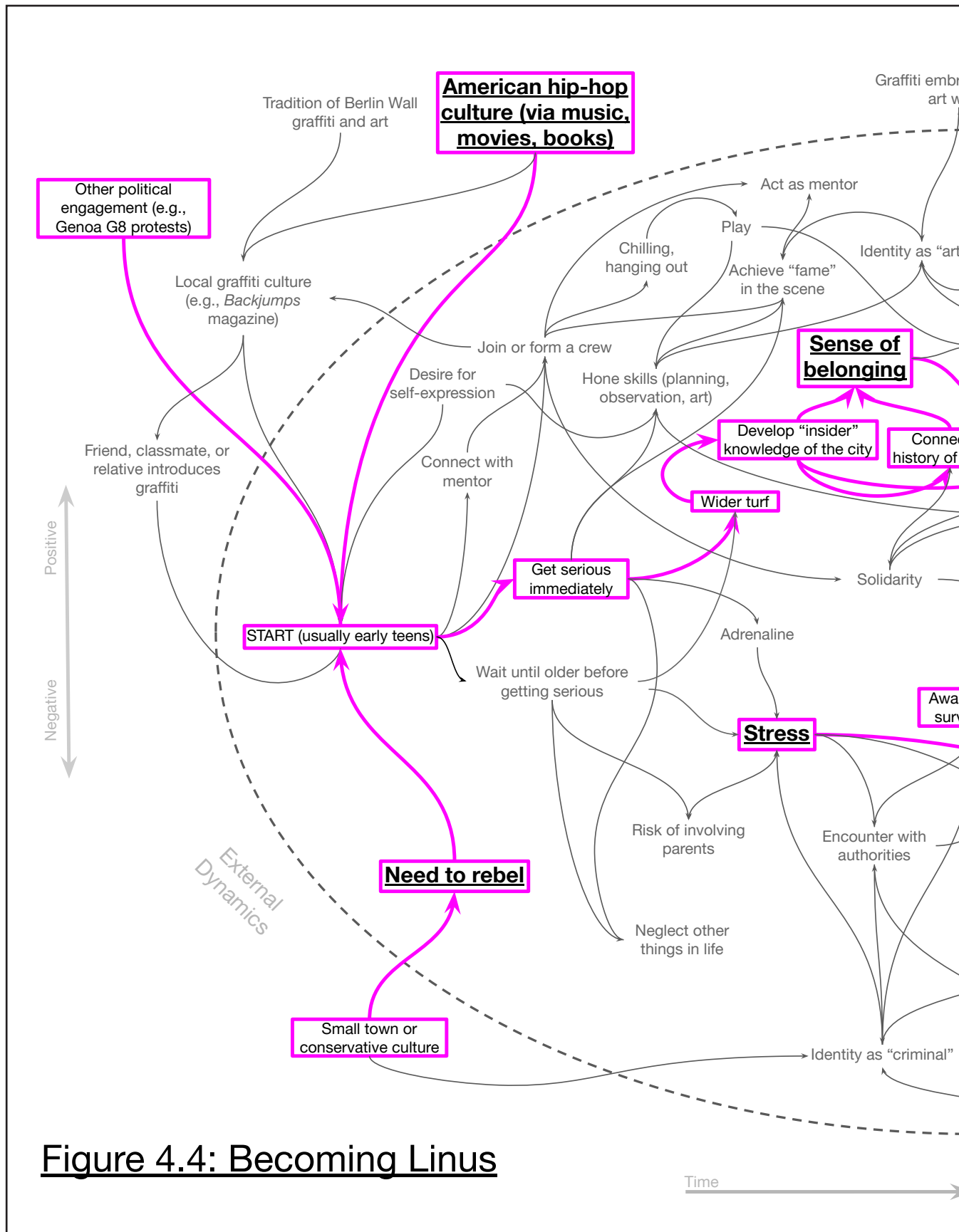
“But you were part of this ‘Monopoly board’ on Manteuffelstraße,” I said. The collective had partnered with the residents of a building to paint a five-story mural in the style of a Monopoly game board. Sites and scenes from around the neighborhood are rendered as squares on the board. As a satire of gentrification, of a mindset that sees all of urban life as a commodity to be bought and sold, the work is fairly heavy-handed, but it also includes plenty of depictions of neighborhood resistance, and no small amount of humor, like a little image of a stooped-over granny wearing a bandana and holding a slingshot. “That was a cooperative process, wasn’t it?”

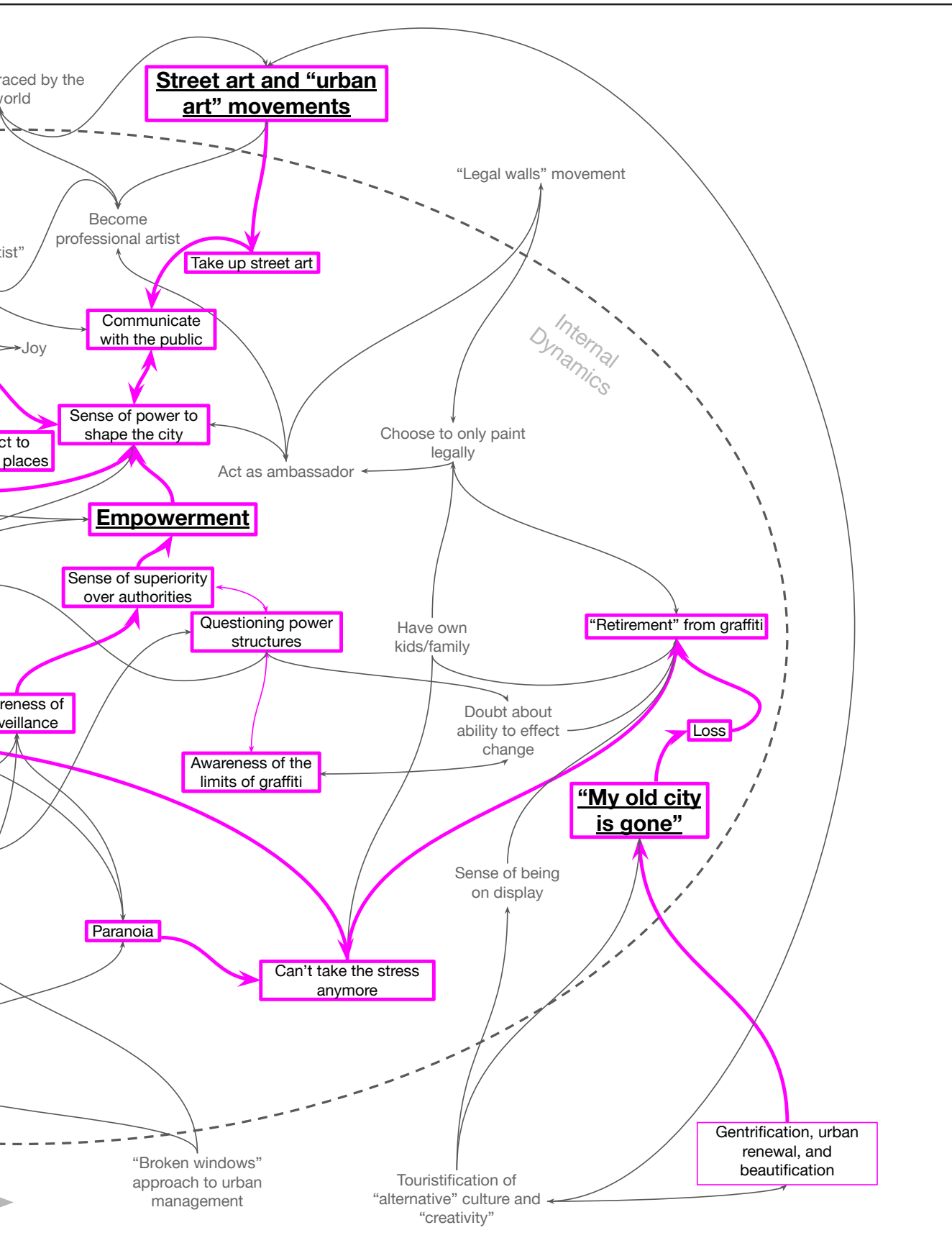
“Yeah,” he said. “First Orangetango [a different Berlin-based ‘collective for critical education and creative protest’] had done a mapping project, then they wanted to bring

the map onto the wall. And that's where we came in. And we worked with them for a year on the design. And I think it's super what came out of it. But it was like pulling teeth in between. And there's the story with the Bethanien Haus, where we said, 'We're going to paint the stairwell.' This was the squatted part of Bethanien. And then they talked about it at plenum — 'What is the political message we want to convey?' And they talked about it and talked about it, and by the next year they wanted a different political message, and six years later nothing's come of it! So that's a case where collectives can be inhibiting. I prefer if something actually happens. Then maybe there's argument, and something new happens — but at least something happens.

"But with [the Monopoly board mural on] Manteuffelstraße, I think it's really good what we did there. Maybe in 20 years it'll be clear what a document it is of the ephemerality, the struggles. We have to describe, document, and archive our own stories. Or else they disappear. They do disappear. But I also have more hope than that. I don't want to be so pessimistic that everything is always getting worse. The city will go on and graffiti will go on. I hope there will always be graffiti. And that's what's so special about Berlin is that the graffiti scene is so alive here. It's vibrant. Stories get lost, but new stories come along. The city is full of such crazy dynamics. And they make new stories possible."









## NOTES ON FIGURES 41.-4.4

The diagrams that accompany these testimonies are intended to aid the reader in thinking about how my interview subjects got into graffiti and what role it has had in their lives.

Factors are either internal to an individual experience or external, though the dashed line is meant to indicate the porous membrane between the self and society. The factors are loosely arranged by their affective impact, whether, generally speaking, they are experienced as positive or negative for the person. And there is a loose chronological arrangement to the factors, moving from the past to the present from left to right.

But while the diagram has a structure, it should not be interpreted as being strict or deterministic. There are as many pathways to becoming a graffiti writer as there are graffiti writers. The complex network of dynamics should suggest a range of possibilities. All of the internal and external factors are derived from my interviews, as are the arrows of influence or progress. As the factors and influences were repeated across my discussions, a structure began to emerge and stabilize. Of course, no single participant presented his or her story as a network of dynamics, and no single participant could have mentioned all of the factors here. So I employed a process of listening for the essence of the stories followed by imaginative reflection and comparison to alternative models. (See Appendix A for more on the phenomenological method.) The result, again, is intended to be descriptive rather than formulaic. It is possible to imagine different pathways, additional factors, arrows of influence flipped in the opposite direction, new arrows of influence altogether. But the diagrams here capture the operative dynamics among the graffiti writers in Berlin I talked to and help to visualize the incredible range and complexity of the practice in general.

# CHAPTER 5

## THEMES OF SELF AND SPACE

*The city is full of such crazy dynamics. And they make new stories possible.*

Susan Sontag famously argued against traditional modes of interpretation because they impose intellectual abstractions on creative works, ultimately amounting to “the intellect’s revenge upon art” (1990). One might extend her premise to the social sciences and say that many of them enact “the intellect’s revenge on life.” By partitioning the lifeworld into discrete elements for analysis, we divorce those elements from their lived context; combining elements from different lives into a dataset for statistical inference requires even further erasure of individual and lived qualities. The golden tree of life turns from green to gray. German has a term for this reductive process, *Verwissenschaftlichung* (roughly “science-ification”), whose six serrated syllables deliver almost as much in mouthfeel as they do in derisive meaning.

There are a number of reasons for presenting the conversations in the prior chapter straight, with minimal intervening discussion and nothing that would be considered academic, scientific analysis. Each graffiti writer’s or street artist’s experience is a unique matrix of motivations, memories, emotions, internal contradictions, political views, biases, idealizations, and enthusiasms. It was important for me to present a few of these individuals in all their complexity so that the reader can witness that complexity and can experience, albeit in edited form, the way my interviewees string together the narratives

of their lives. (In Appendix A I explain the processing involved with turning the recordings and field notes into prose.) The interviews often took place in settings relevant to the discussions that unfolded; I included some scene-setting sentences so that the reader might be able to imaginatively inhabit those settings with us while listening in on the conversation. The discussions generally had a certain flow that I also wanted to preserve. And given that one of my overall goals for this project is to give voice to marginalized and misunderstood members of society, it was important to let them speak in their own words as much as possible — and to preserve their testimonies in unhomogenized form.

Just three people feature out of the many I interviewed — but this is mostly out of concern for space and the readers' stamina. The specific contours of these featured testimonies are quite different, as can be seen from the diagrams of the dynamics [Figures 4.2-4.4]. These three individuals also often offer strikingly different reflections on common topics or themes. However, especially when the material from all the other long-form interviews is considered, a number of related themes do emerge. The remainder of this chapter presents excerpts from interviews in order to illustrate a few of the most compelling emergent themes, focusing on those themes that are most inherently compelling and most of interest to this project. To be clear: more themes emerged than the ones highlighted here. (See again Appendix A for the methods used to identify the emergent themes.) But I treat in depth those that I feel have more direct resonance for readers concerned with the built environment. These themes are ephemerality, which is relevant to matters like historic preservation, *Milieuschutz*, and urban change in general; property, relevant to matters including the right to the city, taxation, and the identification of stakeholders; materiality, important for considerations of urban form, landscape design, and the image of the city; and belonging (addressed in two subthemes, being and becoming), which goes beyond the comparatively superficial conception of "stakeholders" to address core questions about

what it means to be a member of an urban community.<sup>1</sup> Each theme has a section focused on excerpts from the actual spoken responses followed explication and analysis. While occasionally I include snippets of an exchange from the interview, in what follows my respondents' words are largely amputated from the greater the narrative context of their testimonies. But Figures 5.1-5.5 illustrate the ways the different themes map onto the diagram of dynamics that underlie those greater individual narratives.

## EPHEMERALITY

### *Excerpts*

Given the commitment, effort, risk, and sacrifices involved in putting up a piece of graffiti or street art, it is easy to imagine that artists would be distressed when their pieces are removed, painted over, fade away, or are otherwise lost. Some attempt to explain away this loss by focusing on the lasting skills writing graffiti has left them with and to reconcile regrets with the benefits that have been reaped by investing so much in "an ephemeral hobby."

I painted trains for 20 years. And that meant every other night standing out there anywhere from 20 minutes to 3 hours. In those years, I was out every night — not always painting, but in preparation. ... I neglected my other jobs, I neglected women, partners, neglected my family. During that time, I couldn't invest much in other things. It's an ephemeral hobby — the train gets buffed, the wall gets painted over, it goes on like that forever. You have the photos and the stories, the photos and the stories behind them. Now I look back on it from a different perspective, I would have done a lot differently, but it's part of my life. Without graffiti, I'd have no t-shirts, no art projects. You have to admit, I can't paint well. What you see took years. People say I have talents, but I say, 'That took tons of work.'

Another graffiti writer I spoke to asserted that graffiti writers don't care if a piece is erased immediately. "You personally don't care if a piece is gone in a day?" I challenged.

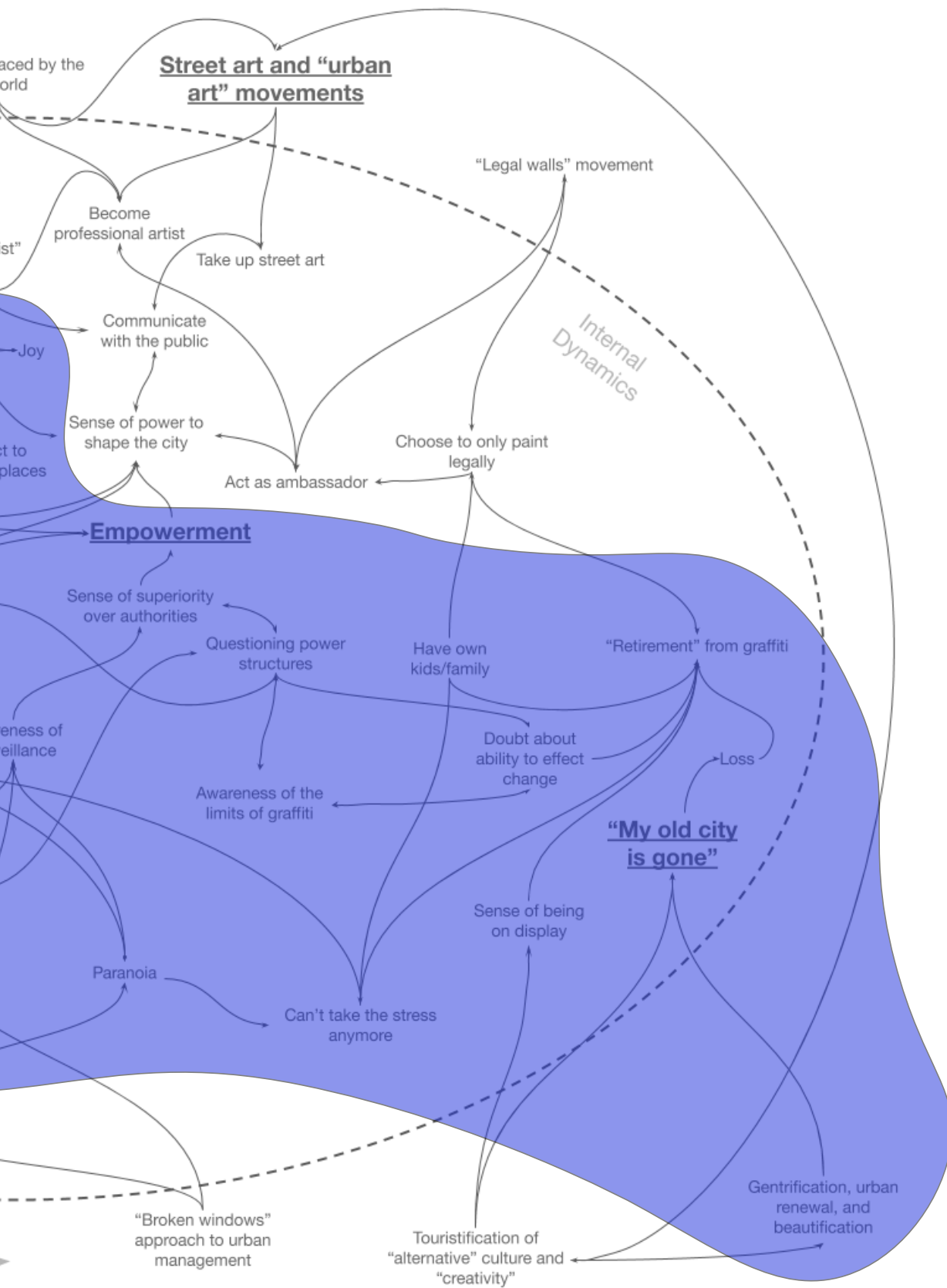
Well, I know that 80-90% of people don't care. Nowadays, among the active generation. In my case, I have to cry all the time when something of mine is painted over or got lost or whatever. But there's not so much stuff of mine left anyways. So

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<sup>1</sup> Lefebvre made an attempt to advance the term *citidin*, by which he meant a city dweller empowered to participate in social and political life of the place (1996 [1968]). This is exactly the idea that I am interested in. A *citidin* is pointedly not a citizen, as in a state-recognized rights holder. *Citidins* are those whose right to the city is claimed via their active, embodied inhabiting of a place — i.e., everyday life. The term has not really caught on, however, so that is why I use "member of an urban community" here.







I'll lean back with my kids and have a look at some photos or whatever. You heard that ODEM died?

ODEM was a graffiti writer who had achieved substantial subcultural fame for being one of the first and most innovative writers of hip-hop graffiti in Berlin in the post-Wall days. He helped his cause by being the subject of a slightly sensationalistic as-told-to autobiography giving an "insider report" of "the fascination of graffiti...but also the dark side of brutality and violence." ODEM was also featured in some issues of Backjumps magazine (see Chapter 3.) Reports of ODEM's death, at 43, had been circulating within the graffiti scene over the past few days.

That's just it — where can you find any pieces of ODEM's? I know of one piece, in Lichtenrade, still. But in the end, no matter how famous you were, the people will forget about you. The times change. It's not "each one teach one," it's not that all the young kids know the old schoolers and have respect. The kids aren't that into graffiti history, but they're more interested in painting. You have an old school piece that's been there for 20 years, a youngster comes, thinks, "Oh, I want to paint," and he paints over it because he didn't know the person. That happens all the time, everywhere. ... But I think that's part of the game. People forget about you. You have to cope with that. And I know people who can't cope with that, and they get mad, for sure. They get really crazy. I know people who go out with baseball bats, looking for the people who crossed their last piece and beating them up and getting into legal trouble for violence. That's stupid, but that's how it is. It doesn't feel good if your pieces get painted over and get lost, but that's how it is, whatever.

I reminded him that he had just said whenever a piece of his is lost, he cries. "It's like anything in life," he responded. "If you build your own chair, or if your house burns down, which you built with your own hands,

If you've [made something], you feel connected. Especially if you're not a hardcore bomber who's doing 20 pieces every night and forgets that he's done this or that piece here or there. But in my case, I always knew where my pieces were or are, and yeah, they stand for a special time in my life. It's the way of life [for things to disappear], but if they get lost, something of you dies a little bit, especially if you don't build up new pictures. You know? Yeah, it's a little sad, but it's part of the story. But the more it happens, and the longer ago it was, the more non-emotional you get. It always depends also how it gets lost. If it gets erased, that's how it goes. But if somebody writes "dickhead" over it because he doesn't like me personally, I get angry. Whatever. So it also has something to do with the way it disappears.

Around the corner from here, along a train line, there's a huge piece I painted with my former crew. And it's fading away. From light. The whole piece is getting bleached out by sun. It's been there now for eight years or so, and I guess it's a matter of time until somebody paints over it. We were joking about going back and renewing it, but I don't know. I don't think it'll happen. Of the six people who were involved, they're either not writing anymore, not living in Berlin anymore, or not

friends anymore. I'd be just going there for my own ego, and that makes no sense [laughs]. But that's it, I can see it fade away. It's a metaphor for my life! [laughs] That's it — [a metaphor for] everybody's life!

Other people I spoke with were less philosophical about having to lose what they have made. More than one graffiti writer — and many of the advocates and city representatives I spoke to — mentioned the idea of preserving works or at least sites for graffiti and street art, especially those sites that have already been used extensively.

Sure, why not [preserve existing legal walls]? The few that there are. But what about protecting an area that people have appropriated? Why don't politicians say, "Hey, this thing will be saved, saved for the graffiti painters, who have already appropriated it." It's sad, but it happens again and again: people appropriate something because it's not being used, and the moment it's booming, it gets broken. From a city's point of view maybe that's amusing, because there are always new places popping up somewhere, but for the people who manage [an institution like a squat or club], it's not amusing at all. If a club locates itself somewhere and then gets ousted, no matter what sort of cultural stuff [*Kulturzeugs*] it was—there must be much more said by the city, like, "Ok, that's there now, that now belongs in the city." It is like a monument. Cultural preservation [*Kulturschutz*]. There has to be something like that. 'Protection of Cultural Monuments,' or something. The club is there, and no matter what kind of investment is made—to turn it into condos or whatever—they need to know what's there, and that the club cannot be displaced, because it was there first.

Other writers seem to embrace the impermanent nature of the practice more. In a digression, one writer mentioned Berlin's controversial and not particularly effective program of *Milieuschutz* [social milieu preservation]. I asked him whether he also thought it was important to pursue *Kulturgüterchutz* and try to preserve graffiti or street art in any way.<sup>2</sup>

No, I think graffiti really is just a temporary thing, and you have to take it into consideration that it'll be removed or painted over. Of course you might also wish to yourself, 'Ok, this should maybe remain here somehow,' but that's not necessarily the primary intention for me. Because for me it has more to do with the process leading up, the painting itself, having a look at it, and then taking a photo in order to preserve it. But what ultimately happens, whether it's painted over or removed in some way, I don't find to be a main criteria. Because yeah, you are—or at least I am—already conscious that it's definitely only a temporary thing. And above all in

<sup>2</sup> *Denkmalschutz* [literally 'protection of monuments,' i.e., historic preservation] is taken seriously in Germany, and in few cities has the debate over the need for and challenges of preserving relatively recent history been more pointed than it has been in Berlin. The concept of *Kulturgüterschutz* [preservation of cultural goods] is not novel, but it is not enforced nearly as strongly as *Denkmalschutz*.

a city like Berlin, which is always changing so dramatically. Sure, it's nice when you find a piece you did years ago and it's still there. That's obviously nice. And there are pieces in Berlin that stick around forever. They're cool, and it's cool that they last forever. But in principle, graffiti is simply a temporary thing. And it has to be that way if it's going to be on the street.

Asked whether meant he is comfortable generally with the fact that the city is changing so dramatically, he continued:

Well, it depends. I believe the change that Berlin is currently undergoing, which is impacting the housing market and the population so much, is definitely not positive. I don't think it's good now. But in principle, that the cityscape changes [das Stadtbild verändert] and the architecture and so on, for me—I don't find that to be negative. Because I think, if things change but there's still space for everyone, then I'd find that totally okay. That the city changes, that a city like Berlin has such a historic background, this divided city history, I find that kind of thing appealing. Definitely. That's what makes Berlin. Exactly. But when it goes in a direction such that there's only space for certain people and the changes are only positive for certain people and negative for the majority — that kind of change is of course not good.

His comments traces the major dimensions of ephemerality that we have just heard articulated: the temporary nature of pieces of graffiti as analogous to the ever-changing nature of the city; yet simultaneously that change is a double-edged sword, with change accepted only insofar as it allows everyone to flourish.

I had expected I might come up to some places and see that they're gone. But The East Side Gallery, it's still astonishing how much is happening there. I think that it's not relevant to me — all these office buildings, they have nothing to do with my life except that they take space I was able to use before. As I said last time, I'm still wondering how to get something positive out of all of it. Because there's no stopping it, it will continue to happen. So the question is how — do you have to just be frustrated about it, or are there still ways to do the things you want to do and have the possibilities to use public space? ... I mean, I really want to avoid becoming a grumpy old guy who just talks about the past — there's no use in that!

## EXPLICATION AND ANALYSIS

In the prior chapter, Heiko reflected on the way his pink bunnies go grey over time; Linus seemed resigned when thinking of his paintings that are now between buildings; Lennart was momentarily disoriented because the graffiti he usually used to orient himself had disappeared. Sooner or later, all graffiti writers and street artists are confronted with the ephemerality their practice. The ways they respond to this reality are varied, however. In the excerpts above, we see the range and intensity of those responses. We also see that

it is not just pieces that are fragile and ephemeral. In these excerpts there are multiple dimensions or valences of the theme of disappearance or ephemerality and graffiti. There is the ephemerality of pieces themselves (“you have to take it into consideration that it’ll be removed or painted over”). There is the ephemerality of one’s knowledge of the city (“I had expected I might come up to some places and see that they’re gone”). There is the ephemerality of one’s own social circle (“of the six people who were involved, they’re either not writing anymore, not living in Berlin anymore, or not friends anymore”) and of the greater social makeup of the city (“the change that Berlin is currently undergoing, which is impacting the housing market and the population so much, is definitely not positive”). And then of course there is the ephemerality of one’s own existence (“in the end, no matter how famous you were, the people will forget about you”).

Before going on, an important note on usage: in the interviews conducted in German in which the theme of ephemerality emerged, my interview partners sometimes used the adjective *vergänglich*, which I have chosen to translate as “ephemeral”. However, *vergänglich* is related to the adjective *vergangen* [past, bygone] which is derived from the verb *vergehen* [to pass by, to elapse, to decay], which is built from that most elemental action verb *gehen* [to go]. Thus a more literal translation of *vergänglich* might be “fleeting.” In any case *vergänglich* has a more everyday feel for German speakers than the vaguely hifalutin, Greco-Latin “ephemeral” does for English speakers. This does not that ephemerality is taken more lightly by people speaking or thinking in German, however.

It is worth pausing for a moment here to consider the particular nature of the “ephemerality” of the urban artistic interventions my interview subjects perform. The root etymology of “ephemeral” means “lasting for a day” or “diurnal,” though it has come to mean more generally “short-lived.” But the expectations of graffiti writers and street artists — and those who view their work — are not that the work lasts only a day. Paint may



fade and glue may go brittle — fake fur fades for sure — but these are not materials whose primary nature is evanescent, capricious, transient, fugitive. Perhaps more importantly, the surfaces chosen by most graffiti writers and street artists, including all of those I spent time with, are anything but ephemeral. In fact, many people I spoke with described choosing their surfaces in part because they appeared old and thus indicated some capacity to stand the test of time. The installation of the piece itself may only take moments, but the moment of installation is the summation of many, many hours, if not weeks or years, of advance planning, site scouting, practicing a design, experimenting with different media, refining a style, and perfecting a technique.

Thus, while “ephemerality” is an inexorable reality for graffiti and street art, it takes on such powerful valence because of the way it relies upon and contrasts with the comparative durability of the streetscape, as well as the way it issues from a lifelong practice, even to the point of being a poignant reminder of mortality (“it’s a metaphor for my life”). For some, the emotional pain of the inevitable loss of individual pieces can be explained away thanks to the lasting memories it etched (“I’ll lean back with my kids and have a look at some photos”) or the reserve of skills and renewable creative capacity it fostered (“without graffiti, I’d have no t-shirts, no art projects”).

For others, the experience of the inevitable loss of their work is transposed to the city as a whole. Loss and change in the urban landscape are met with everything from resignation (“there’s no stopping it, it will continue to happen”) to something like a half embrace (“that the cityscape changes [*das Stadtbild verändert*] and the architecture and so on, for me—I don’t find that to be negative”). This is definitely not open acceptance of all change, however. In particular, what must be protected is not any given artwork or site but *people* and *social practices* (“Why don’t politicians say, ‘Hey, this thing will be saved, saved for the graffiti painters, who have already appropriated it.’?”).

The person who half embraced change in the cityscape said that, “in principle, graffiti is simply a temporary thing. And it has to be that way if it’s going to be on the street.” In connecting the temporary nature of graffiti to the city, this writer is making two provocative points. First, he seems to be saying that in a churning metropolis like Berlin, one cannot expect permanence. And second, at a more general level, he implies that as a component of public space (“on the street”), graffiti must be only temporary. The implications of these views are striking. The idea that anything occupying “the street” must only be temporary indicates his perception of public space as a common, in the sense of a shared resource. This is in contrast to the claims often made of graffiti, that it is a marking of territory or claiming of space. But his first point, that nothing in Berlin is stable, also seems to contradict his advocacy for things like *Milieuschütz*. He goes on to explain that change is “what makes Berlin. Exactly. But when it goes in a direction such that there’s only space for certain people and the changes are only positive for certain people and negative for the majority — that kind of change is of course not good.” This graffiti writer’s intricate balance of permanence and change in the concrete and the social is an indication of the degree to the practice of graffiti writing can inject new complexity into questions about preservation, which are often merely vectors for conservative values or exercises in art history. But this last respondent’s comments also inspire further reflection on the meaning of public space and the concept of the commons. With this in mind, let’s turn to the next emergent theme: property.

## PROPERTY

### *Excerpts*

As with the theme of ephemerality, questions of property extend across scales, from works of graffiti or street art to buildings and surfaces to spaces and the city overall. In this section, I take the smallest scale first: property and the piece. Who owns art in the street?

One man I spoke with, who after decades as a street writer is trying to turn himself into a professional artist, spelled out his attitude toward this question:

I do not like all those people who think if you do street art or graffiti or urban art, that you're giving the work away. I do not give the work away. I give away the moment for you to look at it. That's a big, big difference. And I think that's where the artists are. They're all scared. They're afraid to say that. Some see it this way: "Do whatever you want with the work, distribute it, bring me fame." But in the end, I think everyone who creates something does not give it away completely, no matter what he creates. It's your baby. No matter what. Every little picture is a baby. You do not want someone to take your child and do whatever he wants with it. "Here, you may have a look. Yes, you may take a photo and take it with you. But the photo with an NPD sticker?"—I'm exaggerating now—"I can't let you do that." And the people who get upset [if you ask them not to take photos]? "C'mon, man. You can look, you can feel happy with the piece, if it makes you happy, or if not, then not. You can absorb it into yourself, you can take it as inspiration. All of that I give that to you. That's what I've worked hard for. You don't give me any money. Twenty-grand so I can paint this facade, for example? You do not pay me for the time that I sit there, you do not pay me the time I need to become such an artist. You give me nothing for it—and you make demands?" This is part of the street art thing I do not like. With the consumer mentality. You have to make them aware that there's a person behind it.

Most people I spoke with talked more about ownership and property at scales bigger than the commodity. Let's start by looking again at something Heiko said in Chapter 4. He expands on graffiti's ability to expose the contested border between public and private space:

If you live in a dense place, a big city like Berlin, a building is not only the property of someone but also the boundary of the public space. So I think there are different interests in what the walls of the building look like. Of course the people who live in the project or who own the building might say, "We want to decide what the walls look like." But I think the public also has the right to say, "These are the boundaries of the public space, this is what I see everyday, I want to have the opportunity also, even if I don't own a building, to decide what the place I live in looks like. I want to have my share of it." And I think this is what graffiti artists just do. I think a lot of them don't think about it a lot, but they just grab their part of the public space and say, "I want to be seen, I want to make this my own space." And I don't see why only the people who have the wealth to own these buildings should be able to do that.

Another graffiti writer picked up the theme of public ownership. In his view, the public does not just have a right to public space, but to the whole city:

But you notice that graffiti just can't be stopped. That's convenient for me and also important, because the city belongs to everyone. It doesn't belong only to those

who have the cash to be able to buy a condo and renovate everything, make it all nice. The city belongs just as much to the graffiti sprayers, to everyone else. I'd say that relates a bit to "the right to the city." Of course it's pretty romantic, but I think everyone has a right to the city, to live in a city like this, and the socially disadvantaged people have just as much right to live in Kreuzberg or Prenzlauer Berg as someone who earns a ton of money. I think these people shape the city too. And that's definitely been diminishing in recent years. I think it'll diminish even more, because when you look at the housing prices and how things are developing, it's definitely getting worse. I see this as a huge problem in Berlin.

This is a fairly abstract, high-level way of understanding the relationship between inhabiting the city, painting the city, and possessing the city. In an exchange with a different writer, we moved toward a more grounded understanding of these relationships. I had started by asking him about his sense of the politics of ownership. Like the others, he first linked this to social status and the fact that the economically privileged have more officially sanctioned power to shape space. But actions in public space have a way of exposing the unfairness of this arrangement:

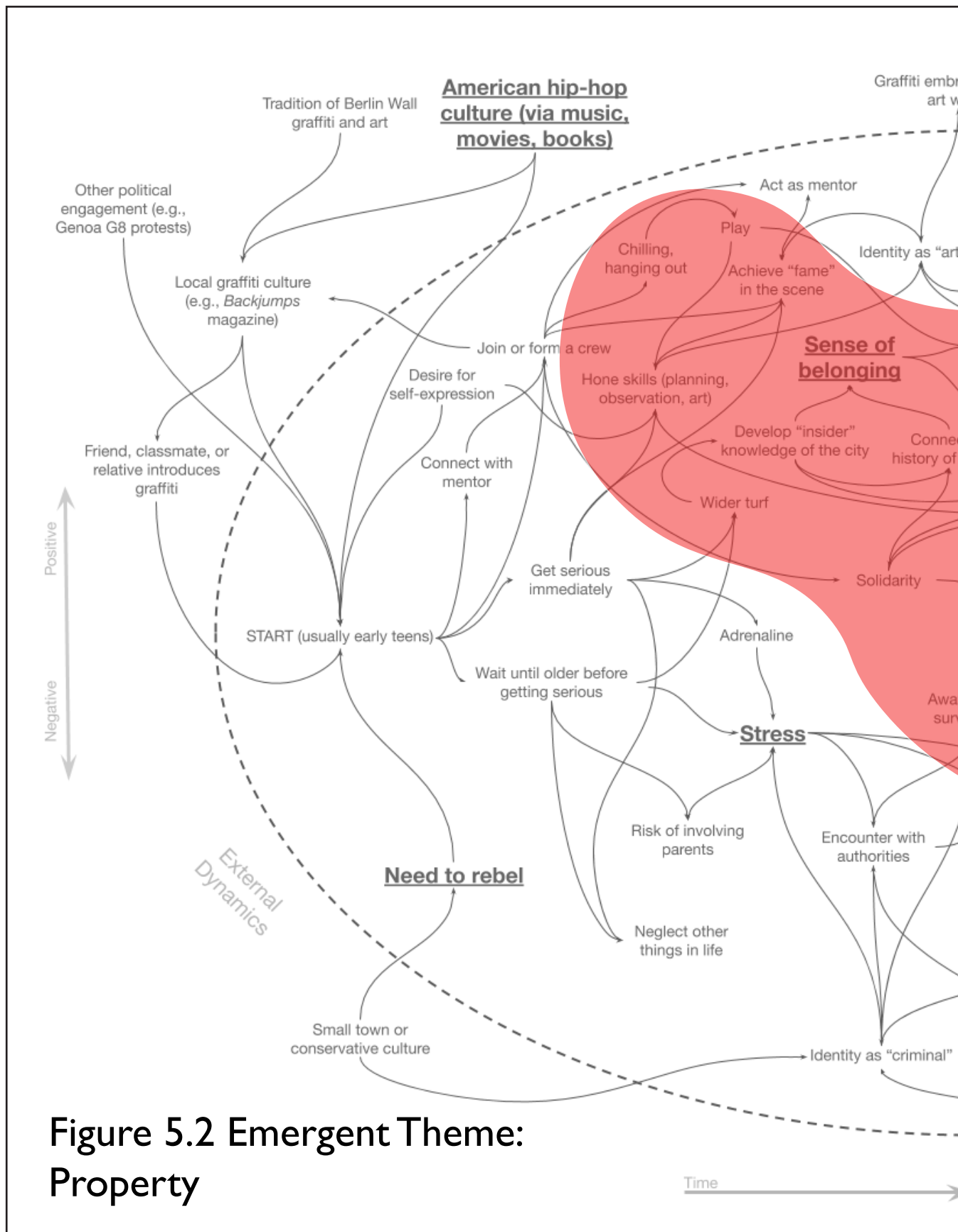
Everything painted in public space is political. Because you know, you attach society, the laws or whatever. What's public? What's public space? Who does it belong to? Who's allowed to design it? If I pay for it, I can do everything in public space; if I don't pay for it because I have no money, I can't do anything, it's forbidden, it's vandalism. Studying politics, having politics in school, for me it was always linked. Lots of people don't get this. They say, "Uh, I don't write anything pro-right-wing or pro-left-wing or pro- any kind of party, so it's not political." But that's a very dense idea of what politics means. So yeah, for me, it's a political thing, being a political being. Homo politicus.

I followed up. "When you've done a piece," I asked, "what does that change about the space for you?"

It's my space. That's basically it. It's my name, telling people I was there. Probably they say, "Oh, it looks good, it changed something." Probably it made somebody else mad.

"But what does it mean for the space to be yours?"

For the space itself? It looks more individual. No matter who wrote on it, it's away from corporate identity or logos or being neutral, boring altogether. It becomes individual. If you like it or not, it's different. It's the fucking S-Bahn car you saw. If you liked, cool, if you didn't like it, whatever. But it was the one which looked different. And that's what it is with all this corporate identity shit. We're lucky here in Berlin that the S-Bahn has its own design, because Deutsche Bahn overall changed their identity, their corporate identity, their design form. It's all red. Back in the day, the different train types looked different, but now everything is red. You have







the same fucking S-Bahn running in Cologne as in Munich. Back then, different train types; nowadays, everything looks the same. Everything has to be the same. Do you want to be one of millions or do you want to be different?

As a last example of what people said about property and appropriation, I want to return to a passage from Linus's testimony. I had asked him whether he knows who owns the spaces he chooses to paint.

It is definitely not something I'm conscious of. If I were to reflect on it, the spots I select, they generally have the impression of being unowned. They're not actively owned or occupied by anyone. And no one's caring about them. These are exactly the places I seek. It could be an old derelict rail depot, or something that seems disused. Exactly this 'unownedness' [*Besitzlosigkeit*] guarantees that it's open to be painted."

"So after painting, do you have the feeling the you've acquired some sort of ownership?" I asked.

Yeah, absolutely. The city becomes my own. When I sit on my bike, I rap. I'm a hook line rapper, I focus on the hook lines. And my hook line, it's even in English. So if I'm on my way back home from painting, I'm singing, 'I ride around in my hood, / graffiti makes it look good. / Summertime feels so fine, / in a city that's mine.' So there you are. In any case, the feeling that 'this is my city' increases extremely. It influences how I move in the city and where I feel at home and how I'm emotionally connected, definitely. That's always how it is. Behind every piece there's a story I have in my head, and I frequent the places, and check out what's going on, and that connects me to the place somehow. I don't think I would seek out the place if my image wasn't there anymore. If the physical possession were to disappear, then probably my history with the place would move on. Because I'd say, 'That was once my spot. Now it's been cleaned.' And the relationship would change.

### *Explication and Analysis*

In the discussion of ephemerality in the prior subsection, we heard that even those people who have rationalized the importance of letting go experience a twinge of loss (and, conversely, a surge of joy at discovering a surviving piece). It is only natural: this sense of loss corresponds to a sense of propriety over the products of one's own craftsmanship. It is sometimes said that graffiti and street art operate on the principles of a gift economy, that artists altruistically sacrifice their own time and resources to a greater good (e.g., Irvine, 2012). And yet the genuine regret and pain conveyed by the people I spoke with ("I have to

cry all the time”) indicates that displaying one’s work in public is different, and perhaps far easier, than giving it away entirely.

For the first artist quoted, there is a complex and subtle relationship between the creator, the piece, the observer, the context, and the experience of viewing the piece. In his eyes, possession is never truly given up by the creator (“it’s your baby”); the piece cannot be bought, sold, and privately owned like a commodity. A viewer can, however, absorb a piece and take inspiration (“you can look, you can feel happy with the piece, if it makes you happy...”). Consumerist mentality focuses too much on material possession without recognizing that the true gift is the humanity behind a particular moment of inspiration, he says. Luckily, inspiration is immaterial and not a scarce good.

One of the later interviewees quoted also picks up on concepts related to the idea of the commodity. Places he paint come into his possession, in a way (“it’s my space”), this personal possession is immediately related to the various reactions others might have and then transmuted to greater, anti-corporate “individuality” of the cityscape. Graffiti is a way not only for individuals to claim space, but for them to contribute to the uniqueness of their city. To use the Heideggerian distinction, a painted corner or train car becomes a unique thing (“it’s the fucking S-Bahn car you saw”) as opposed to an anonymous object (“nowadays everything looks the same”).

Heiko, meanwhile, reminds us is that the quality of public space is defined to some extent by the aesthetic properties of private property that abuts it. This point is perhaps inarguable. And clearly graffiti that’s visible in public space has the potential to change that space. But Heiko is also saying something more radical: that “what I see everyday” is also, on account of its role in my world, something over which I have a right to control. Members of the public, no matter their financial capabilities, have a right to “make this my own

space”—but this is a right to take possession of public space through intervention in *private* space visible from the *public* space.

If graffiti perpetually reminds people that the city belongs to everyone (it “just can’t be stopped”), it is simultaneously up against a trend of increasing privatization and property values. And yet for the sprayer who spoke about inequality, capital (“to be able to buy a condo”) is not a fully legitimate form of ownership. For him, “the city belongs to everyone,” regardless of ability to take ownership of part of the city in a traditional sense, because *everyone shapes the city*. He seems to be saying that while graffiti sprayers may shape the city in an extremely visible and overt way, “everyone else” also shapes the city, simply through their life. A similar idea was echoed by the next writer, who repeated the common trope that everything in public space is political. But he also went on to spell out what he sees as the nonsensical legitimization or criminalization of social practice based solely on the conditions of ownership (“If I pay for it, I can do everything in public space; if I don’t pay for it because I have no money, I can’t do anything, it’s forbidden, it’s vandalism”).

Linus does not target spaces that are clearly owned by others in the way that Heiko and the other people quoted above do, in order to demonstrate a point about who has a right to public space. But his intervention nevertheless draws attention toward grey areas of ownership. In his eyes, if something is derelict or disused, its owners have in a sense given up any of their right to determine what is done to its surface. What is more, despite targeting forgotten and out-of-the-way places, Linus comes to feel that he takes a form of possession of the entire city through painting. The sites he paints enter into an emotional register of his city, and his possession of them is directly linked to his history of painting them. His investment of a surface with particular qualities is inseparable from his sense of propriety over them, which is in turn wrapped up with the story he tells about himself in the city. His sense of place is a product of the triangulation of painting, property and

story. This sensitivity to the material qualities of place is the next emergent theme we will examine.

## MATERIALITY

### *Excerpts*

Graffiti writers and street artists tend to be keenly attentive to the microspatial, material characteristics of the sites they choose. The most important criteria include visibility, exposure to the elements, and surface material. A good spot is prominent enough to be seen but not so exposed as to make it impossible to install an illicit piece in the first place. A piece in a doorway or underpass might last longer than one that gets rain and sun directly. Smooth plaster will be easier to work with than cinder blocks or brick. This attention to material reality can be a reassuringly concrete counterpart to abstract notions like “the right to the city” that are so often breathlessly attached to the graffiti phenomenon. But in this section I want to start from the material and concrete and to explore the deeper suggestive and associative properties of the materiality of the practice of doing graffiti and inhabiting the city as a graffiti writer. We’ll begin to see the ways in which the materiality of the practice is inseparable from its psychological, social, historical, and political meanings.

Let’s start by looking back at the testimony of Lennart from the prior chapter. Lennart gets a lot out of the colors and forms of tags, immediately attempting to connect those characteristics to the people behind them:

And the less legible it is, if it’s well done, the more interesting it is, and the more you can lose yourself in it. I notice sometimes when I’m sitting or standing somewhere and I’m just dreaming about some tag. And if I take some time to decipher it, it’s because I’ve just fallen in love with it, with the power contained within it. I’m swimming in the juice of the color [ich schwimme in der Saft der Farbe] and in the drips. And you just try to imagine, ‘What has this person experienced? Are they male, are they female? Is he tall, is he short?’ — and probably it’s exactly the opposite of what you expect!

For Lennart, it is not only the painted content of a piece but the fact that it was painted by hand:







It's just so insanely fascinating, there's so much fascination in the whole thing. Even here you see these little flecks have come out of the can. [...] I find that super interesting. A person was holding that can! And advertising? It's just about money.

And yet the quality of what is painted remains important. Lennart encounters a social history in what he finds on the walls. "I like it when the walls tell stories," he puts it plainly. "When I look at this," he sputtered in exasperation at a mediocre tag, "well, ok, I guess you can do that sort of thing.

But it's just not alive. It's cold. But when I'm at a club or a cafe ... you wind up taking a half an hour for the bathroom because you're looking around the whole time! Who was here? What is there to discover? Who is telling what story? Who crossed whom? Why? Who's discovered something new? Who has a new style? I just love that, when it's on the street or in a cafe, when the bathrooms tell stories.

In addition to finding the stories of individuals and groups written on the walls, Lennart connects the appearance of the city to the opportunities for expression it seems to welcome:

And then at some point — it must have been just before the year 2000 — everything everywhere in Berlin started to change. Buildings were modernized. Everywhere there was fresh paint, everything was new, everything was pretty, everything was — when I think back to what Oranienburgerstraße looked like, what the Hackescher Markt looked like, it's worlds apart from the way it is now. That was a development that wasn't so great. We didn't want that. It didn't have to be like that. Everything so sterile, so new. It felt like a kind of censorship, a ban, almost like the end of freedom for those people who had been tagging facades. One felt kind of hemmed in, because one started to think, 'Ach, I guess you can't do that anymore,' and it wasn't any more fun.

Lennart was not the only one to draw these sorts of connections. Numerous others I interviewed also brought up the changes Berlin had undergone in recent years, linking social and economic changes to the physical appearance and aesthetic qualities of the city.

You were at Neurotitan at Haus Schwarzenberg, where we met [with the Graffiti Lobby]?

Yes, of course, I replied. Neurotitan is an art gallery housed in the Haus Schwarzenberg complex, an old courtyard apartment that was taken over by a non-profit and now

houses artist galleries, a bar and a cafe, and cultural organizations, including a small cinema and the so-called “Monsterkabinett.” Nestled in the heart of the extremely gentrified Hackescher Markt area, the non-profit has chosen to reject the renovation and beautification trends, and “maintains” the building in more-or-less the condition it was around the time of reunification: no signs or street presence; dingy grey-brown plaster, half of which has fallen off to reveal dingy red bricks; dark corridors connecting a series of courtyards, where a few scraggly vines survive improbably. And there is graffiti and street art everywhere. Though the courtyards total no more than a couple dozen square meters, the site has become something of an international destination.

This corner, this little alley. There used to be a lot of that kind of thing. [Haus Schwarzenberg] is still a real piece of 90s Berlin, of which only one piece has remained. And that's what I mean. There was Tacheles, and everywhere you had [graffiti] corners, where you had a certain flair. I love that. To me, it was not dirty. For me it was warmth. Really crazy warmth.

The relationship between what is perceived as dirty and what as beautiful came up in relation to other urban practices as well:

I think one sees parallels between street art and other things in the city. Street music at Schlesi [i.e., the Schlesisches Tor U-Bahn stop] or the Warschauer Straße [bridge]. It's dirty there — why do they go there? Because that's the feeling they want. To make the dirty a little more pretty. Or maybe the dirty is already beautiful.

Others went on to connect the “dirtiness” of graffiti with other characteristics of social life. This graffiti writer was telling me about a book he had recently read on the history of vandalism in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The most interesting thing I learned from that book is that there was only one period in German history when there was no vandalism: the Third Reich. Because everybody was arrested. So if people start to complain today about graffiti, about having clean cities — [that's just] like back in Third Reich. That says something about the state of mind that the society has. People from other parts of the country often complain about Berlin being so dirty and rough. But I feel very good here. Maybe I get mad about people having old couches on the street and putting their trash everywhere, but for me it's some kind of anarchy, which shows me that Berlin is a little more relaxed, even if it gets on my nerves from time to time.

3 The book, Maren Lorenz's *Vandalismus als Alltagsphänomen* [Vandalism as Everyday Phenomenon], which was originally published in 2009, was also released in a special edition paperback for the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung [Federal Center for Political Education], where it was available for only a few euros.

All of the people I've quoted so far have been speaking with some remove; they have been reflecting on graffiti and other unsanctioned urban interventions as viewers, neighbors, or passersby (even though they of course have intimate first-hand experience with the practice). But many others I spoke with drew similar attention to the materiality of the city and the materiality of their own artistic undertakings. A few people I spoke with now work as professional artists, having graduated from illicit street graffiti to murals and canvases, which they attempt to sell in galleries. The man quoted below had had some success; I met him in his large studio at the Urban Spree cultural complex in Friedrichshain. But he admitted that this transition in medium was not entirely working out for him.

Inside [a gallery], one has a closed room, people must decide to go inside. Outside, [a piece is] part of this entire environment, where there's a lot else going on, but then there's also a lot more to work with. Works that outside are totally exciting might be totally boring if they were inside, because you have the feeling that outside you have to have some sort of justification [for putting it there], but inside, it's just a cute little picture. And then if it was done illegally, that itself is a statement, no matter what the content is. Aesthetically, it's easier outside, because everything else completes the image, a complete aesthetic, but inside, all the concentration is on the work — and so it has to be good. On the street, there are ads, and people walking, and a bunch of history that maybe someone knows or not, and all kinds of other impressions in the environment. To which one can make connections in the work, play with other elements in the environment. So I've noticed that once again I really want to go outside. Maybe because so much is being renovated, because there's so much white. And it's not so much that I [myself] have to do it, but I wish someone would.

Among the people I interviewed whose understanding of the city was most richly caught up with its materiality and the materiality of his practice was Heiko, whose testimony is worth revisiting here. I asked him what sort of spaces he selects for his pieces.

There are different categories of spaces. ... I started to look for places that I found fascinating. I always tried to put [my art] in places that were worn out, old, kind of decayed. And especially when I started to work with fur — I used colored fur, mainly pink but also other bright colors. Then put it on walls of buildings that were very decayed, very gray. To have this contrast between this soft fur and also this bright color on this old building.

Heiko explained that he would cut the bright pink fur into the shape of a bunny and install it around his neighborhood or wherever he found a good spot. I had seen some furry bunnies around Kreuzberg, but they were no longer pink.



And that's the great thing! They age, like animals or like humans, because they go grey, they lose their colors. Which was really a nice coincidence. I mean, I think they really just suck up the whole air pollution and turn grey, but they really look like old bunnies after some time. And you really start to develop this relationship to your artworks. For example, I went out at night, I put the stuff up, then the next day I'd go out to see if it was still there. And if it was still there I was happy, and if it was gone I was sad. And this is really a different way to experience the city, if you have your own landmarks and just look for them, if they're still there or if something's changed. [...] A lot of bunnies, I can tell you where I put them — but the spaces now are totally different. A lot of places, the walls are not there anymore, or changed so much that it's not really the same place anymore.

As with the others quoted above, Heiko was closely aware of the ways Berlin had been changing. I asked him to elaborate.

Like I said, I liked the idea of having this thing that was bright and colorful and soft against a building that was old and cold and grey. And nowadays, the same bunny wouldn't look good on a brand new building with a nice colored wall. The contrast is not the same. And also, these old buildings were really saying something, like, "I had better times," or something like that. I always think of them like old people; they have this history, and you could really see the history on the building. And these new buildings, they are very nice, but more like models — you don't see any scars or any wrinkles. They are just very clean and you don't see any — they are not at all like humans. [...] And so I always wanted my pieces on these old people because I liked these old people, I liked what they represented. And this is also a reason why I don't do this kind of stuff anymore because I think the spaces where you can do it are just getting fewer and fewer, and I don't want to put it just on the wall of a new condo building.

If Heiko is more aware of the city through his attention to its textures, colors, and material qualities — and how these interact with his art — some others I spoke with emphasized material connection to the city through aspects of their practice that did not have to do specifically with their art.

I even appreciate people spitting on me or beating me up. It's better than living next to each other but pretending we can't see each other. The paint on the wall hardly matters to me. It's about interacting with people. That's what graffiti does: it makes me interact with my neighbors.

The library of graffiti scholarship is filled with interpretations of graffiti and street art that have little to do with the material reality of either the art or its installation. There are explorations of the semiotic implications of graffiti (e.g., Baudrillard, 1993), the political content of messages (e.g., Gröndahl, 2012), the sociological and anthropological roles played by graffiti crews or deviant behavior (e.g., Macdonald, 2001), or graffiti's implications for urban governance and "the right to the city" (e.g., McAuliffe and Iveson, 2011). On the other hand, some scholars have drawn our attention to the implications of the spatial locations of graffiti (e.g., Cresswell, 1992) and even to the importance of the surface as a space, with an attendant Lefebvrian "right to the surface" (Andron, 2018).

What the interviews recounted in this section illustrate is an important link between those two dimensions: the social, psychological, and political importance of graffiti is inseparable from its material qualities. Most of the people I interviewed have a nuanced understanding of the distinction between what is "clean" and "dirty" in the city. Foremost, for some of them graffiti is not dirty: it is warmth, it is people, it is life. This is a direct rebuke to the discursive characterization of graffiti as dirty or an indication of blight that is adopted by many in the media, law enforcement, and urban management. In that discourse, "dirt" like graffiti should be eradicated because it is an indication of social disorder and decline. Many of the people I spoke to, however, see the city in the exact opposite way: it is clean-ness that indicates censorship, sterility, selling out, loss, and decline.

But it is also not the fact that all graffiti is necessarily inherently beautiful; Lennart's judgement of the quality of a piece we walked by is but one example of the aesthetic standards that most graffiti writers and street artists enforce. The professional artist noted that his canvas pieces, which cannot interact with the physical cityscape, are not as effective as he would like. The distinction between high-quality and low-quality work, between effective and ineffective work, is extremely important. And it is in this distinction between high and low quality that the distinction between clean and dirty begins to break down.

What some might perceive as “dirtiness” becomes a quality that is laden with meaning. For the man who associated graffiti with busking, it is the “feeling” of a neighborhood, its ambience or atmosphere. For the man who associated clean-ness with the Nazi period, dirtiness is freedom. Essentially, for the graffiti writer who reminisced about the Berlin of the 1990s, “dirtiness” is age. It is history. Heiko made this slightly more specific and interpersonal: dingy old buildings do not simply indicate the history of the city, they are themselves old people whom he can get to know better by placing his art on them.

The interpersonal connections available to graffiti and street art practitioners are at their root material. Even if Lennart’s connections are imaginative (“Who was here? What is there to discover? Who is telling what story?”), they are triggered by the material appearance of graffiti on the street or in a bathroom stall at a cafe. Heiko’s human connections also begin at the level of imagination and metaphor, but they are impossible to understand without understanding the behavior of synthetic pink fur that’s been glued to a crumbling plaster wall. The last person quoted above takes the material basis for building social bonds to a potentially disturbing extreme. We need direct interaction, he seems to be saying, we need to be spitting on or beating each other; the alternative — the blasé ignorance of our neighbors (cf., Simmel, 2010[1903]) — is worse. In an age of ever-expanding opportunities to “connect” with one another with mediated platforms and to “connect” with place digitally and virtually, the importance of the material in these testimonies ought not be ignored. The connections that people form to each other and to the city are explored in greater depth in the next subsections of this chapter.

## BELONGING I: BEING A BERLINER

One of the premises of this project is that writing graffiti affords people special ways of knowing, inhabiting, and producing place and space. The themes touched in the earlier

sections of this chapter — ephemerality, property, materiality — have particular salience to important, established issues in urban planning (i.e., historic preservation, the protection of private property rights, the physical design of public space). But in the final section of the chapter, I would like to turn to the more holistic aspects of knowing, inhabiting, and producing. Collectively, we could call this “belonging.”

Almost everyone I spoke to expressed a deep sense of belonging in Berlin. Even, or perhaps especially those who are ambivalent about the changes Berlin is experiencing feel those changes at a personal level. The graffiti writers and street artists I interviewed are Berliners in the truest sense: they are at home there. I’ve chosen to present the aspects of belonging that emerge through the practice of graffiti writing into two parts, which I am calling “being” and “becoming”. Being and becoming are of course two sides of the same existential coin. For the purposes of the themes discussed in this chapter, however, I am using “being” for the people I spoke with who are native-born Berliners. (“Becoming,” the subject of the next subsection, will be for people who migrated to Berlin later in life.) In either case, the root of belonging is finding connection. Both these sections explore how people found connection to place through their artistic practice.

### *Excerpts*

For some of the writers I talked to, connection to the city was rooted in connection to specific places. Since this interviewee had grown up in Berlin, I began by asking him whether he had grown up seeing graffiti.

It was actually pretty normal back then. Two weeks ago I drove down to where I grew up and I recalled how back then every house on the street was painted. It seemed normal. And now everything's clean. But back then it was normal. Only now do I notice all the spots where, damn, there was a piece there and there and there.

As a child growing up in the southern West Berlin neighborhood of Lichtenrade, he explained, his family would make a weekend excursion out of driving to the Wall and having

a look over into East Berlin or Brandenburg. Of course the Wall was painted. But the Wall was not the primary site through which he discovered graffiti.

I think West Berlin had two hotspots for graffiti before the Wall came down. Northern West Berlin, like Wedding and Reinickendorf, which got famous for it. And then Tempelhof-Lichtenrade also, because you had the Kinder und Jugendhaus Lichtenrade, which is a youth club. One of the social workers — he just retired, that's why I went down there again — he had a screen print machine. He was the arty guy, studied at UdK [Universität der Künste, the University of the Arts], and he got stuck there as a social worker. But he discovered that more and more kids were coming and talking about graffiti, doing graffiti, and he started to work with them. He started doing screen prints on shirts, doing posters and airbrush stuff. So this youth club became the main meeting point for the West Berlin graffiti scene in the south. So BASIS, Ghetto Stars, all the big names from back then. ESCHER, RCB crew, people from the whole south went there to use the airbrush and do their prints. So that was very special. Graffiti for me was around and kind of normal then.

Still, though he may have perceived graffiti to be “normal”, this did not mean it was legal or sanctioned, and it did not mean he took it up lightly.

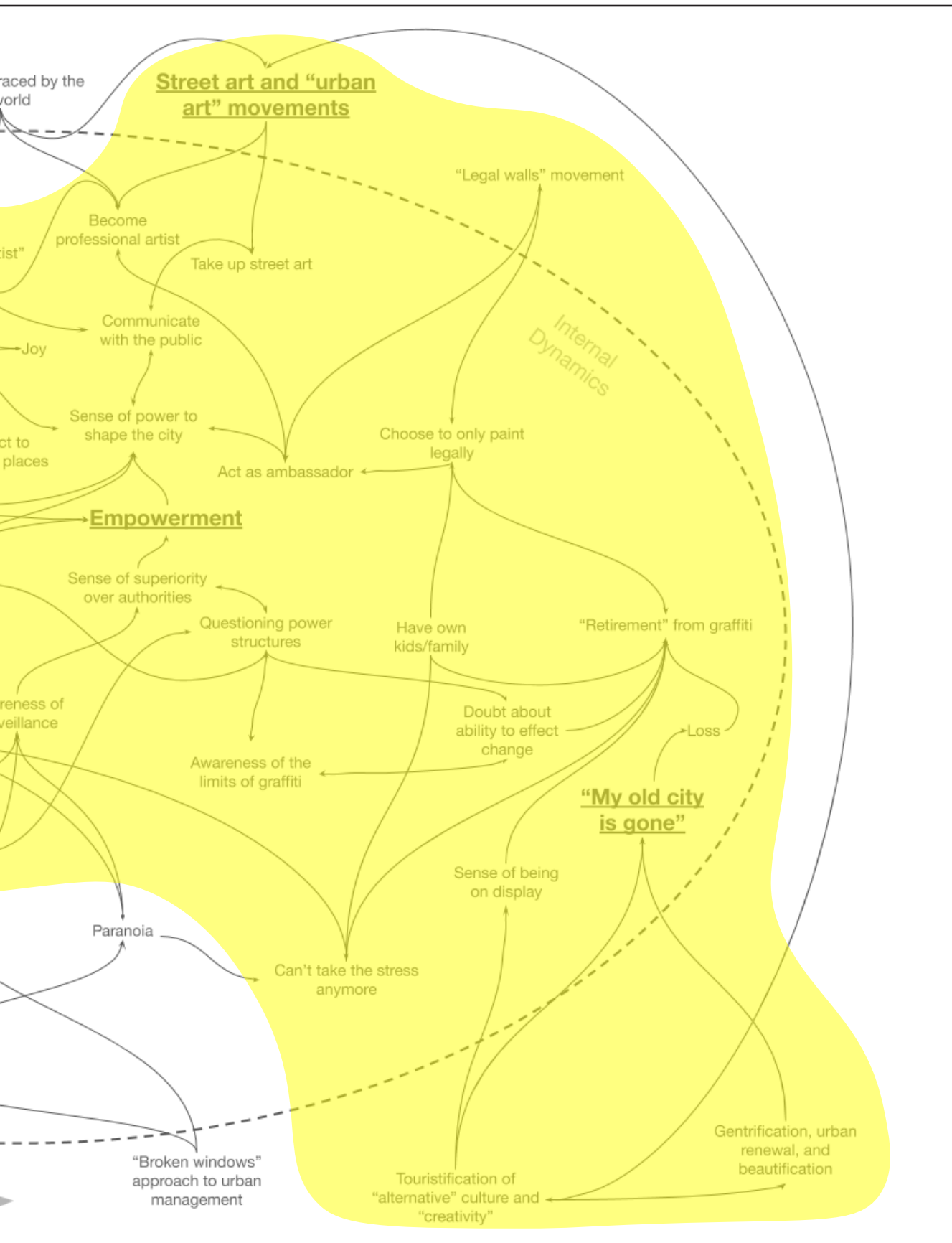
But I decided, I can't do this illegally. It's funny, I went on for five or six years only sketching. In a book, on paper. And then there was a famous radio show from a guy named BEN. Sami Manzur; BEN is his writer name. He runs the Wild Style Shop in Spandau. He had the Wild Style Show on Jam FM, and I listened to it, I liked it. And they had this graffiti contest going on. He said [on the radio], “Send me your sketches via fax, I will pick the winner. You can win free cans” and stuff like that. I had no fax at home, so I called a girlfriend, she lived ten minutes away by bike, so I went over there and sent in my scan. And I won. That was 1997. The first time I had a spray can in my hand was because I won some! ‘Cause my sketch was the best. And you know, I'm still proud, I still like that sketch, which is funny because a lot of my sketches I don't like anymore. And that's the first time I used spray paint. They had their own Hall of Fame, so I went there, got the cans I had won, and used them straight away on the Hall of Fame. And I failed miserably, I think. The guys from the shop were like, “Ah, such a nice sketch, such a terrible graffiti.” It was funny. But that really connected me to the shop for a couple of years. It was an hour by train from my home, but I went there once a week. I liked to hang out there.

Lichtenrade and Spandau are two of Berlin's outermost areas, over 20km away from each other by the most direct surface route and surely at least an hour apart via S-Bahn.<sup>4</sup> Other people I talked to connected to far-flung places during their first years as graffiti writers exploring the newly reunited city:

<sup>4</sup> Both districts were technically independent towns prior to the *Groß-Berlin-Gesetz*, or Greater Berlin Act, of 1920, which officially incorporated numerous surrounding “civil parishes” and rural areas into the capital, increasing Berlin's physical size more than tenfold and doubling its population to about 4 million. The centralization was triggered in part by the aftermath of WWI and led to increased suburbanization (Richie, 1999, p. 330).







So yeah, down there in the southern part of Treptow, there was a ton to discover [entdecken], lots of stuff was vacant [brach] because there was a lot left over from the DDR. All the nationally-owned enterprises were just gone — LPG [Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft]<sup>5</sup> and the like. So there was a bunch to explore. The things just sat fallow [brach] for years. And so you go all over and look around, which you can still do. At that time though you had old trains everywhere, the S-Bahn too, which were just standing around. They weren't running anymore and you could go discover them — you could go on a sort of discovery tour and have that experience. And that amounted to a lot.

But this same interviewee had much stronger connections to nearby areas:

Other than that, we had a sort of counterpoint up here. Across about ten S-Bahn stations, that was the space in which we moved. You knew your way around. You were always bumping into people. One example: we were at the Adlershof train station. There were three of us and we started having trouble with some Nazis.<sup>6</sup> They came up [onto the platform] and wanted to beat us up, wanted to throw us down onto the tracks. Within a half hour there were over a hundred Nazis, and there were three of us. And then within a half an hour there were exactly as many of our people there. You know? One after the other had seen from the train what was going on, and everyone got out. It was our turf. We used to also hang out another station further and if a security guard came by, they didn't dare even get out [of the train]! It was our turf like that.

5 A *Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft* [Agricultural Production Collective] was a collectivized farm in East Germany. Controversial from their inception (which involved the forced expropriation of land from private landowners), they remained an emblem of the ambitions of state-run food production during the socialist era. It is curious that my interviewee uses the term “LPG” as an example of a vanished state-owned enterprise in Berlin. Since the LPGs were large farming operations, there could not have been one in Berlin proper. Most of the facilities that operated in East Berlin and which were subsequently abandoned following reunification were involved in electronics, chemicals, and other forms of industrial manufacture. It is an indicator of how prominent the LPGs are in the collective imagination about the GDR that my interviewee came up with “LPG” as an example of a Berlin company, even though there was no LPG in Berlin. It is also worth noting that in Berlin today “LPG” is the name of a chain of high-end organic groceries.

6 Technically, there are no Nazis in Germany and have not been since the fall of 1945, when the Allied Control Council banned the party and began its denazification efforts. Those efforts were aborted, however, in part because, as Tony Judt put it, “for political purposes Germans had spontaneously ‘denazified’ themselves on May 8th 1945” (2005, p. 61). And since such a large portion of the general population, and an even larger proportion of the doctors, engineers, industry leaders, and others who would be essential to rebuilding, were enrolled party members, total exclusion of former Nazis from post-war society would have been impossible. The still-growing number of volumes that address Germany’s incomplete project to erase Nazism could fill a medium-sized library. The basic fact, however, is that fascistic political ideologies have continued to linger, in various guises and with varying levels of visibility and public acceptance, for decades. The “Nazis” my interviewee encountered in the 1990s may have been an ethnicity-based street gang, sympathizers of the NPD (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, a banned right-wing group), or some other stripe of what is generally termed right-wing or “neo-Nazi.” The encounter happened in the past but is not isolated to history. Recently, the AfD (*Alternativ für Deutschland*) Party, which espouses sharply nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric, gained more seats in the Bundestag than all but the two major centrist parties. In the electoral district surrounding the Adlershof train station, the AfD received 16.9% of the votes in the 2017 elections, trailing only The Left (25.1%) and the CDU (20.2%) (Amt für Statistik, 2019). In 2018, according to a victims’ advocacy group, there were more than three times as many violent anti-Semitic attacks in Berlin and nearly a 22% increase in racist incidents overall compared to the prior year (“Rassistische und antisemitische Angriffe nehmen zu,” 2019). There may be no Nazis in Berlin in a technical sense, but the spectre of Nazism haunts the streets — and train stations — to this day.

It is worth pausing here to acknowledge that graffiti is not absolutely fundamental to the social sense of turf this writer describes. It is also worth noting that, while he contrasts his social circle with the aggressive Nazis, they themselves seem to have presented a threatening, if not necessarily criminal, front. Such tense encounters were by no means a given along the train lines, however. Another writer I spoke with valued time spent along the S-Bahn for quite different, much quieter reasons:

In the end, I think I was so focused on trains because it has something to do with psychology and how you work as a human being. I think people have very different reasons for painting trains. Some do it for adrenaline or whatever, but for me it was always, how do you say? It was healing, nice, and laid back to be out at nighttime, being somewhere on the train tracks at night, at 3am, seeing foxes running around on the tracks. All that stuff normal people don't see. Having nature around you. And being there with friends — also the talks with friends. I had so many good nights out with my friends not painting anything, just hanging out and trying to find out when security leaves. And very often seeing nothing, just a waste of time, but I don't know. I occasionally meet old schoolers who say, "That was the biggest waste of time in my life, and I have regrets about wasting so much time on it." But I don't know. I liked the time. And I really miss being out there at nighttime, somewhere. When the city is calm, and it's interesting. There's a big fascination about all that. But the times have probably changed. It's very romantic this reminiscing about the good old days. Nowadays, the longer you haven't painted illegally or haven't painted trains, the more scared you get about the actual situation. Which actually probably didn't change so much, [even] if I have heard about a bust with dogs and night-vision cameras, and now they now have these sensors that recognize if somebody walks by. That's not my good old world.

Many of the native-born Berliners expressed some sense of disconnect between the city they grew up with and the city today. The writer quoted earlier — the one whom Nazis foolishly tried to harass on his turf — also lamented the loss of the social life he used to know:

Everyone from smaller towns, they all came there, the S-Bahn was the center of our existence [*war der zentrale Lebenspunkt*]. I ditched school frequently, and just rode the S-Bahn, starting in the morning, and we ran into people. There weren't any cell phones, there wasn't any of that! You had to assume that you would run into people at certain places. And that also doesn't work anymore today. Today people make an appointment over Facebook or whatever, and this urban life doesn't happen anymore the way it used to [*dieses Stadtleben findet eigentlich, wie es damals war, gar nicht mehr statt*]. When you had your beat and everyone met up with someone. No more today. Everyone has a cell phone, can just wander around randomly [*hockt irgendwo rum*], then can make a plan to meet up with someone. That didn't work earlier. It's completely different today.

This writer values the serendipity of meeting people on his “beat”, a serendipity that is nevertheless not random — a sort of intentional putting oneself into sites where encounter with friends becomes more likely. Compare this to Lennart’s use of “alive” graffiti landmarks for arranging rendezvous:

I like it when everything’s alive, when people have been there. For example, I like to use graffiti to orient myself. But it’s crazy how much has changed here! There was a time when I’d meet with buddies and we wouldn’t say, ‘Meet me on such-and-such street or at such-and-such park,’ rather we’d say, ‘We’re going to meet up by the ESK around the corner’ or ‘by the DISNE piece’ wherever. And I found that awesome, it was fun.

In the prior section, we revisited part of Lennart’s testimony where he explained that he likes it “when the walls tell stories.” His elaboration of this idea indicates the ways in which graffiti is part not just of his mental maps of Berlin but of the way he locates himself in the greater world as a Berliner. I had asked him whether he recognizes the “characters” in the stories he reads on the walls.

No, not at all. And that’s what’s great, that so many come from other places, from other countries or other cities in Germany. That’s just lovely. But of course I like it more when I do recognize them. The more you recognize, the better. I had this experience where I was in Southern France in some little town on the Atlantic. I don’t know how many kilometers that is from Berlin, but it’s quite a ways away. And at some point I see a piece from a well-known crew from Berlin. And I stood there and thought, ‘How awesome is that?’ Exactly that’s the thing that I love about graffiti: you have this recognition value [Wiedererkennungswert] that allows you to see, ‘Ok, someone was here too.’ The world is somehow — it all hangs together, no matter how far away you are from someone. At that moment I actually kind of felt at home! I can’t really describe the feeling I had. It was simply total joy.

Lennart’s feeling “at home” through recognizing graffiti abroad may seem like the apotheosis of belonging in Berlin — or may seem like a paradox, with graffiti at once marking a specific place and collapsing distant places into one. But he was not the only Berliner I spoke to who expressed a sense of belonging through contrast with another place. I am quoting the next interviewee at length, primarily because this whole explanation came in one burst, and because it illustrates how closely painting, fine-grained knowledge of the city’s infrastructure and architecture, and awareness of societal nuances



reside in the minds of some graffiti writers. All I asked him was, "So when you started out, where did you like to paint?" And this was his response:

It was important to me to paint where I went a lot. Wherever I was a lot. So up toward the Ku'damm was not important, rather wherever I was was important: Tempelhof, Kreuzberg, Neukölln. Then Schöneberg, and at some point I started going further, not just where I wandered. Systematically: the S-Bahn lines, streets, buildings, and so on. We went with bus or train, and sought sites that were most visible. Criteria: what one sees best. It didn't matter how you got there. I'd get there somehow. I climbed rain spouts, climbed through the building, over other roofs, anything. Anything to get where lots of people came by.

It was always West Berlin, southwest Berlin. A little in Moabit also, but always in the southwest. A bit in the East eventually, but then only along the S-Bahn. It wasn't my zone. You have to figure that you might not be able to ride the train home, so you really want to know the area. I came to know what's behind the scenes. I know where the dead train stations are, those that were never completed. I know where the connections are bad. In Berlin, there are two [rail] gauges, narrow and wide. And to me that makes it very interesting. It's very well connected. I heard on the radio, no matter where you live in Berlin, you're maximum 500 meters to a station. Wow. That's a metropolis. You don't have that in Hamburg.

And the diversity, the anonymity is very important — I like it when you can disappear. Yeah, the size [of Berlin], the variability that one has through the size. I can go out in Charlottenburg in bars, then I go to Friedrichshain and you have completely different people. Then go to Kreuzberg, you have still other people. Or then down in the south, like in Steglitz, and you have still different people. For example, I was in Hamburg, and now they have more going on, but for so long, they only had the one neighborhood: Hafenecke [sic]. It's so limited. Ok, over the years for me Berlin has also become like a village — I bump into people I know all the time. But Berlin also has so much to offer in terms of architecture, the buildings. For example, in my corner of Tempelhof, you have mansions, small houses, two-story townhomes, medium-sized apartments, and the 10-story social housing complexes. But mostly it's varied. And that makes the city, too. And you see it. If you don't want to talk to millionaire, you turn around and there's someone living in social housing. And then you have a student, and then you have, who knows, someone who's worked for fifteen years in construction. You have Turks, of course, all kinds.

But the thing is, all those neighborhoods have gotten cleaner. They've lost their charm generally, maybe nothing to do with graffiti. I prefer a grey facade to some beautiful blue painted thing. There's been tons of new building, and lots of those [new buildings] aren't as good for spray painting. I'd rather an old brick wall than new walls. And new walls are often cleaned quickly. You have to be careful, because if you get caught, those things cost a lot to repaint, 15 or 20 grand, and if you get a shit judge, you're really in trouble. So that's why I stopped with that and mostly did trains.

We will come back to some of the many topics addressed in this passage, but before leaving this interviewee, I want to include some of what he said in response to my follow-up questions. I asked him about all the neighborhoods getting cleaner.

First, it didn't surprise me, that rents are rising. It surprises me that it took long, and stayed cheap so long. [...] But Berlin has had such a crazy history, it's time maybe that it develops normally.

And yet Berlin's history is quite important to him, as he quickly made clear through his assessment of how urban change relates to his and others' graffiti practice:

And of course [Berlin] is the graffiti capital. In the hot zones, within the Ring — no chance [of a piece lasting]. You'd have to work every night to maintain a piece! [Outsiders] don't see that there's a history behind existing pieces. Myself, I had a piece from '98 that was painted over. Then I did it again, twice as high! But the tourists destroy a lot because they just don't know [the history].

### *Explication and Analysis*

There are several key aspects of belonging in Berlin that emerge from the interviews excerpted here. First, the people I spoke with have a particular way of inhabiting the city — or rather, they inhabit a particular city, a graffiti metropolis, which they have helped create. This metropolis is made up of neighborhoods, each with a distinct character; of comparatively stable features like youth clubs, specialty shops, train lines, and train stations; and of comparatively fugitive or evanescent features like empty lots, the paint on certain facades, individual graffiti pieces, or the glimpse of foxes at 3am, all of which features coalesce into a mental map that graffiti writers use to orient themselves physically and socially. Lennart was not the only person to tell me they literally navigate by graffiti tags. There is nothing unique about the formation of mental maps; we all live by them, and they have become an important ontological given in fields like landscape architecture and urban design (e.g., Lynch, 1960). It is also not surprising that the people I interviewed had the strongest connections to areas nearby their homes, especially when starting out with graffiti. Most city dwellers will know their own neighborhoods best. But what is surprising are the unusual and far-flung “beats” that my interviewees established through their

practice. Most city dwellers will have beats based on the routes connecting the locations of their productive (work) and reproductive (home, family, food) activities (see Clay, 1980). But graffiti writers develop beats based on distinctly non-instrumental practices and affinities — and will traffic these beats even under great inconvenience (getting up in the middle of the night, biking for an hour across town) and threat (from cops and “shit” judges or neo-Nazi street gangs). For many of them, graffiti led them to discover parts of the city they would not have known before and ultimately to establish a “turf” in which they feel safe.

If graffiti writers develop connections to their cities based on remarkably detailed knowledge of the physical city — everything from the different train gauges to the textures of facades — a second key element of belonging that emerged from my discussions is the social element of belonging. For Lennart, graffiti pieces have value based on their aesthetic qualities, but it is through their metonymic appearance as people that he finds in them a “recognition value”, which collapses space and brings “total joy”. For the writer who reminisced about calm evenings and “having nature around you”, it was less the painting itself that was important than the time spent in long conversation with friends and “just hanging out”. And as just mentioned, for the one writer, his physical turf along the S-Bahn was important because it was also the turf of his friends, those co-constituents of “*Stadtleben*” whom you hope to bump into on an afternoon ditching school, and whom you count on to materialize by the hundred when you’re in trouble.

That writer’s almost off-hand reference to “city life” is given a fuller exploration by the last writer I quoted. In a few short sentences he gives concrete examples that illustrate some of the most enduring concepts of urban sociology: that the big city allows a freeing anonymity (see Simmel, 2012 [1903]; Mumford, 1937), that a diversity of building types is necessary for social diversity (see Jacobs, 1992 [1961]). He was not the only writer to allude to the famous, nearly mythical *Berliner Mischung*, which a newspaper columnist recently

described as “a political magic word — for a city in which diverse cultures and social classes live together peacefully, often in the same building, and thereby cross-pollinate each other, culturally and economically” (Bernau, 2014). While a key characteristic of the *Berliner Mischung* is the close proximity of different kinds of people in the same parts of the city, the writer I was speaking with clearly had developed a better appreciation of this diversity by having come to inhabit many different parts of the city through graffiti. Graffiti is definitely not necessary for this kind of appreciation — one can easily imagine any number of vocations and avocations, from postal delivery to social work to food blogging — which might cause one to visit disparate parts of the city and come into close contact with the different people living there. But he does link his appreciation of diversity to his graffiti through his visual appreciation of the city (“you can see it”). His comments about what distinguishes Berlin from Hamburg as a true metropolis may raise eyebrows; with a regional population of about 5 million and incredibly important trading connections throughout Europe and the world, Hamburg probably meets most meaningful definitions of a metropolis. But Berlin is indeed a huge city, with an elaborate public transportation network — which he knows all the better through his graffiti practice.

One last noteworthy element of belonging that emerged from my discussions with native-born Berlin graffiti writers and street artists is the temporal, historicizing tendency of their testimonies. Almost unanimously, and often without any prompting, my interview partners expressed some sense of loss when reflecting on their place connections: “That’s not my good old world”. This is also not a unique experience, especially in a large, dynamic city; anyone beyond a certain age will have memories of stores closed, buildings torn down, views obscured by new construction. Neighborhoods change, people interact with each other differently. What is fascinating, however, is that the people I spoke to view the old, the vacant and fallow, the grey and the analog as distinctly better than the new and “improved.”<sup>7</sup>

7 In the English urban planning lexicon, any alteration to an “empty” site — from adding a fence to installing

That my interview partners' memories of the past, of events that happened as much as twenty or more years ago, is so specific, may also not be particular to graffiti. The man who remembers biking to a friend's house to fax in a sketch to a radio DJ wound up winning a competition, after all — such moments of early triumph are bound to be formative and memorable, whether it's one's talent with a pen, piccolo, or pointe shoes that's being recognized. But because of the autonomy inherent in graffiti — no one's parents encourage them to take up graffiti or force them to spend hours practicing it — these memories of youthful achievement are all the more personal. And when they relate to place, they are all the more associated with feelings of place attachment and belonging. And since this place attachment is so personal and historical, it's all the more irritating when "[outsiders] don't see that there's history behind" a given piece and a given place.

In the next and final subsection of this chapter, we will explore the ways in which "outsiders" have nevertheless come to find a sense of belonging in Berlin. In other words, we will explore the ways in which graffiti has helped them to become Berliners.

## BELONGING II: BECOMING A BERLINER

As mentioned in the prior section, I use the term "becoming" in this section above all as a way to distinguish the people who relocated to Berlin later in life from native-born Berliners. So what we will be exploring here are the ways that graffiti and street art have influenced the process by which newcomers come to feel part of the city. (Different connotations of "becoming" will come up later.) While for the purposes of this project I am interested in the experience of newcomers for comparative reasons, it is important

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utilities to building a structure — is called an improvement. For the people I talked to, improvement in the planning sense definitely does not necessarily mean improvement in the everyday sense, as far as they are concerned.







to note that Berlin, like many big cities, is a city of in-migrants. (I use that spelling to avoid confusion with “immigrants,” typically understood to be foreigners. Especially at the national level, countless public resources have been expended — and political axes sharpened — on the question of how to “integrate” foreign immigrants into Germany society. That is not the main question I am concerned with, however. Plenty of foreigners move to Berlin, but plenty of Germans relocate there as well.) Berlin lives on in-migrants, quite literally: the birthrate in Berlin is the lowest in the country, only 1.46 per woman, well below replacement rate. But over the past several years, Berlin has seen a net gain of around 40,000 people annually, thanks to in-migration that has been as much as 215,000 in a single year (Amt für Statistik, 2019). The experiences of these tens of thousands of people — often referred to in the media as *Wahlberliner* [Berliners by choice] — and the processes by which they become Berliners, are of concern well beyond the graffiti subculture that is the focus of my project.

### *Excerpts*

It almost goes without saying that people who grew up outside Berlin grew up in an environment where graffiti was less present, less tolerated, less “normal” than it was for people from Berlin. But Berlin’s reputation was well-known to many; it has been called a “Graffiti Capital” (or the graffiti capital), and many people I spoke with used this term. Just like a political capital, it both extends influence into the surrounding territory and draws people in centripetally. Many explained that they felt compelled to move to Berlin because of its reputation for graffiti. For those people for whom graffiti had already become important, Berlin represented a place in which to achieve some form of self-actualization. It represented opportunity in a comprehensive sense. As one man I spoke with put it, he simply felt, “I have to come to Berlin, because there’s everything here.”

As powerful as the abstract reputation of Berlin was and still is, many people had had first-hand contact with the city before choosing to move. Sometimes a family member had given them their first taste of life as a Berliner:

I've been here since 2007. My brother was here already, which meant I was visiting almost every weekend. We're from Cottbus originally — not that far away. So everything about Berlin was always at the center of my interests.

Even if Berlin was ever-present in one's mind, even if moving there can, in hindsight, be thought of as having been inevitable, that does not mean it is automatic. Recall how Linus had described his coming to Berlin:

So Berlin was a center of attraction [*Anziehungspunkt*], also because the graffiti scene in Berlin was very diverse, in that there were always very good, progressive artists here. There were these art centers, like Urban Art Info, the first cool street art gallery, where Swoon and people like that had shows. That was in Mitte on Brückenstraße. We came regularly whenever something was going on, and went through all the streets, photographed everything. It was always a huge source of inspiration. I mean, the graffiti scene, there are always a bunch of total idiots, to whom I wouldn't ascribe much consciousness, for whom it's just about being cool. But there was always a sector in the scene that went further. And we tried to instill that back in Nuremberg, but at some point you don't want to do everything yourself anymore, and Berlin just has this sucking effect that makes you want to come.

For Linus, despite his fascination with the city, he almost makes it sound as if he eventually had no choice but to move to Berlin. For others, even though Berlin represents hope and opportunity, that opportunity is often understood in contrast to limited possibilities in one's home region:

I come from the Ruhrgebiet, and I've been in Berlin for nine years. I started university in Bochum, near Essen, and within the first semester thought to myself, "Okay, I've got to go." My brother was already in Berlin at the time and so I was here a lot, and I started to think, "Okay, I can envision myself here." I like the city. A few years prior, I'd been in Berlin to visit my brother and had done some spraying. And I just thought, "Wow." Because Berlin is the graffiti capital of Germany, and by now the world, has been for a while, and so that was surely a bit of the influence: I thought, "Wow, you can really do a lot here."

Ambivalence about place is extremely pronounced in the case of Heiko, he with “two hearts beating in him.”<sup>8</sup> Like others, he is enchanted by what big cities promise, even as he cannot abandon his roots:

There are really two hearts beating in me, because I really also love this urban environment. So this sabbatical will also be for me to figure out if there's some kind of tendency in one or the other direction. If I say after two months that I need to go back to the city, I really miss the crowds or the culture or whatever. Or after two months I say it's so great to get rid of the stress, to be at the ocean, to have this experience of nature, to be close to yourself and to nature and not being disrupted by all the other people and this noise and the pollution and stuff like that. Because of my biography, growing up in a small town, big cities were always something to look toward. I was just yearning to get to a bigger city and see what's there, to get somewhere that's not small and boring and provincial like my hometown. So this was really driving me. And when I got to Berlin I had the feeling, now I'm in a city that's really big and there's a lot of things happening, and this is something that matters to me.

But unlike the other new Berliners quoted so far, Heiko only took up graffiti and street art after coming to Berlin:

This all started in Berlin for me. I'm from a small town in the northwest, but I've been in Berlin for 18 years. And at the time street art was getting big, you got the sense there were maybe 50 or 100 artists doing this, so there was so much to see. All kinds of places. What I liked about the whole thing, is it was very encouraging to do it yourself. I mean, I always had the feeling I wanted to do art, but I never had the courage. I didn't feel like there was space for me. I didn't study art, I didn't think that anything I was doing was good enough to convince anyone to put in a gallery. And suddenly there was this huge gallery I could use, where I didn't have to ask anyone, I could just put it up there, and maybe people like it and maybe they don't. And this opportunity was just great, to show my art and not to have to ask anyone. And of course hoping that someone likes it, but not having that be the first consideration. And of course I saw the other advantages. The gallery — the white cube — takes art out of context. Street art was a way to put it in context, to use it in communication with the space where you put it. It really counted where you put it. That's how I got into it.

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8 Cf., Goethe, *Faust 1* (1111-1117):  
*Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,*  
*die eine will sich von der andern trennen:*  
*Die eine hält in derber Liebeslust*  
*sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen;*  
*die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust*  
*zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.*

In me there are two souls, alas, and their  
 Division tears my life in two.  
 One loves the world, it clutches her, it binds  
 Itself to her, clinging with furious lust;  
 The other longs to soar beyond the dust  
 Into the realm of high ancestral minds.  
 (trans. by David Luke)



Rather than having been drawn to Berlin, in a positive way, on account of its graffiti and street art reputation, Heiko eventually found himself caught up in the hype, and even found himself the object of fascination by outsiders, in a way that he struggles to see as positive:

And it's also this time where everyone was doing this street art, this underground, illegal stuff, this is the time where this legend about Berlin being such a great city was created, and that led to so many now rushing in here to see this. And I really have issues with being — well, at some point I started to see myself as some kind of animal in a circus, where you do your tricks and a lot people are watching you. When I had started, I never had the feeling I was doing it for spectators; I was doing it for other people like me. People like me who live in the city, but also for people like me who do this artwork. And I think right now I have the feeling that this has changed. There are so many more people, and you have the weird feeling that you are being employed by the city to do these 'weird' things, where tourists can come and say, 'Wow, this is so Berlin.'

Heiko was not the only one to see the tension that comes with an “underground” practice being increasingly accepted in the mainstream:

Graffiti has been a crazy component of Berlin over a long period of time. Definitely 30 years, and even longer than that. It makes up a part of the identity of Berlin. People come here because they say, “It's totally cool, I want this cool feeling. A little roughness, I want to have that.” But on the other hand you have these people who sell apartments using this image, they attract people, because they want that [image]. But then they want it to be totally clean. And I find that to be a total contradiction. Because if you want to live in Berlin, in Neukölln or Kreuzberg, then you've chosen that. And it's completely normal that graffiti is on the walls. It belongs there, it's a part of this neighborhood and of the city. You can't have the one without the other. And that's why I'm happy every time when there's a white wall and then someone sprays something on it. Even if it's not me! There are several walls by me in Prenzlauer Berg that are always getting cleaned, and then there's always something new [painted] on them. I find that great. I think, “It belongs there, you can't just get rid of it” [*das gehört dazu, das kann man nicht einfach so weg machen*].

But Heiko embodies the tension personally. So bedeviled is his situation, he has made the decision to leave Berlin in order to be able to return later with a blank slate and reclaim some of what he once found there:

But right now, I'm trying to be more positive. I will leave Berlin in February for a year, but with the idea to come back and have a fresh start and do something new. I think there's still a lot of things you can do. And I think also there's the opportunity to use the way the city has changed in your artwork. Right now I have no idea how, how to get out of this cycle of feeling like a circus clown who's doing something for people who are just watching, but I think there must be ways to get something back of this freedom and of this subversiveness.

Heiko's reaction may not be surprising, given how personally he connected with the city through his art:

And you really start to develop this relationship to your artworks. For example, I went out at night, I put the stuff up, then the next day I'd go out to see if it was still there. And if it was still there I was happy, and if it was gone I was sad. And this is really a different way to experience the city, if you have your own landmarks and just look for them, if they're still there or if something's changed.

I will come back to personal connections in a moment. But before that, however, it is important to point out that most of the people I met, having wound up in Berlin, were not quite as openly conflicted about staying there or openly ambivalent about change. For some, graffiti, street art, and Berlin go together in a way harmonious with a certain set of ideals about urban life and participation in it. One man linked "DIY" urbanism with a critique of consumerism:

Also, I wanted to say why street art for me in general is important, [even] music on the street, urban art. This Reclaim Your City thing. You are part of the city, and the city is a representation of the people. It's like, if I live in a boring city, and the people don't do anything and I don't do anything, the city remains boring. But I noticed that Berlin is interesting in so many places because the people do what they want and don't just consume what others put in front of them. For example, you just go to parties that others have organized, consume everything, it's kind of a boring culture there. But when the people notice for themselves, everything I do and present, bring out, that makes the city more livable, and I'm a part of that, then it feels good, you have a feeling that you're part of the city and you belong in the city. That's what I find interesting. Even people who do music on the street, I find that cool. I think that's what now in Berlin is maybe dying out a bit, this sort of DIY character.

Another reiterated a common interpretation, linking graffiti with a critique of power structures:

I find that it also always lays bare the weak points. Even in a place like Potsdamer Platz, where really everything is under video surveillance and everything is new and everything is just super, even there there's always somehow little spots where someone could paint a little picture without attracting attention. And it's like hacking in that way. It exposes the weak points in structures that are supposed to work perfectly, that are supposed to result in no one doing anything wrong. And for me that's what makes it still perfectly symbolic of deviant behavior, that you can do things that other people don't trust themselves to do.

Beyond such general qualities of graffiti in the city, many explained how graffiti had helped them appreciate the big city in ways that are comparable to what we heard from native-born Berliners in the prior section. That is, graffiti affords them special knowledge of particular areas of the city and insights into specific locations. Just like the Urberliners, more recent arrivals use graffiti to orient themselves and navigate:

Graffiti sprayers have such a perception of space that we can sort according to names somehow. So you don't say, "Take the subway to Greifswalderstraße," rather it's like, "Turn right at DISNE" or "Meet me where that new LES is." And you know exactly where that is. Graffiti sprayers have a incredible photographic memory.

But they also use graffiti to connect with specific sites that give shape to the meaning of the city and channel the dynamics of urban change:

I like to paint the stretch between Ostbahnhof and Savignyplatz: that whole, very tight big-city atmosphere. I really like to paint there because it has this super urban feeling, so metropolitan [*großstädtisch*] — I like that. And also the underpasses beneath the elevated train there are super cool. Those are my favorite places, still in Mitte: these random courtyards on the edge of the train that have become sorts of "dead places," where there's no one, or at most a couple bums, but where you might go as a graffiti sprayer. When you're there, in the eye of the hurricane of gentrification, and suddenly you find this unoccupied island where no one goes, where it's not all about money — that transit planning has amputated so that there's no way to earn money. And then there are spots where you find traces from 20 years ago of sprayers who probably also hung out there.

For many of the people I spoke to, the important places in the city had changed for them over time:

Earlier I used to love to go around Schlesisches Tor in Wrangelkiez [in Kreuzberg], where my brother lived a long time ago. That area has turned into its complete opposite. Now I don't like going there, because it's totally overrun, it's too much for me, also just too much commerce. At that time, Mitte was for me, on the map as I felt it [*auf der gefühlte Karte*]<sup>9</sup>, more of an area for artists and street art and less so for graffiti. But in the meantime, a ton has changed, and it's painted a lot. All the roofs, all the little spots, up to the last little corners. The more the classic places disappear, the more it's pushed into the last corners and courtyards. And I think that's great, that it's completely saturated. It really is Mitte, it really is the center of the city, which in every other big city is the cleanest, most neutral, most boring part of town. And here in Berlin it actually feels very active. I find that exciting.

<sup>9</sup> Literally, "on the felt map" or "on the sensed map". *Die gefühlte Karte* is not a common term in the way that "mental map" is for English speakers; the adjective *gefühlte* most often occurs in the term *gefühlte Temperatur* [wind chill or heat index]. While the speaker clearly means something like "mental map", in this case I thought it important to hue closer to the literal meaning of what he said.

I had to push back on him at this moment. Mitte is indeed the center of reunited Berlin, home to most of the major tourist attractions. As the first of the former East Berlin districts to see reinvestment beginning in the 1990s, it is regarded by some as the most thoroughly gentrified (Holm, 2013). A lot of people would say that Mitte is over, I said. Isn't it totally yuppified? I asked.

I can understand that, but I find Kreuzberg worse. Sure, you have some older people, the old established crowd here [in Mitte], but in Prenzlauer Berg it's only young families, and in Kreuzberg just party people. When these processes result in you not having a good mix anymore, then it's really gotten crazy, something isn't right. So I think Mitte is actually pretty good in that regard. Sure, places have disappeared, a lot of great places, but there's still a certain mix of people here. There were empty lots and empty houses and the like, and those places have dropped off the map, off the graffiti map, because it just doesn't work there anymore. But also the architecture is lovely, all the courtyards and tangled streets here in the eastern part of Mitte. And also lots of people. I like it when there's lots of interaction — there's a lot happening, and graffiti fits in well in that situation. I find it just lovely.

This connection between the spaces of graffiti and social interaction again echos what we heard in the prior section. Like Lennart in the prior section, this next interviewee explained how graffiti helps him connect not only to the physical city but the social life of the city via the stories he finds on the walls:

For me personally of course, it's that I feel much more connected with the city, also that I pay attention much more to what changes. For me it's a form of communication that's taking place, which of course isn't understood by outsiders. But I see who was painting at which places with whom. Who was here for a visit, who reacted to whom with what kind of piece? Who painted at a spot where someone else had painted and then pissed him off? Who is hanging out with whom? For me it's just like a quasi novella running in my head. And when I'm in cities where there isn't that, where there isn't much going on, then, in the first place, it's much more boring visually. Nothing much is happening there and so I get this feeling it's dead.

If writers like this dismiss the potential for "outsiders" to find connections as rich as theirs, some still hope that graffiti is reaching non-practitioners at some level:

And so that's why I still have the hope that it doesn't disappear, because graffiti is still very important in the city for me. When I'm out with other people and try to see things through their eyes a bit — try to see what [graffiti] is for them — they actually perceive it quite seldomly, and it doesn't disturb anyone. You get used to it somehow. It's definitely not a scandal anymore. But I think it's good when you're surprised, when you're riding around and not looking down at your newspaper but rather outside, and then something happens. There's something new, you pay

attention to what's changing. You have the feeling that you're connected with the city.

Another transplant I spoke with was particularly attuned to graffiti's potency — and limitations — as a medium for everyday people to connect with and become part of the city. This attunement may have been because he was a transplant, but probably also has a lot to do with his chosen profession, social work.

And I was sometimes in this funny role, because I thought, "Okay, I go out on the weekends and do this nonsense," and now I somehow have to say [to my cases], "You mustn't do that." I'm aware that as a social worker I function as a role model, and in spite of that decide that if I'm going to do something illegal, I do it. Definitely. Aside from that, as a social worker I'd say that it's totally good if someone paints, rather than letting his aggressions out in some other way. He should spray instead, he should go out and paint something. That does less harm, I'd say, than anything else. So I think it's a totally important form of expression for teenagers. And I've kind of had the feeling that it's the last, or not the last, but one of the last forms of real rebellion.

I asked him to clarify what he meant by this.

Well, in principle you can say you're defying the laws, so it's a totally egoistic thing: "I'm going there and spraying this wall. I don't ask anyone. I just do it." And it has that element. It has to do with teenagers or young adults, with growing up — not fundamentally with graffiti, but somehow with rebelling against laws, against whatever norms and values of society. And graffiti is a good medium for doing that for a lot of people. For me, it's not really a critique any more, because I move too much within social frameworks and have a job and am relatively socially normalized, I'd say, in a certain way [weil dazu bewege ich mich zu sehr im gesellschaftlichen Rahmen und habe irgendwie einen Job und ich bin gesellschaftlich relativ normiert, sag ich mal, in gewisser Weise]. But even so, it is still a critique, because you're saying a little bit, "I want to shape the city too. The city can't be shaped only by those people who have a lot of money." And so it's the case that when I see a white wall, I have this desire [*Bedürfnis*], "Oh, I want to paint that." And so I find it good that there's graffiti in the city and in the street, and that everything isn't totally clean.

When I asked what he meant by graffiti being "one of the last forms of real rebellion", I had expected him to compare graffiti to punk rock or skateboarding or tattoos or van life or any of the other once-fringe activities that have lost some of their capacity to shock as they have become accepted into the mainstream. But his response indicates he meant that graffiti was both the last form of rebellion available in society and the last form of rebellion for him personally.



*Explication and Analysis*

I promised to compare the experiences of “becoming” a Berliner, as recounted here in this section, with those of “being” a Berliner recounted in the previous section. It seems most useful to start by looking across the same dimensions highlighted in the previous section: physical, social, and temporal-historical. In terms of finding connection to the physical city, like the *Urberliners*, newcomers have a keen sense of the city’s microgeographies; the graffiti metropolis they know is made up of courtyards and cool street art galleries, underpasses and places “that transit planning has amputated so that there’s no way to earn money”. They navigate by tag and come to have elaborate mental maps (or “sensed maps”). There are neighborhoods they like and others that “have dropped off the map”. In contrast to the native Berliners, however, when it came to neighborhoods, newcomers usually referred to central, densely populated, and well-known areas. No newcomers spoke about places like Lichtenrade, Adlershof or Spandau; they spoke almost exclusively of Mitte, Kreuzberg, Neukölln, and Prenzlauer Berg.

In terms of the social dimension, we see almost verbatim echos of what we heard from natives. Graffiti writers form connections to places not only through the aesthetic properties of graffiti pieces alone but also because they represent people, people whose past appearance at that place and whose interactions with others can be read as a story — as “a quasi novella” even. Graffiti writing brings them to spaces dense with street life, introduces them to sites where other marginalized people spend time (“bums”, graffiti writers from 20 years ago), and makes them attentive to the importance of that particular form of social diversity known as the *Berliner Mischung*: if you do not have “a good mix [of people] anymore, then it’s really gotten crazy, something isn’t right”. But in contrast to the locals, whose appreciation of the overall “metropolitan” qualities of Berlin emerges only after they have visited other “smaller” places like Hamburg, many transplants have a sense of Berlin’s big city mystique that predates their actual exposure to it. If you were from a

small town, a smaller city nearby, or even a relatively large city like Nürnberg, Berlin was “always at the center of [your] interests” and “always something to look toward to”.

It would therefore be easy to dismiss these newcomers’ fascination with all Berlin has to offer as confirmation bias. But the degree to which some of them are conflicted about being in Berlin and about the changes Berlin is undergoing belies that conclusion. Would a native Berliner, someone whose presence in the city is essentially default, be able to imagine that he is playing a role as “a circus clown” in the way a *Wahlberliner* can? What I am suggesting is that newcomers, having made an intentional choice to live in Berlin, have a certain degree of self-consciousness about their identities as graffiti writers, and especially about their existence in the city, which prompts them to “try to see things through [others’] eyes a bit — try to see what [graffiti] is for them”. They are more likely to adopt the mindset of others (“People come here because they say, ‘It’s totally cool, I want this cool feeling. A little roughness, I want to have that’”) and they are more prone to see themselves being seen by others (“you do your tricks and a lot of people are watching you”). Clearly the compulsion to put oneself in the mindset of others does not necessarily lead to fellowship and solidarity, but it may be the *sine qua non* of community. Seeking to understand others’ connection to place and to reconcile this with one’s own may amount to at least one definition of integration.

As for my interlocutor’s sense of history, again, there are meaningful similarities and differences with those in the prior section. Since most of the extended interviews I conducted were with people who had lived in Berlin for at least a decade, it is no surprise that even these “newcomers” had witnessed change — and largely experienced that change as loss. Most had seen neighborhoods become less (though occasionally more) appropriate for graffiti or street art, this appropriateness judged on the availability of good spots for painting and on the perceived receptivity of the people who live in those neighborhoods.

For some, the loss is directly linked to their own works disappearing. Especially for someone like Heiko, who in some ways discovered his artistic interests in Berlin — rather than having come to Berlin in order to further develop interests that had already broken the surface — change in the landscape registers as personal trauma: “If [a piece] was still there I was happy, and if it was gone I was sad.”

For newcomers to Berlin, their diachronic understanding of their involvement with graffiti is also closely caught up with their conceptions of their own life course, of their own “becoming”. At this point a brief digression on “becoming” may be fruitful. Up until now, I have been using “becoming” in its everyday sense of one-directional metamorphosis: I was a Nürnberger and then I *became* a Berliner, I was a notebook doodler then *became* a graffiti writer. But it also has more expansive meanings. The concept of “becoming” has been taken up by a long line of prominent philosophers, reaching from Deleuze and Guattari back to Nietzsche back at least to Heraclitus. As an ontological concept, “becoming” is concerned, centrally, with the idea that no entity or person ever really *is*, we are all only ever *becoming*. Metamorphosis is not a transitional phase but rather our chronic condition. For Nietzsche, “being” and “becoming” are not even separate, since life is about ongoing self-creation, as he emphasizes in his encouraging command to “become the person you are” [*du sollst der werden, der du bist*] (1974 [1887], p. 219). This is not a bad thing, quite the contrary. Because of its indefinite nature, to embrace “becoming” can be self-affirming and liberating. The self does not sit hidden away somewhere waiting to be uncovered or “found”, forcing us to quest after its essential, ultimate truth. It would be impossible for such an essential truth to fulfill the expectations heaped upon it anyway. Selfhood as “becoming”, on the other hand, invites us to accept ourselves in the course of a perpetual process of transformation. With some of these ideas in mind, I want to turn back to the last conversation recounted above.

This last quoted graffiti writer touches upon many of the ideas that have come up across all the emergent themes so far: personal desires and compulsions (“oh, I want to paint that”), the physical appearance of the city (“everything isn’t totally clean”), his own past (“it has to do with teenagers or young adults”), personal responsibility (“[I] decide that if I’m going to do something illegal, I do it”), probing the limits of the socially acceptable (“rebellious against laws, against whatever norms and values”), awareness of inequality and disempowerment inherent in systems of property (“the city can’t be shaped only by those who have a lot of money”), and a demand — a demand taken rather than requested — to be allowed to “shape the city too”. He said that graffiti is “one of the last forms of real rebellion” for him, and this is a weighty idea to consider. At one level, he is saying that as a “relatively socially normalized” person, he has had to abandon most forms of rebellion. And yet as he has grown up, graffiti has been the one thing he has continued to do that transgresses social norms. While he recognizes the dissonance between his identity as a writer of illegal graffiti and his role as a social worker — which involves, after all, helping people stay *out of* trouble — he rationalizes this for himself by explaining that doing graffiti is in fact a healthy form of expression and release and might be good for the troubled youth he works with. He sees that graffiti has been important for his own coming of age — for his own becoming — and wants to keep that opportunity open for others. In his refusal to give it up himself, he refuses to settle fully into a static and circumscribed identity as a “socially normalized” adult; he insists on continuing to become.

At the same time, the uncertainty of becoming can be disorienting or even terrifying, a freedom that is a kind of curse, an unmooring. Existentialists like Sartre pointed out that this freedom also comes with responsibility for the world and our actions in it (1956). The graffiti writer quoted here seems to have found a channel for that freedom and linked it to a responsibility for the world (i.e., his work helping young people). His refusing to give up graffiti is his channelling of freedom into responsibility, his overcoming the existential conundrum. And it plays out in the fabric of the city.

Additionally, his refusal amounts to “a critique” in that it demonstrates his insistence on taking part in shaping the city, even though he is not rich. In a modern Western welfare state like Germany, it can seem like the problem of inequality and wealth redistribution has been solved. So many basic needs, from healthcare to education to public transit, are provisioned through social means and administered through depoliticized bureaucratic processes. In this context, for an individual to demand to take part in — to repoliticize — something so fundamental as shaping the city may be rebellious indeed. It is rebellious in large part because it refuses to see material redistribution as a sufficient measure of social justice. Becoming fully connected to the city involves active participation in directing *its* becoming. In linking this demand for participation with his own ongoing process of becoming, he presents a simultaneously simple and profound reality: shaping the city *is* shaping the self, and, shaping the self is shaping the city.



# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

I opened this book with some bold assertions about Berlin's unique qualities as a city in general and as a — or perhaps *the* — postmodern “graffiti metropolis” in particular. I also introduced some concepts from urban design and social theory and proposed exploring the capacity of graffiti to produce the kind of “loose” or “insurgent” space that affords “counterpublics” important political voice. The findings from that exploration, I argued, suggested that the “graffiti metropolis” is brought into being via a “subcultural urbanism,” through which graffiti writers shape themselves as they shape the city. Having now spent some pages involved with the specifics of Berlin and the lifeworlds of graffiti writers, it would perhaps be helpful to come back to some of those themes introduced at the beginning and to explore the implications of the case study for the field overall.

There are at least two reasons for undertaking a case study like this one. The first is simply to get the details of the case in such a way as to present a coherent and reasonably complete picture. This is the kind of work we normally associate with journalism or history: attention to the particularities of the locale, the physical and human stories that unfold, the nature of central process in question (i.e., writing graffiti in Berlin). The second reason to do this kind of case study is to consider the ways in which it might contribute to our understanding of urban processes and politics in general. This is the kind of work normally assigned to social scientists: attention to details that are also found in other similar cases,

and, *mutatis mutandis*, the dynamics that can be recognized across all the cases and, in theory, future cases as well.

The two ways of approaching the story have been combined here, the main thread of case joined regularly by background understandings and theory. In this conclusion, it will be helpful to hold them apart and, in a sense, offer two conclusions, one addressing the case and one addressing the general understandings. But it is important to emphasize that this project has been exploratory at heart, aiming to paint a comprehensive picture of Berlin over time and concerned with individual lifeworlds above all; I did not set out to demonstrate strict causal relationships or identify archetypes, and it would be a mistake to look for tidy, QED conclusions or truly generalizable and transferable predictive factors. In keeping with the explorative spirit, then, rather than simply recapitulate everything that already was handled in great detail over the preceding chapters, I will emphasize instead the new avenues of inquiry suggested by what my work has shown. It may be better to describe what follows as openings rather than conclusions.

## THE CASE: BERLIN

This project was inspired by the observation that Berlin is a city in which graffiti and street art have an unusually prominent place in the urban landscape and public consciousness. Many parts of the city are so blanketed in illicit tags, throw-ups, pieces, and other types of graffiti, as well as street art, that they are difficult to imagine looking any other way: Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain, Neukölln, parts of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, Wedding, all of the S-Bahn lines and the elevated U-Bahn lines, just to name the most painted places. There are also increasingly frequent “urban art” festivals; there are highly-visible “free walls” for graffiti writing; there are preserved segments of the Berlin Wall, which function as an open air museum for political murals; several organizations offer street art or “Alternative Berlin” tours; and a formal, government-funded museum for street art opened in 2017.

Still, some of these facts are seen as representing a “sell out” to such a degree that during my second research stay a book called *The Death of Graffiti* was published. Berlin’s comparatively rapid growth over the past few years has also lead to the disappearance of countless old buildings and empty lots that had been popular among graffiti artists, as well as the renovation (and more attentive maintenance) of buildings whose facades used to be regularly painted. Even if the quantitative presence of graffiti remains high, the evidence from the history of *Backjumps* magazine and from the people I spoke to is that it is being concentrated in “spectacular” events, driven to the trains and train lines, and pushed to different neighborhoods. As we heard in Chapters 4 and 5, many people who had cultivated a deep relationship with the city over years of graffiti writing perceive these developments as a loss: “My old city is gone.”

For the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of people who are graffiti writers in Berlin, who have shaped their city through their subcultural practice, these recent developments represent a threat to their distinctive way of inhabiting the city and asserting their citizenship. In a sense, the mainstreaming of graffiti in Berlin might be undoing its force as subcultural urbanism. Or perhaps it is the “normalizing” of urban change in Berlin, which, after three-quarters of a century of extremes, from destruction to division to reunification to bankruptcy, is now exhibiting some of the development and real estate market characteristics more typical of large European or North American cities during the neoliberal era.

It is tempting to look at the entire history of graffiti and street art in Berlin post-Wall as a process of recovering the spatial-political focus that it had had during the era of the Wall. But despite lingering *Ostalgie* it would be neither politically desirable nor practically, physically possible to recreate anything like the geopolitical lightning rod that was the Wall. What I’ve shown throughout the preceding chapters is how what has emerged

instead is a spatial politics that is distributed across the city, rather than focused on the Wall, and a spatial politics that is enacted through the social production of space, rather than solely through political sloganeering. We saw this most meaningfully at the level of the lifeworld experiences of graffiti writers. I call this subcultural *urbanism* rather than subcultural *urban design* because what we saw emerge from both the historical material and the spoken testimonies went beyond aesthetic preferences and ideas about urban form. It encompassed those factors, of course, but it also encompassed sensibilities about what urban communities can and should be like, ideas about change, a conception of what social relations can and should look like: urbanism as a way of life, in other words. As a way of inhabiting the city, graffiti writing is as much about seeking *resonance* as performing *resistance*.

Above all, what I believe this project uncovered was the depth at which writing graffiti in Berlin can be understood as *productive* of space and meaning, rather than simply destructive or reactive or critical. In Chapter 2, I showed the complex ways in which graffiti writing is caught up with political, historical, social, and other forces at play in Berlin. In Chapter 3, I showed how the Backjumps project, one of the most important entities in the subculture, promoted a way of appreciating urban space, which developed into a mode of interaction with space that was particularly suited to the post-industrial, postmodern context of Berlin. In Chapter 4, we turned to the testimonies of individuals and heard in a holistic way how they narrate their experiences with actively shaping the city. And in Chapter 5, I illustrated several compelling themes that emerged from numerous interviews. These first three of these themes can be related to already established problems in urban design and planning policy: ephemerality (development and change versus historic preservation), property (ownership, value, rights to urban space), and materiality (aesthetics, design principles). Any summary of what this means in specific terms would be reductive, but we can venture that graffiti urbanists in Berlin prefer “old” buildings

but also embrace flux as a general idea; they are deeply suspicious of the current state of affairs in which property owners (or the state) have a monopoly on shaping the public sphere, especially in cases where that power is exercised at the expense of disadvantaged populations, which is especially noticeable in gentrifying areas like Kreuzberg and Neukölln; and they are masters of the physical substrate of the city, intimately connected to the analog infrastructure of the train lines and engaged in making the city in a material way (“graffiti made this empty lot into a spot”).

The final theme, belonging — with its two subthemes, being and becoming — gets at a problem much more fundamental, which is not directly incorporated in mainstream policy. Namely, how do people come to feel truly connected with and involved with a city? How can that “citidnship” be realized? What we saw was that graffiti has given people a way to come to know the physical city with great depth and nuance; a graffiti writer’s *gefühlte Karte* [sensed map] is richly detailed. What is more, that map is populated with people and stories, not just static physical features. We saw that graffiti has given people a way to appreciate the social structure of the city that is linked to ways of being. In terms of Berlin, we saw that “forgotten” places like the train lines become important social spaces, but also that doing graffiti exposes practitioners to an array of people and places that cuts across otherwise expected geographic and economic divisions; the *Berliner Mischung* [Berlin social mix] is an important reality to be upheld.

## BEYOND THE CASE: THEORY AND THE FUTURE

Subcultural urbanism brings cultural studies and urban studies into productive, hopeful dialogue. There has been a robust tradition in critical scholarship of examining the role of “culture” in urban spatial politics. At least for the past few decades, urban management has increasingly instrumentalized culture in the name of economic development, and sought



to install a marketable version of the dominant culture as “public culture” in public space in order “to maintain social hierarchy in a polarized society” (Zukin, 1995, p. 270; see also Sorkin, 1992). In Berlin, as in other places, this has often taken the form of “touristification” of certain cultural practices, histories, or even poverty (Till, 2005; Colomb, 2012; Frenzel, 2016). What I have done here is to show how cultural practice can play a role in urban change in a way that is slightly more optimistic.

Subcultural urbanism promises an alternative to hegemonic impositions and exploitative valorization. Certainly graffiti and street art can explicitly resist such trends through their content — and this happens quite frequently (see also Novy & Colomb, 2013; and Colomb & Novy, 2016). But what we saw in chapters 3, 4, and 5 was how the practice of graffiti writing can also implicitly enact resistance and engender attitudes about society that are antithetical to hegemonic, neoliberal structures. Subcultural urbanism, at least as seen in this case, can be understood as a way for urban space to allow people to find their voices. It is a way for cities to serve as much more than inert substrates for economic and reproductive activity; rather, cities shaped by subcultural urbanism become cradles of expression and venues for self-actualization. Subcultural urbanism insists on urban space that provides niches for the flourishing of different ways of being, of a diversity of urban life. It insists on space that lets people hear and tell stories about themselves and about the community. While „voice“ and „expression“ are important elements of the graffiti subculture, I also emphasized experience, worldviews, and embodied modes of life — and many subcultures, from skateboarding to break dancing to punk and beyond provide comparable examples of the way urban space can be appropriated and reshaped to serve for self-exploration, self-actualization, group formation, and discovery of social solidarities. Cities defined by subcultural urbanism cannot be branded in a particular way. They cannot even be branded as „multicultural“ or „creative“ or „hip“ or „welcoming“ in a marketable, tourist-friendly manner — as we have seen, in a city defined by subcultural urbanism is a

place where it is not only permissible but perhaps necessary to say, „Berlin does not love you.“

Participating in the production of space — space loaded with meaning (Lefebvre’s “lived space”) and space traced in daily life (Lefebvre’s “perceived space”) — via the cultural practice of graffiti writing can work against abstracting, homogenizing, and ultimately dominating forces (Lefebvre’s “conceived space”). One question this brings up is to what extent it is important which of the three parts of the spatial trialectic is activated in subcultural urbanism. One thing the story of graffiti in Berlin has shown us is the imperfect distinction between “lived” and “perceived” space. For Lefebvre, the “lived” element is that which is intentionally loaded, or overloaded, with meaning; it is the dominant element in a mosque or monastery. The “perceived” element on the other hand is “everyday” and “blind” or instinctual; it is dominant in a high-rise apartment building, whose function is completely dedicated to sleep, eating, and so on. But what we saw in Berlin is how anonymous spaces can be transformed to spaces of meaning through graffiti writing. Their relative meaning and anonymity, however, is dependent on knowledge, or connection, or the willingness to lose oneself in reading the names written somewhere. At the same time, we saw how a site can be painted (or have a work installed) on a forgettable night out, but then, if the work survives for a long time, take on meaning it did not have initially. Background becomes foreground, everyday sites become landmarks. So, while the three-part production of space was a useful point of departure for me, but it is not necessarily the best lens through which to analyze graffiti and subcultural urbanism. Along those same lines, phenomenology and an ontology of complexity obviously informed my overall approach, but it might be fruitful to explore how the material I’ve presented could yield new insights if analyzed through the framework of, say, assemblage theory.

There are certain limitations to the case study method. A single place, as interconnected as a place like Berlin is, can in the end only really tell stories about itself. This study is not “reproducible” in the sense sometimes sought with the traditional scientific method. And as demonstrated in Chapter 2, Berlin is a city with more atypical characteristics than most. But I have highlighted Berlin’s characteristics in order to make it clear the ways in which those characteristics contribute to the unique stories that the graffiti phenomenon has engendered there. Indeed, as I have argued, the specificity of the case study is the only way for the richness and complexity of the stories to come through. *Every city* has unique qualities, and therefore every city would expect subcultural urbanism to manifest in ways informed by those qualities, just as it has in Berlin.

That said, a comparative study might help to identify those dynamics that are common to cities that have graffiti and street art movements nearly as robust as Berlin’s — Melbourne, São Paulo, Lisbon, and Athens come readily to mind. Similarly, it could be useful to compare Berlin to other large cities in Germany, such as Hamburg (which is also known for graffiti) and Munich (which is not), or to look at a cross-section of German cities, including small and medium-sized cities, such as Heilbronn or Leipzig. Any of Berlin’s characteristics — post-war, post-industrial, post-Communist, a legacy of political activism, a legacy of totalitarianism, etc. — could be used as a criterion to select comparative cases, which could then be compared and might reveal interesting things about said characteristic.

The explorative work I’ve presented here outlines a set of factors that could be revisited in order to understand the particular complex context for a subcultural urbanism of graffiti in a given place. Namely, at the level of the city as a whole, we would need to look at physical, economic, socio-cultural, legal, and technical dimensions. And at the level of the individual lifeworld, we would listen for themes related to property, materiality, and permanence. Most especially, we would listen for the ways in which subcultural practice is able to beget a

sense of belonging. Future research might pick any one of these dimensions or themes and zero in on, for example, how graffiti and social belonging are linked in different urban and cultural settings.

The core ethnographic work in this study involved adults looking back at the role of graffiti writing in their sense of place and citizenship. None of my extended interviews were with teenagers or even particularly young adults. But since many of these adults had started writing graffiti in their early teens or even younger, themes of youth empowerment, deviance, and identity formation came up. They were not the central topic of the interviews, however, and I did not make them the subject of focused analysis. Nevertheless, I believe that the research presented here opens up a number of more pointed questions about young people and the city. Young people are using graffiti to shape urban space and in that sense claiming rights to the city. How might graffiti and subcultural urbanism more broadly force a reconsideration of who is “of age” when it comes to involvement in decision making about the future of the city? How can graffiti writing and subcultural urbanism inform urban design itself, that is, the kinds of spaces that a city should provide in order to allow youth to expressively appropriate space for the purposes of establishing their sense of identity and citizenship? Do all youth per se represent a subculture or a counterpublic capable of the kind of agonistic urbanism described here, or do they have to participate in a subculture characterized by intervention as overt as graffiti?

Generational differences also point to other avenues of future inquiry. People in the developed world under the age of about 30 can be called “digital natives,” people under the age of about 20 have never known a world without the Internet, and people born in the last 10 years will not have known a world without ubiquitous mobile computing. To what degree does the Internet, with its promise of infinitely personalizable “virtual spaces,” represent a complementary — or contradictory — outlet for the youth subcultures

examined here? To what degree does the ever-increasing digitality of space and place influence the way subcultural urbanism plays out in analog reality?

There is some risk that in isolating the practices of graffiti and street art, I have missed other, perhaps more impactful, subcultural practices that have shaped Berlin, or more salient things that my subjects have in common. For example, my interview subjects were surprisingly ready to reflect on things like the Critical Mass bike rides, the techno club scene, squatting, and even their paid professions when talking with me about their engagements with the city. Future research could look for more connections between graffiti and these other practices, some of which are also subcultural. That research would build on mine, and therefore avoid the danger of superficial treatment of a subculture's urban impact, at least for graffiti. Future research could also target a subset of graffiti writers — recent immigrants from the Middle East, for example — and compare the role of graffiti in the ways those people shape the city as they shape themselves.

What I have not done with this project, not even attempted to do, at least not in any systematic way, is to assess what the experience of the graffitied city is like for lay people, those not directly involved in creating graffiti and street art, graffiti and street art magazines, gallery shows, or urban policy. What is it like to live in a heavily painted neighborhood like Kreuzberg? What was it like to walk past the Cuvry Brache every day? What has it been like to experience a neighborhood like Mitte, which has less painting than it once did, or a neighborhood like Neukölln, where, at least anecdotally, the amount of graffiti is increasing? How does the experience of collective storytelling and sense of openness vary for those not directly involved? Similarly, what is it like for non-resident lay people, such as tourists, to temporarily experience a city as “bombed” as Berlin? Do they take back to their hometowns impressions of a city that is more free, more lawless, more “creative,” or simply dirtier than their own? How do tourists who spend time in



a neighborhood like Kreuzberg — or even take a “street art tour” — experience Berlin compared to those who spend all their time at the more formal and sterilized tourist destinations like the Museumsinsel and Brandenburg Gate? What do tourists make of graffiti messages like “Berlin does not love you” or “Fuck off tourists!”? Do such messages have their apparent intended effect (i.e., to make tourists feel unwelcome) or do they merely reinforce the gritty-chic image that attracted the tourists in the first place? Future work might attempt to answer these questions through surveys, media analysis, or ethnographic techniques (including autoethnography). To attempt to answer such questions was beyond the scope of this project and would probably have diluted my arguments. But having some understanding would certainly add necessary breadth to the discussion of what a graffiti city means and what its potentials are.

## FINAL ARTICULATIONS AND A CALL TO ACTION

Some months after our recorded interview, Linus got in touch with me. He was planning a gathering in conjunction with a new “object” he was going to install somewhere in Neukölln, and he wanted me to attend. He said our interview had got him thinking more and had, in part, inspired this new installation.

At the appointed time, a warm summer evening, I found my way to the site, which was behind a small bridge in an open, industrial area not far from the main residential areas of the district. There were already about a dozen people there, and the mood was casually jovial: some people chatting in small clusters, some sitting on the railing, most drinking bottles of Schultheiss or Berliner Pilsner from a small cooler. I mingled in with the others, and people came and went in pairs for a couple hours or so. From the bridge, we had a good view of Linus’s installation hanging from an adjacent overpass. At some point, Linus found me and handed me a small folded piece of paper. It was in a sense the program for

the meeting, and it gave some instructions for how to interpret the piece. Interpreting the piece, however, was synonymous with experiencing the space:

Turn around once clockwise in a circle: the entrance to a paper factory, Neuköllnische Allee crossing over the canal, a cement factory, a glass factory, the highway construction site, a mail-distribution center, a continuing education facility, a bunker annex, and then again the railway.

A glance to the far distance: spot the highway construction site above the rail lines leading to the south, recognize the the scrap piles of the port of Neukölln, make out the rail bridge in the direction of Schöneweide, locate the Estrell Hotel, discover the letters "LEISER".

A glance at the map: the various mobility concepts that exist here in this dense space, running parallel or crossing each other: the canal as waterway, the various rail facilities for public transit as well as freight, the street network, including bike paths and the construction site for the highway.

In 2009, graffiti from the group "DIAMONDS" brought my attention to the abandoned rail tunnel. Numerous walks along the tracks, nocturnal excursions, or simply riding my bike to Adlershof allowed me to observe the area over the years.

The upheaval of the urban landscape wrought by the extension of the A100 is the most impactful change. The industry- and transportation belt that wraps around the city here functions as a barrier between the inner city and the rather stigmatized mega housing project on Sonnenallee.

The highway will further cement this segregation.

Although old lots are disappearing and space is being filled in, new disused or uncontrolled spaces come into existence. The present train tracks also confirm the continuity that such places —perhaps because of their physical disconnectedness — can have inherently.

Graffiti made this vacant lot into a spot. The craving to stand directly in front of the graffiti forced the discovery of access points. Following these paths further allowed a network to develop and revealed new entrances and exits. The continuity of frequenting/watching allowed the space's changes to be observed. This part of the city has become mine.

To do:

- Walk along the train tracks on weekends for as long as that's possible.
  - Visit the highway construction site, take an artefact and imagine the future.
  - Appropriate urban space psychically and physically.
  - And at last, be here again for the blackberry harvest. It pays off, man!
- [my translation]

To experience the piece and the place, then, is nothing more and nothing less than to enact a rite of oneness with certain terrain. As a summative expression of the ongoing power of subcultural urbanism in Berlin it is tough to put it more succinctly: Glance into the distance

and at the map, appropriate space psychically and physically, and imagine the future. Linus's guarded optimism suggests an inversion of that notorious line from Karl Scheffler: "*Berlin ist dazu verdammt, immerfort zu werden und nie zu sein*" [Berlin is cursed forever to become and never to be], Scheffler wrote (1910). In Linus's notes to his installation he says the opposite: Berlin is blessed to always be becoming. The installation itself rotated slowly in the breeze from where it hung. It looked to made of cardboard and papier mache and resembled a stylized version of one of those instruments by means of which the bolt of a lock is shot (Figure 6.1). Linus's name for the installation and gathering: The Key to the City.



Figure 6.1 Linus's Key to the City, Berlin-Neukölln, 2017.



# APPENDIX A: FURTHER NOTES ON METHODS

*What kind of research is this? (or, Approaching Interviews as Conversation and Dialogue)*

How I went about eliciting and analyzing the testimonies of my research participants is central to the quality and validity of the research, but to discuss the details of my methods in depth in the introduction or content chapters would have been distracting, which is why I want to elaborate more on them here. In Chapter 1, I acknowledged that there is something of a false distinction between the two focal areas of this project, the shaping of the city and shaping of the self. It is part of my overall argument in fact that the two are fundamentally intertwined phenomena, that participation in the design of the public realm — shaping the city — can be central to the development of political consciousness and identity — shaping the self. Chapters 2 and 3 offered two takes on the evolving contexts and historical trajectories of graffiti writing and street art in Berlin as a whole. In Chapters 4 and 5, I turned to the testimonies of individuals. What I found in conversations with people who have been involved in graffiti and street art is that their practice is often inextricably bound up with both their coming of age and their experience of the city. No one I spoke with used terms like *Lebenswelt*, but my conversation partners seemed all but unable to describe their experiences painting on walls without also talking about their childhoods, hometowns, education, career choices, taste in music, taste in architecture, impressions of certain cities and neighborhoods, understandings of cultural and political history, and ideological inclinations. And yet it would also be wrong to characterize the practice as part of a “blind,” “background” lifeworld. Indeed, it would be somewhat comical to even suggest that doing graffiti is somehow an accidental, not-entirely-conscious, everyday activity.

Though social and cultural contexts are incredibly important (see Chapter 2), no one “falls into” graffiti through some kind of mimetic process, and certainly no one who does it for any amount of time can fail to reflect on its meanings and implications. Many people will even be forced into that reflection by law enforcement officials. But at the same time, most of my interviewees talked about doing graffiti or street art in a matter-of-fact way; it was, for them, simply part of who they are and simply part of Berlin.

The challenge, thus, was to acknowledge the intentionality and situatedness of the practice while being attentive and open to the fullness of individual experience and reflection. To achieve this, a number of approaches are used commonly across a variety of disciplines: interview, dialogue, observation, participant observation, and so on. What distinguishes the disciplinary applications can be subtle, relating as much to the attitude or orientation of the researcher as to the specific technique. A psychologist, journalist, or sociologist might each conduct an “interview” — but these interviews could look quite different. As for my own orientation, as I wrote in Chapter 1, critical, hermeneutical phenomenology was most useful. Operating within this orientation, I adopted an interview style combining van Manen’s open conversational mode (1990) and Freire’s dialogic mode (2000). To be open in conversation does not mean being “unstructured or open-ended” but rather “remaining oriented to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried-away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). And with my “notions” deeply in mind, as well as presented to my interview partners at the beginning of our conversations in the spirit of co-investigation, I sought out the constellation of “generative themes” of my partners’ lived experiences. As Freire puts it,

the generative theme cannot be found in people, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from people; much less in “no man’s land.” It can only be apprehended in the human-world relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and peoples action upon reality, which is their praxis. (p. 106).



So while conversation was my primary mode of accessing the lifeworlds of my participants, I strove to access the full dimensions of their praxis through other means of observation co-inhabiting of space. Let me try to put this in more concrete terms and give examples from my research experience.

I made a conscious effort to recruit people who had been involved for some time and would thus be able to look back at their lives as graffiti writers and street artists in the city. While many of my interview subjects had their first contacts with graffiti as teens or even pre-teens, at the time of our meeting, all were at least 25 years old, with most in their 30s. A few even had experience being interviewed by media or researchers — though even those who had already had such opportunity for reflection admitted they had never had the chance to talk quite so much about their experiences with the city. And so it is perhaps unsurprising that they were able to offer such fulsome and roving responses.

In order to be “conversational” *a la* van Manen and “dialogic” *a la* Freire, rather than subjecting my interviewees to a rigid questionnaire, I conducted semi-structured interviews, allowing a conversation to unfold around general questions I had in mind and in some cases had shared with the interviewees beforehand. (My interview guide is included as a separate appendix). Rather than meet in a formal setting like my office at the university — which was anyway in the somewhat remote suburban neighborhood of Dahlem — we often met in public or semi-public places like bars or coffee shops chosen by mutual agreement. Our conversations thus progressed in a comparatively natural way — and did often tend to have the character of a conversation, a dialogue between mutually attentive parties. That said, my contributions to the “dialogue” were sometimes minimal. It was often the case that an interviewee would find him- or herself unspooling a narrative for minutes on end, or else digressing into expansive philosophical ruminations and

reflections. At a pause, I might say something like, “Such as?” or “What do you mean?” and then the interviewee would spin out into another lengthy diegesis.

It is in order to remain as faithful as possible to the nature of the testimony I received, Chapter 4 presents three extended dialogues, without the typical expected interjections of the detached, objective scientist-author. I do this for several reasons. First, it is important to be clear about my influence on the testimony; the testimony was not written onto a paper survey or typed into an electronic form or recorded in some kind of sterilized or anonymized setting or delivered as some kind of formalized deposition. Rather, it was elicited by an embodied researcher, with his own goals and positionality, in a comparatively informal setting, and in the context of a conversation that both parties had an interest in conducting with a certain amount of courtesy and even friendliness. I, for one, needed to be trusted enough for them to be able to speak candidly to me about their lives and pasts — including actions that are illegal or exist in a grey zone. I also needed to maintain a positive enough impression so that they would agree to speak with me again and help me identify further interview candidates. For their part, my interviewees, aside from a basic human desire for recognition and wanting to be liked in the immediate social moment, probably wanted to be portrayed positively in whatever document was ultimately produced out of the project, and probably wanted to make sure that their testimony lived up to my *wissenschaftliche* interest in their lives. And since I often introduced myself by saying something like, “I am curious about how graffiti writers have shaped the city,” my contacts might have assumed that I was an ally out to help the cause of graffiti and therefore been more willing to help me. I have no reason to believe that anyone was disingenuous with me, but we were certainly engaged in a bit of a dance, and even if the dance hall was in fact a place as innocuous as a local coffee shop, it was not always an entirely natural and spontaneous interaction.

*How did you find the people you interviewed? (or, Some Notes on Positionality and Access)*

My admission to this metaphoric dance hall was based on a range of characteristics of my positionality, some of which are given and some of which were constantly being negotiated and performed. I am a white, straight, cis-gendered, culturally Protestant, male native English speaker of normal weight and above average height, all of which characteristics afford me tremendous unearned privilege in any number of social settings. At the most elementary and yet profound level, I almost never have to include or even think about those characteristics when introducing myself or interacting with most of the people in my everyday milieu, a large North American university. The fact that we often think of these characteristics as “default” belies the power differential inherent in processes of identification and masks the legacies of violence that went into establishing this extraordinary position as “default.” While in Berlin, most of these privileges still held; the language of the international academy is English, and my level of German proficiency is enough to conduct relatively advanced academic discussions, at least within my field. When interacting with strangers and potential interview subjects, I was able to draw on the authority of various academic institutions, introducing myself as a fellow at Freie Universität, with business cards to prove it, or else emailing from a .edu email address. People of a certain profile are not quite so easily impressed by academic credentials, and a few relatively famous artists and high-ranking city officials never responded to my inquiries or else shunted me to lower-level functionaries in their departments. But for the most part, I was able to access and ask questions of whomever I wanted, thanks in no small part to my empowered position.

That said, the subject matter of this study complicates some of the usual relationships between interviewer and interviewee. Because one of my goals was to use this project as both an exploration of and tool for social justice, I did what I could to diffuse the power

imbalance that was initially present in many of my interactions. I mentioned above the importance of establishing trust, and while any interview requires a degree of trust, the nature of the trust required for this project was unique. Graffiti writers and street artists, even those doing only legal work, all cultivate a degree of anonymity. At the very least, they maintain an artistic alias — albeit one that is so out in front that it often forms the content of the art itself. In some cases, I was introduced to someone by their civilian name — and never learned their “sprayer name.” The opposite happened as well. Some people I spoke with have a civilian name, a name they use for legal graffiti, and a name they paint illegally; I never was allowed to know all three. In several cases, I was told both civilian and painter names only on the condition that I never, ever use them together. In one embarrassing instance, a graffiti writer I’d been put in touch with suddenly and dramatically broke off our interaction because I asked about his “background” — a bridge too far, in his mind, in terms of what he wanted to reveal about his identity. In the interview conversations presented in Chapter 4 and the excerpts in Chapter 5, all the names used to identify speakers are invented by me. (Not everyone requested this, but I chose to be consistent rather than use different standards for different people.)

The majority of my interview contacts came through personal references (the “snowball” technique of finding interview subjects), and this was possible only after having established a rapport with the referring person. But this rapport was often not based on the academic credentials and other advantages I mentioned above. On the contrary, I needed to be thought of as “cool” and, while I needed to seem dedicated enough for it to be worth sharing intimate insights about “the scene” with me, I couldn’t seem too caught up in academic theorizations of the practice, and couldn’t ask questions that were too prying. Many of my interviewees had had interactions with the police, after all, resulting in sharply uncomfortable interview situations that made them understandably leery of saying very much to a comparative stranger.

When I went to events like gallery openings, visited graffiti shops, or met people I had only previously had email contact with, I wore casual clothing in order to be less intimidating and to fit in better. I typically wore jeans with sneakers, a t-shirt, and hoodie — also the typical wardrobe of many of my interviewees. It helped, of course, that this is a wardrobe I was already comfortable with; it did not at all feel like I was donning an elaborate disguise when I went to these meetings. But it was nevertheless a conscious choice. (When I met with city representatives, I wore slacks and a button-down shirt.) It also helped that most of my interviewees were within a decade of my own age. And my language abilities further contributed to the relaxed, somewhat more equal nature of our discussions. Had I had to work with an interpreter, for example, there is no way that the discussions would have been as free-flowing as they were. In a couple of cases, because the interviewee had exceptional English, we spoke in English. In all other cases, we spoke in German. In order to save space, I have only included the original German where I thought the specifics of a certain utterance were important to present in the original as well as in my English translation.

Many of my interviews came out of connections with the Graffiti Lobby, a group with which I have had contact since 2014. Throughout 2016-2017, I attended most of the Lobby's monthly meetings, observing quietly but not secretively, and I would occasionally bump into members of the Lobby elsewhere around town. More than one interviewee told me they agreed to the interview only because of my connections to the Lobby. Many of my interviews also came out of my connections with the Archive of Youth Cultures. While some of the employees of the Archive are used to fielding inquiries from the media, I probably would not have been able to conduct such extended and personal interviews with them, and would not have been referred to others, had I not demonstrated a certain amount of dedication by spending so much time combing through the Archive's holdings.



*Who did you talk to? (or, Further Notes on Access and Recruitment)*

As mentioned in the introduction, the narratives and themes presented in Chapters 4 and 5 are drawn from about two dozen long-form interviews conducted between October 2016 and September 2017. This kind of research is not meant to establish population-level truths, and so my “sample” is not intended to be “representative” in the sense typically used in the quantitative social sciences.<sup>1</sup> That said, I did seek out as great a spectrum of people as possible. While the “snowball” method was the main way I found my participants, I did not just ask people to introduce me to their friends; I asked them to introduce me to people they thought would add something to my understanding of the lifeworlds of graffiti writers. At the end of every interview, I showed my interviewee the list of who I had talked to already and asked for suggestions. For example, at the end of one interview, my interviewee said, “Hmm, you’ve got enough professional graffiti artists. You’ve got some hobby street artists, you’ve got some dedicated street taggers. What you need are some hard-core train bombers.” And he gave me a couple names.

In the end, the two dozen people I talked to ranged in age from their mid-twenties to mid-sixties. I spoke with mostly men, but also several women and one transwoman. Ethnically, most were German although several could be said to have a “migration background,” to use the common German euphemism for first-, second-, or nth-generation immigrants. (As I mentioned, all but a few interviews were conducted in German, and those other few were in English.) I did not ask for the specifics of their socioeconomic backgrounds, and there is

no reasonable way for me to speculate on that matter. As for their current status, I spoke

1 Out of curiosity, I asked as many people as I could how many “active” graffiti writers there are in Berlin. The graffiti shop owners answered this question with the most confidence, and although (but perhaps because) they were responding off the tops of their heads, several of them gave the very same response: about 10,000. Had only one person given me this number, I not have taken it seriously, much less literally. The fact the same ballpark figure was mentioned by a few different people may only be a coincidence. Even if it is not accurate in a quantitative way, it indicates qualitatively the sense that people have of size of the subculture: a very large, but not unimaginably large, number of people. (Some insiders I talked to distinguished between “active” graffiti writers, who paint at least a few times a year, and “hard-core” writers, who are painting on at least a weekly basis. This latter group was estimated to be “a few hundred,” “around five hundred” and “not more than a thousand.” Estimating the number of graffiti writers in Berlin is further complicated because of the ever-increasing number of people who paint while visiting Berlin, the so-called “graffiti tourists.”)

with people who were high school dropouts and people with nearly as much post-graduate education as me. I spoke with people employed in primary education and social work, with computer programmers, with struggling artists and with successful artists; one man I spoke with was working as a groundskeeper at a cemetery. They did not mirror the population of Berlin, but they were a diverse lot. More importantly, they presented a diversity of life experiences with graffiti writing and street art. I stopped at two dozen interviews in part for practical reasons (each was between 1.5 and 2.5 hours, so there was already a considerable amount of material to process); in part because I started being told I had a good spectrum of participants; and in part because I felt I had achieved “saturation” (i.e., while each participant was unique, the rate at which I heard things I hadn’t heard before dropped off).

*How did you process the data? (or, Notes on Transcription, Translation, and Analysis)*

All of this talk of deep and attentive conversations about the meaning of life might make it seem as though my research was like one extended cocktail party or salon, interrupted only when someone needed to refill a drink. As I mentioned, most of my interviews were indeed conducted at cafes or bars, and the experience was usually stimulating. But for every hour of excitement in the field, there were countless hours engaged in the austere and lonely offices of transcription, translation, and editing.

Of the two dozen or so extended interviews drawn on in this study, four were conducted in English and the rest in German, and all were recorded. First, I transcribed the recordings directly. Initially, I attempted to use automated transcription services, like Trint, which change several seconds a minute. I thought this would save me time. But the transcripts that were generated had so many errors that I had to spend hours listening to the recording

and fixing them anyway. After that, I just transcribed directly from the recording myself. The transcripts came out to 15- 25 pages (7,000-15,000 words).

Then I translated the German interviews. Again, there are web-based, machine translation services, but they are not very good, and human translation services were prohibitively expensive. So I did the translations myself, initially retaining the natural speech patterns, then polishing, punctuating, and otherwise transforming the testimonies into grammatical written English. While I am reasonably fluent in both of these languages, I turned regularly to a bilingual Langenscheidt Compact Dictionary (1993), as well as the Leo website (<https://dict.leo.org>) and Paul Hemetsberger's Dict.cc project (<https://www.dict.cc>), including the usage forums on both of those sites. Except where it is particularly relevant to include the original German words spoken, I have not included the full German transcripts. (I also polished the transcripts from the English interviews for grammar and punctuation.)

While these first steps may look like objective “cleaning” or “organizing” of the data for analysis, in truth there is manipulation — and analysis — happening already. The transcription and translation process entailed subjective decisions at every turn: in choosing which English terms to use, in choosing how to punctuate sentences and paragraphs, in choosing how much of the spoken rhythm to preserve, in choosing which of the filler words and verbal tics to keep, in choosing what register and tone to give the translations overall. I cannot and would not claim that the resulting English texts are transparently objective renditions of what my interview partners said. In fact, it is probably more accurate to say that my transcriptions and translations are caught up with my analysis and interpretations. At the very least they are the first step in that process.

Let me explain what I mean. Broadly speaking, there are two opposed schools of thought when it comes to translation: fidelity to the original text (or, in this case, transcript) versus

naturalness and fluidity in the target language. Among translators working from German to English, the latter approach is far more common, especially in fields like literature and journalism. There is actually some contradiction between “naturalness” and “fluidity”: what we consider neat, fluid prose is quite different from natural, spoken language. In the academic context of this project, clean prose of a certain register is the standard, normalized discursive mode — for the researcher/writer. And yet the trend in the social sciences is to present interview transcripts in “unedited” form, with the incomplete sentences and so on that characterize spoken language. The verisimilitude achieved with this approach is not to be discounted; along with name-dropping esteemed theorists and packing in citations, reproducing the “raw” language of an interview can be important to projecting an ethos of good, objective science. But I opted for the other approach, the journalistic or literally one, for a few reasons.

The function of putting words spoken in a foreign language into clean prose in a new language is to present the speaker as legitimate member of the discursive community. It is to eschew the exoticism that can accompany strange locutions (e.g, literal translations of foreign idioms) and to preempt the derision and paternalism that can be engendered when confronted with natural speech rendered as broken, imperfect prose. In other words, I wanted to make my interview partners sound like respectable, articulate, English-speaking adults — while being extremely faithful to what they actually said. Obviously, I have not turned them into Edwardian butlers; I believe their German-ness, their distinctive phrasings and individuality, their use of terms from the subculture as well as other slang, and their overall situatedness as residents of a 21st-century metropolis come through clearly. But in keeping with my greater goal to give voice to people whose voices are not normally recognized in this arena, and to present their experiences as fully as possible, I chose to render their testimonies the way I have.

Presenting such long excerpts as I do in Chapter 4 serves my greater goal, but also illustrates what I mean by my analysis starting already with transcription. In addition to quoting at length in order to preserve the context of my interviewees' utterances and my influence on them (Chapter 4), in Chapter 5 I include some long quotes and conversation excerpts in order to illustrate the proximity of certain statements to one another. The idea is to not disguise the complexity of my correspondents and their worldviews. Additionally, by presenting extended quotes, I am inviting the reader to live with the participant's voice for a little while. As Heidegger said, "language is the house of being"; I had been invited into that existential house built of language, and I wanted to share the experience with readers. Additionally, when living with someone's voice for a while, when witnessing an extended testimony, we can begin to see something of its arc. The high and low points of that arc will be of special interest. Also, the instances where the participant takes the extra effort to express something in intense or poetic language will stand out. For example, when Lennart says that he "was swimming in the juice of the color," we know that he didn't just happen to notice a tag on the street; something extremely meaningful was happening in his lifeworld.

A certain holistic analysis takes shape through the extended quotations. This analysis is reflected in the "Becoming a Graffiti Writer in Berlin" diagrams [Figure 4.1-4.4]. But this is only one level of analysis of a phenomenon. Chapter 5 goes to present a thematic analysis. Contra grounded theory and other forms of analysis, phenomenology identifies themes as "structures of experience," to use one of the many terms van Manen uses (1990). He identifies three approaches to discerning thematic aspects of a phenomenon:

1. The holistic approach or sententious approach, for example attending to text or visual documentation as a whole.



2. The selective or highlighting in approach; we listen to or read a text several times and ask: What seems especially revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?
3. The detailed or line-by-line approach: what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the experience, about the phenomenon to be studied?

For most complex, social life situations, the first mode is not possible (though my intent with Chapter 2 was to give some of the global context and background). The second and third approaches, however, are both important immediately relevant to my project. The second seeks out major “landmarks,” while the third goes zooms in to work out the details and subtleties. There is a sense of exploring a territory, and this exploration will feature discoveries and insights. Van Manen goes on: “[Such] insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (pp. 77-78). The researcher moves from the “essence” to emergent themes “by lifting appropriate phrases or by capturing in singular statements the main thrust of the meaning of the themes” (p. 93).

It should be clear that both a deeply held sense of the whole interview transcript as well as attention to specifics are required. Van Manen says that the reported experiences must essentially be memorized: thought about, discussed, compared among themselves and with imagined alternatives, so that throughout a long, slow process certain themes do in fact emerge. (Again, these are not pre-identified from the literature and then looked for, as in some other forms of social science research; rather they are found to literally emerge.) Finally, the relationships of particular details and the coherent themes need to be related to each other; clusters of themes, or mega-themes, might be identified. It should be evident that the process I described above — conducting, transcribing, translating, editing, and putting into clean prose — was a process of internalization and rumination which allowed

themes to emerge. This is what I meant when I said that “processing” the data was in fact fundamental to the analysis.

At the end of the process, when the description is complete, fundamental patterns or structures should be obvious. Here I can site Bruno Latour, but it is an epistemological approach shared by the best journalists and all skilled observers of society. Latour advises not to “worry that by sticking to description there may be something missing, since we have not ‘added to it’ something else that is called an ‘explanation.’ ... If a description remains in need of an explanation, it means that it is a bad description” (2005, p. 137). In other words, an adequate description will have an internal validity based on its coherence and have a claim on the world through richness of detail. The dense description is the explanation.

# APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Evan H. Carver

Graffiti schreiben in Berlin [Writing Graffiti in Berlin]

Interviewvorlage [Interview guide]

[Aufwärmung: Darf ich Ihren Name eintragen? Wie alt sind Sie? Kommen Sie aus Berlin (wenn nicht, seit wie lange sind Sie in Berlin)?]

[Warm up basics: Do you want me to record your name? How old are you? Are you from Berlin (if not, how long have you lived here)?]

Persönliche Geschichte mit Graffiti [Personal History with Graffiti]

Seit wie lange hast Du Graffiti gemacht/geschrieben? [How long have you done graffiti?]

Wie alt warst Du, als Du angefangen hast? [What age were you when you started?]

Warum hast Du angefangen? [Why did you start?]

Wie wichtig ist es, dass deine Stücke vom ferne sichtbar sind? [How important is it to you that your pieces be widely visible?]

Was ist Dir wichtiger, die Sichtbarkeit oder die Qualität? Hat das über die Jahre geändert?  
[Do you care more about the visibility or the quality of the work? Has that changed over the years?]

Machst Du hauptsächlich Tags, Throw-Ups, Pieces (also traditionelles, buchstabenförmiges Graffiti), oder auch bildliche bzw. figürliche Stücke (eher "Street Art")? Hast Du mit Aufkleber oder Schablone oder Plakate erfahrung? Welche Formen sind Dir wichtiger und warum? [Do you do do tags, throw-ups, pieces, or figurative works? Which do you prefer, and why?]

#### Die Geographie des Graffitis [Geography of Graffiti]

Wie wählst Du deine Flächen/Orte? Wo gefällt es Dir am besten, zu malen/sprühen? [How do you choose your sites? Where do you like to paint and why? (Where did you like to paint and why?)]

Haben Deine Lieblingsflächen oder -orten sich mit der Zeit gewechselt? Warum? [Have your favorite locations changed over time, and why?]

Sind viele von deiner Stücke noch sichtbar? Weist Du, wo sie sind? Bist Du stolz darauf, dass einige noch zu sehen sind, oder ärgerst Du dich, wenn sie nicht mehr sichtbar sind? [Are many of your pieces still visible? Do you know where they are? (Are you proud of those that are still visible or upset about those that are not?)]

Kannst Du mir eine Karte/Stadtplan mit den wichtigsten Graffitiorte zeichnen? [Can you draw a map of the city with the most important graffiti sites?]

Wie hat das Schreiben/Malen von Graffiti deine Stadtsansicht geändert? [How has writing graffiti made you see the city differently?]

Inwiefern hat das Graffitmachen beeinflusst, wie Du mit deiner Umgebung umgehst?  
[To what degree has being a graffiti writer influenced the way you interact with your surroundings?]

Die Graffitiszene in Berlin [Graffiti Scene in Berlin]

Wie hat sich die Graffitiszene in Berlin geändert? [How has the graffiti scene in Berlin changed?]

Hat die Graffiti die Stadt Berlin geändert? [Has graffiti changed Berlin?]

Hast Du in anderen Städten als Berlin gesprüht, und wie war dieses Erlebnis? [Have you painted in cities other than Berlin, and what was that experience like?]

Wer sind Deine Lieblingsgraffitikünstler/schreiber? [Who are your favorite other graffiti writers?]

Gehst Du lieber alleine Sprühen, oder hast Du ein Crew? [Do you paint alone or with a crew?]

Was hältst davon, dass Berlin als Graffiti und Street Art "Mekka" betrachtet wird? [What do you think of Berlin being considered a "mecca" for street art?]



Wie beeinflussen die Berliner Mauer und ihre Hinterlassenschaft deine Arbeit/Kunst?

[How does the legacy of Wall influence your work?]

Wie hat die steigende Zahl von sogenannten "Free Walls" ändert oder beeinflusst wo und was Du sprühst/malst? [How have the increasing number of "free walls" changed where and what you paint?]

### Die Graffiti und die Politik von Berlin [Graffiti and the Politics of Berlin]

Hast Du je politische Graffiti gemacht? Inwiefern betrachtest Du deine eigene Arbeit/Kunst als "politisch"? [Have you ever done "political" graffiti? In what ways do you consider your work political?]

Beeinflussen Ereignisse in der Stadt und in der Welt was oder wo Du sprühst/malst? [Do events in the city or the world influence what you paint or where you paint?]

Gibt es irgendwas besonders berlinerisch an deiner Kunst? Anders gesagt, würdest Du die selbe Stücke in anderen Orten machen? [What is specific to Berlin about your work? In other words, could you do the same pieces anywhere?]

Als Graffitischreiber/künstler, inwiefern siehst Du sich als urbane Akteur oder Aktivist? [As a graffiti writer, to what degree do you consider yourself an urban activist?]

Änderst Du die Stadt durch deine Kunst? Wie? [Are you changing the city with your work? How?]

# APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

(This interview was conducted on 7 May 2017. Since I often began with some small talk before starting the recording, the transcript begins somewhat in medias res.)

[00:00:01] Aber manchmal nervt das komplexe und wenn es schief geht dann sieht man es nicht leicht. Ja ich meine das ich mache das nur für mich ist das nicht gut genug. Das ist ganz schön und gut genug. Schon mehr Technik als viele Wissenschaftler die ich bisher getroffen habe teilweise noch mit uralt Diktiergerät ein bisschen Techniques so wie du weißt. Also was das bequeme ist wenn es mir ein bisschen etwas zu sagen. Aber wie gesagt Das Ding geht Graffiti aus in der Stadt. Statt gestaute Ich mache diese Arbeit. Aber ich halte nichts von dem Ringbahn Kate konnte einfach verstehen was dahinter steckt. Ich weiß nicht ob vielleicht auch ein bisschen so gut aussieht.

[00:02:20] Also Ich male seit 20 Jahren für diese 20Jahren hab immer eigentlich eher so das illegale Graffiti gesucht weniger die Auftragsmalereien gemacht. Aber ab dann schon. Als ich vor drei Jahren Brasilien hab da nochmal eine ganz andere ganz andere ganz andere Form von Graffiti aber eben einen anderen Umgang der Bevölkerung mit Graffiti kennengelernt. Und seitdem bin ich auch immer so interessiert an Projekten wo das so ein bisschen gemeinsam passiert wo die Leute zusammen mit den Malern überlegen was passieren soll. Ein bisschen partizipativ weil ja der Großteil der Graffiti-Szene ist ist total egal was die Leute davon halten. Aber ich bin tatsächlich immer noch ein bisschen in die Richtung. Mir ist es schon wichtig dass die Leute irgendwas davon wahrnehmen und im besten Falle auch

verstehen und kritisieren oder gut finden aber jedenfalls überhaupt wahrnehmen dass es irgendwie Graffiti gibt und vieles von dem was zurzeit passiert ist sehr klassisch und so lange jetzt schon 20 Jahre oder 30. [75.7]

[00:03:36] Heißt das dass die Leute einfach gar nicht mehr hingucken sondern und das finde ich schade so weil dadurch dadurch geht halt so eine alt gewordene Rebellion die aber eigentlich viel Potenzial hat um immer noch mit den Leuten in Kontakt zu kommen, und eventuell über Stadtsicht sich zu auszutauschen. Deswegen habe ich in Rio auch gemerkt, wie schön das ist, wenn man einfach klingelt, und Derjenige -- ob er der Hausbesitzer ist oder nicht -- aber er entscheidet dann einfach das es OK ist so. Man kann man tagsüber auf der Straße malen und das ist dann. Das führt dann auch dazu dass alle mit einem reden und man am Ende mit so einem Grill und Bier in der Hand da sitzt und einfach nur den Abend ausklingen lässt. Vor seiner Wand irgendwie weil die Leute einfach so ins Gespräch verwickeln, dass man einfach da bleibt. Das ist natürlich eine ganz anderes Gefühl als wenn man nachts losstiefelt, nicht gesehen werden will und an Orten malt wo sonst keiner ist. Natürlich hat man keinen Kontakt. Dieser Kontakt ist mir schon wichtig. Deswegen mache ich ja auch Schul Workshops manchmal mit Graffiti so, dass es mir schon darum geht dass man darüber irgendwie ins Gespräch kommt. Ich meine Graffiti selber: da gibt's nicht viel zu sagen, finde ich. Für mich gibt es klar lange Texte drüber und so. Aber ich finde das ist nicht so komplex wie viele denken. Und dann rede ich aber lieber über die Stellen und über Stadtentwicklung und überhaupt inwiefern Jugendliche die Möglichkeit haben in der Stadt teilzuhaben. Das funktioniert eigentlich über Graffiti ganz gut.

[00:05:20] {Das heißt du hast du gesprüht und du sprühst ein bisschen immer noch -- aber Buchstaben, ein Tag?}

[00:05:31] Genau. Ich hab den Namen, ich mal die noch regelmäßig, aber ich versuche das auch. -- seitdem Ich in Brasilien war, zum Beispiel auch viel mit bildlichen Sachen zu verbinden und nicht mehr so ganz straight nur Buchstaben.

[00:05:47] {Das ist cool. Ich wusste nicht dass das es so in Rio funktionieren. Also was kann ein bisschen mehr sagen über diese VerBindung zwischen Stelle und Leute?}.

[00:06:18] Unbewusst achten natürlich alle Sprüher darauf wer und wie viele Leute ihre Bilde, an welchen Stellen sehen. Insofern werden alle Sprüher irgendwie zu Experten, Was so Reichweite und Stellen in der Stadt angeht nehmen sie zu kleine und Marketing Manager, die überlegen welche Ecke bringt am meisten Bekanntheit. Wo hab ich die besten Chancen dass mein Bild dranbleibt. Wo stehe ich neben anderen Bildern und wo steht mein Bild allein sondern solche Sachen. Die nehmen Graffiti Sprüher wahr auf jeden Fall, aber gleichzeitig treten sie ganz selten überhaupt in Beziehung zum Publikum und wenn dann irgendwie, keine Ahnung, so aggressiv und so. Ich glaube wenn Leute auf Sprüher treffen, sind die meistens entweder betrunken oder pöbeln rum. Es gibt wenig Momente wo Sprüher und Normalbevölkerung sich kennenlernen können oder treffen. Das gehört teilweise auch zum Selbstbild, dass man gegen alle ist. Aber für viele ist es einfach, dass es keine öffentlichen Plätze gibt, wo man in Ruhe malen kann. Es stimmt auch nicht ganz -- es gibt natürlich ein paar. Aber oft sind die halt völlig jenseits von belebten Orten an irgendwelchen Rand Gebieten, genauso wie zum Beispiel Skaterbahn immer in irgendwelchen Randgebieten sind, um niemanden zu stören aber dadurch dass man auch gleichzeitig total raus. Verschiebt das Problem so ein bisschen in die Vor-Bezirke oder Vorstädte. Man hat dann halt nicht mehr die Graffiti-Sprayer in der Stadt.

[00:08:00] Das finde ich da geht schon etwas verloren weil die Bevölkerung nie mit Graffiti sprühen in Kontakt kommt. Und die Graffiti Sprüher auch nie hören was die Leute davon

halten. Es ist größtenteils glaube ich egal aber trotzdem. Viele sagen dass sie nur für die für ihre Graffiti Kollegen machen -- das glaube ich aber nicht. das sind wir alle alle des Publikums sind so ein Stück weit. Das ist ja das Schöne in der Stadt: man kann sich ja nicht aussuchen wer vorbeiläuft an dem Bild. Und dazu was sagen will. Aber viele Leute legen trotzdem keinen Wert darauf was die Leute davon halten oder dass man irgendwie machen müsste um eventuell wieder mehr aufzufallen. Ich würde wirklich sagen, dass Graffiti inzwischen unsichtbar ist für die meisten Leute. Wenn es nicht gerade total provokativ auf irgendeiner Glasscheibe ist dann nehmen die meisten Leute es einfach nicht mehr wahr das ist so ein Rauschen einfach so. Und auch diese Tagsüber die sich alle beschweren, sieht im Alltag eigentlich nie jemanden, geschweige denn dass jemand lesen würde oder sich damit beschäftigen. Und diese Unsichtbarkeit finde ich es eigentlich ein bisschen schade, weil die Leute sich so daran gewöhnt haben dass es total vorbeirauscht einfach jeden Tag. Manchmal sieht man das wenn Kinder in der S-Bahn sitzen und das Fenster die Namen anfangen zu lesen oder ihre Eltern fragen was da steht und so die Eltern zum ersten Mal überhaupt wahrnehmen was da steht und dann gleich sagen "Ach, vergisst dass es illegal" oder "Das darf man nicht" so was. Dann merkt man wie die Wahrnehmung darauf einfach so komplett gefiltert ist schon, dass man das gar nicht mehr sieht.

[00:09:37] Und viele viele Graffiti Aktionen letzter zeit werden auch nur fürs Internet gemacht nur damit man danach Bilder oder Videos hat, die sich im Internet verbreiten. Es ist okay so finde ich aber das Problem ist dass man damit irgendwie auch nur seine kleine Filter Community erreicht irgendwie die das gut findet aber nicht wirklich mit der Gesellschaft in Kontakt tritt. Und im Prinzip dann keine politischen Diskussionen darüber anfangen weil es oft nur um eine Bestätigung, Likes, Dings geht. weniger darum dass es eine besonders interessante Stelle wo viele Leute sich irgendwie die Leute erst einmal aufmerken oder erst mal wachsam werden. Genau das sind zwei Sachen: einerseits ist es total unsichtbaren, andererseits gehen die Graffiti Sprüher selber total ins Internet

und versuchen da irgendwie Bekanntheit. Also ich rede vor allem über die Graffiti-Szene das kann ich gar nichts kann ich mich gar nicht so aus. Und vor allem im Internet zu ihren Fame suchen.

[00:10:44] Eine Ausnahme finde ich es gibt immer wieder Ausnahmen, aber die sind eben auch besonders radikal oft. Oder bedienen sich halt komplett andere Techniken als normalerweise. Kripo ist eine gute Ausnahme da oben -- mit den Fäusten -- der ewig schon dabei, also einer der ältesten Graffiti Sprüher hier in Berlin und trotzdem ein sehr traditionellen Hintergrund hat. Hat er eben auch Aktionen gemacht, die komplett anders sind. Zum Beispiel wie diese Fäuste. Hat Stellen gemacht, die vorher keiner gemacht hat. Der es geschafft, dass die normale Bevölkerung ihn wahrgenommen hat. Das ist schon das Höchste der Gefühle für mich, wenn man das schafft mit dem eigentlich Normalen - Immer wieder dasselbe -- aber es trotzdem zu schaffen, dass Dasselbe irgendwie normalen Leuten auffällt. Kripo ist ein guter Punkt. OZ in Hamburg ist ein guter Punkt.

[00:11:42] Das sind so die zwei würde ich wo ich sagen würde die es schaffen dass am allerbesten diesen Graffiti Zirkusse ein Stück weit zu verlassen um auszugehen und politischen Diskussionen dadurch anzufangen. OZ nicht mehr, aber als er noch gelebt hat, war es tatsächlich so dass er auch für mich so einfach einer der war die komplett in Frage gestellt haben alles andere auch die Rituale und die Routine und alles, die man sich angewöhnt hat um Graffiti zu denken. Einfach mal wieder auf den Kopf zu stellen. Kann man wieder darüber nachzudenken, was man da macht.

[00:12:14] {Also ist das dann die politische Botschaft in solche Graf die es einfach einfach die Aufmerksamkeit auf eine Fläche oder ein Objekt dazu zu bringen?}



[00:12:35] Ein bisschen komplexer ist es schon. Ich habe ja auch mal -- irgendwann ist mir wieder eingefallen -- dass wir dieses OZ Manifest gemacht. Das Ganze ist im Prinzip nur so ein bisschen ein Versuch, dass mal einen Text zu fassen was uns daran interessiert hat an OZ. Da geht es um Stadtentwicklung und der Gedanke ist schon dass nicht nur einfach Stellen in die Wahrnehmung gerückt werden sollen sondern schon auch ein Gefühl dafür entwickelt werden soll "wer hat überhaupt das Recht diese Stellen zu besetzen in der Stadt?" Also "Reclaim Your City" mäßig. Wer darf denn eine große Fassade haben und wer nicht. Und wenn die Bewohner da drin in dem Haus überhaupt kein Recht haben ihre Fassade mitzubestimmen. Dafür aber der Plakats Kunde der ist im Internet irgendwie bestellt dann finde ich es läuft etwas schief. Ich finde tatsächlich das dass der öffentliche Raum im Berlin im Moment extrem an Qualität verliert. Also sowohl was die Umwelt angeht -- Bäume und auch verkehrsberuhigte Bereiche oder eben auch Lücken wo nichts ist wo kein Kommerz stattfindet und keine kein Geld nichts einfach nur Leere ist das gibt's fast nicht mehr. Das finde ich schon schade.

[00:13:51] Diese Qualität von öffentlichem Raum diese Vielfalt und öffentlichen Raum geht halt immer mehr verloren zugunsten von so einer Mischung aus irgendwie kultureller konsumorientierte Großstadt Kulisse, die aber wirklich komplett durchgeplant ist. Und eben ganz viel von Werbung und vor allem auch von jedem Bereich also wo Werbung als früher noch ein Plakat war das ist halt heute ein Fahrrad wo noch ein Schild dran ist oder Kampagnen die irgendwie mit Graffiti Methoden bedienen. Oder sind die halt immer mehr auch andere Bereiche übernehmen oder eben diese ganz schlimm. Auch diese Werbe-Fassaden Graffiti, die es in letzter Zeit gibt. Da schwimmt auch ganz viel. So finde ich von dem was früher im Jahr ein klarer Trennung da war. Und ich finde dadurch tatsächlich verliert der öffentliche Raum so ein bisschen an Vielfalt. Und Partizipation ist immer ein schönes Schlagwort. Ich bin auch wirklich dafür dass die Leute mehr Mitspracherecht in der Stadt haben sollten sowohl in ihrem kleinsten Raum also in ihrem Haus und in der Straße

als auch wirklich politisch, was das Ganze angeht. Aber natürlich ist dabei nicht sicher was dabei rauskommt. Jetzt kann ich sicher sagen in welche Richtung Berlin gehen würde wenn jetzt die Bevölkerung hier mehr Mitspracherechte hätte. Dann so würden sie Tegel erhalten und versuchen das alte Westberlin irgendwie zu retten. Aber ich es trotzdem ist es schon so dass es früher einfach mehr Freiräume gab, in denen Leute einfach mitmachen konnten wenn sie wollten. Wenn sie Bock haben, ok, aber wenn er mitmachen will, soll er doch die Möglichkeit haben zum Beispiel ein Club irgendwo einzurichten oder ein Café aufzumachen oder die Graffiti zu malen. Und wenn es nicht mehr geht dann verliert man halt ein Stück weit den Kontakt zu seiner Umwelt. Das ist nun mal die Großstadt.

[00:15:53] Genau da gehts mir eigentlich darum dass Leuten wieder ein bisschen mehr das Gefühl geben sie sind Teil ihrer Stadt und sie können daran teilhaben an dieser Stadt die den eigenen Händen verändern wenn sie wollen. Und weniger unbedingt, was ich jetzt male oder was jetzt die Botschaft von den Sachen ist-- das ist für mich eher zweitrangig. Es geht tatsächlich eher um "Ich mache einfach mit, Punk, Do it yourself Philosophie."

[00:16:29] {hast du hast du das tatsächlich selber erlebt dass zum Beispiel Du etwas malst. Und dann die Nachbarn sagen. Was weiß ich. Das ist mir nie eingefallen dass man diese Wand bemalen konnte -- das könnte ich auch machen!}

[00:16:55] Das ist eine gute Frage. Findet das wirklich statt? Also in Rio ist es ständig, dass Leute sich neben eingestellt haben und mitmachen wollten und ständig gefragt haben, ob sie mitmachen dürfen. Hier in Berlin: viel, viel weniger. Klar Ich meine was was ist liegt jetzt an der einzelnen Stelle, aber was es dann schon gibt sind halt so Graffiti Touren oder Workshops wo Leute versuchen mehr davon zu verstehen und eventuell von den Techniken zu lernen. Was sie damit machen kann ich schwer sagen. Aber gibt schon es gibt immer wieder Leute die Interesse daran haben, die gerne die Techniken lernen wollen

und dann halt für ihre eigenen Sachen zu verwenden. Aber tendenziell ist es schon eher so dass Leute sich nicht irgendwie darauf einlassen. Ich finde es auch gar nicht nötig dass sie etwas anmalen. Worauf es mir ankäme wäre dass sie immer noch das Gefühl haben, dass andere vielleicht auch einfach nur dafür kämpfen dass diese Stadt irgendwie weiterhin demokratisch bleibt und die Mitbestimmung irgendwie in der Stadt da ist. Dass nicht alles so clean ist und alles so durchorganisiert ist.

[00:18:30] wo es zum Beispiel mir total auffällt. Genau das ist ja noch einer, den ich nicht erwähnt hat, das sind diese Berlin Kidz oder Life, die ja auch ein sehr klassisches Graffiti ein Stück weit machen aber eben nochmal komplett neue Stelle komplett radikaler Ansatz komplett über Internet präsent. Und das eben dann schon schaffen -- zB in dem sie Fahrräder irgendwo dranhängen. Wieder das Gefühl für so ein bisschen Anarchie im Stadtraum zu wecken. Das ist irgendwie das Gefühl wieder zu haben, so ist es immer noch ein Stück weit das Berlin was es irgendwann gab, wo jeder machen konnte was er wollte. Was es natürlich nicht mehr ist. Aber schon so ein bisschen mehr Punk Attitüde. Es hat nochmal eine ganz neue Raum Besetzung. Dadurch im Prinzip keine Klage jetzt werden demnächst wieder die Putzfrauen werden sich anpassen denn auch abseilen anbieten. Aber bis dahin muss man noch irgendwie freie Bahn für die.

[00:19:55] {Du hast in Leipzig studiert. Und wie lange bist du in Berlin?}

[00:20:02] Ich bin seit 2007 glaube ich hier. Mein Bruder hat hier vorher gewohnt, das hiesst ich war fast jedes Wochenende in Berlin damals schon. Ich komme aus aus Cottbus was mich weit weg ist. Alles Berlin war immer ein Bisschen Zentrum meines Interesses.

[00:20:19] {Hast du in Berlin angefangen zu sprühen?}

[00:20:22] Nein, in Cottbus als 12-Jährigen.

[00:20:29] {Das heißt aber du bist tätig in Berlin seit zehn Jahren. Was sind die wichtigen Orte für dich? Sind Sie immer noch und vielleicht Orte nicht mehr zugänglich sind, was sind die gewesen. Gibt es Spezifische?}

[00:21:02] Also gibt es auf jeden Fall. Ich fand immer die Cuvry Brache super gut, war ein schöner schöner Treffpunkt für alle möglichen Leute. Die gibt's nicht mehr. [long pause] Was ich super schön finde ist die ganze Stadtbahn. Also die Strecke zwischen Ostbahnhof und Savignyplatz: das Ganze sehr enge Großstadt Atmosphäre. Da male ich halt auch gerne so weil es halt ein super urbanes Gefühle ist, so großstädtisch -- das gefällt mir. Und auch die ganze Unterführung unter dieser Hochbahn finde ich super cool. Das sind meine Lieblingsorte, immer noch auch hier in Mitte. So irgendwelche Hinterhöfe die an diese Stadtbahn Grenzen und dadurch so ein bisschen 'tote Orte' sind, wo keiner sonst ist oder maximal ein paar Penner schlafen. Aber wo man dann halt als Graffiti Sprüher hinkommt. Wenn man halt mitten in dem Orkan der Gentrifizierung plötzlich noch so Inseln hat wo kein Mensch ist und wo keiner hinget, wo es nicht geht dass man da Geld damit macht. Das durch die Verkehrsplanung einfach so abgeteilt ist das keine Möglichkeit gibt Geld zu verdienen. Und dann sind da noch die Orte wo man Spuren von vor 20 Jahren trifft von Sprühern, die wahrscheinlich auch schon darum gegangen haben.

[00:22:49] Ansonsten ich mal wenig im Oste, also ganz weit im Osten, ich im meine hauptsächlich Ost-Berlin würde ich sagen, West-Berlin eher wenig. Weil ich finde es architektonisch nicht so interessant. da gibt es viel weniger große Flächen, weil es viel enger bebaut ist wahrscheinlich auch weil ich meine Freunde alle hier habe. So ist es hier eher so der Ostteil Berlins in meinem Interessengebiet. Aber ich male nie in Marzahn, zB. Keine Ahnung. Da war ich nie. Sollte man mal wahrscheinlich noch machen.

[00:23:22] {Aber das heißt hauptsächlich Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, F'hain?}

[00:23:28] Prenzlauer Berg auch nicht. Lichtenberg, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Mitte.

[00:23:37] {Es wird gesagt dass es kleine große [He gets a phone call.] [[All phone call: Nummer eins genau genommen auch von verschiedenen Seiten gehört und wusste nicht ob es jetzt faktisch Susa also ich hab die Familie gefragt und ich hatte ja so weit unterstützenswert ich keine Lust drauf und das auch in Kreuzberg machen. Frage Also los jetzt noch nicht. Welche Schwimmhalle damit gemeint ist aber das wäre schon möglich. Fernsehfilms von der Firma ja vielleicht hat man ja ne Chance weil Lichtenberg nicht angeboten wird dass man Balloon machen wir das schon mal für die Familie kann ich sagen Wir würden das machen super.

[00:27:06] Aber ich fand sie einfach spannend rauszufinden ob es denn noch am Ende funktioniert wenn man jetzt die vielen vielen Dank. Wir sind auf den Weg gemacht. Herzlichen Dank Danke. Tschüss]]

[00:27:29] {ist das ja was ich sagen wollte. Es wird gesagt dass im Osten immer mehr kleine Brachen gibt's nicht so aggressiv wieder aufgebaut. Das ist einfach Ecken, einzelhäuser, die nicht wiederaufgebaute muss jetzt gibt es diese Orte interessant oder die Industriebrache ist nicht wichtig>?}

[00:28:15] Tatsächlich sind die Kleinen Brachen ja eigentlich schon waren immer spannender. Ich habe wenig in Fabriken und so gemalt. Das ist halt so was für Sonntagnachmittag irgendwie, wenn man Lust darauf hat. Aber eigentlich malt man ja gerne auch mal unter der Woche und wie gesagt ich mag es auch wenn Leute meine Bilder

sehen, deswegen ich mache auch nicht gerne Orte die komplett abgelegen sind. Insofern die kleinen Orte sind mir schon wichtig. Diese kleinen Brachen sind wichtig. Man merkt immer mehr, dass sie verschwinden. Aber gleichzeitig -- ist schon schwieriger geworden. Oft sind es halt diese -- gar nicht unbedingt nur die Brachen sondern eben die Wände der angrenzen, die gute Sichtbarkeit bieten. Die verschwinden natürlich dadurch dass der Häuser reingebaut werden. Und dann diese Brandwände, die sind tatsächlich ein großer Verlust und die gibt's die gibt's auch in Kreuzberg viel -- oder gabs viel. Dadurch ist Kreuzberg auch nicht so interessant war für den Wiederaufbau und in dieser Zeit als eben die ganze Häuser gebaut wurden. Dadurch gab es auch in Kreuzberg viel freien Platz und freie Wände. Das ist ein Wrangelkiez auch teilweise immer noch so. Da sieht man auch die ganze Parks in Hinterhöfen und da findet eben viel Graffiti statt so. Genau aber zunehmend verschwinden diese Lücken immer mehr. Und das ist tatsächlich schon ein blöder Verlust. Und es gibt viel Leute die reagieren indem sie in Tunnel gehen oder auf Dächer gehen. Das

[00:30:00] ist jetzt nicht so ganz meins, Aber das ist wahrscheinlich die --- Wenn man halt immer auch Gelände will, was noch nicht erobert ist, ein bisschen freies Gelände ist, so zu sagen, wo noch nicht hundert andere gemalt haben. Weil ich muss auch mal ein bisschen ausweichen und das wird auch jetzt wieder passieren. Graffiti Sprüher, wenn sie wieder neue Flächen suchen, ist noch nicht ganz klar wo die sein werden, weil diese ganzen Glas Beton Fassaden, die bieten halt nicht mehr viel an als Fläche. So muss es halt irgendwie andere Orte wiedergeben, wo das stattfindet. Ich bin nicht super skeptisch, dass es nicht klappen wird, sondern es wird auf jeden Fall klappen. Es wird Wände, neue Stellen gefunden werden. Aber so wie es bisher war -- dass man mitten in der Stadt teilweise sogar Spielplätze hatte, wo nichts, wo die Stadt und auch noch die kommerziellen Gewerbetreibenden irgendwas zu suchen hatten -- das war immer schön, und ja das verschwindet auf jeden Fall, kann man schon sagen.



[00:31:09] {Wie hast Du reagiert, weiter nach aussen? Oder einfach weniger?}

[00:31:09] Ne, man malt immer. Aber weniger, dass man älter wird!. Ich weiß gar nicht. Ich hab das so das ausgewichen, versucht dann ein bisschen radikalere Gegenmaßnahmen zu ergreifen. Anonymisierst Du das am Ende? {Ja, auf jeden Fall.} Ok. Ich finde auch Feuerlöscher Graffiti ganz gut -- da kann man ja auch mal neue Flächen finden und erobern, die sonst schon gar nicht mehr gehen weil sie eben weil es eben viel zu viel Hektik wäre und viel zu schnell gehen müsste. Dann diese Feuerlöscher ist halt ein bisschen Reaktion darauf. Das mache ganz gerne. Und ich reagiere mehr, man versucht auch mal ein bisschen zu gucken, Was wird neu gebaut und wie kann ich da wieder was Neues dran machen. Jetzt gerade zum Beispiel am Ostkreuz, rund um Ostkreuz. Diese Autobahn Riesenbaustelle bis Treptow runtergemacht und da entstehen halt auch viele neue Stellen. Die muss man möglichst früh sich krallen so. Genau. Insofern mache ich das eher, dass ich darauf gucke, was wird neu gemacht und dann auch dahingeh, habe ich jetzt gar ein prinzipielles Problem mit.

[00:32:44] {Hast Du gesehen zwischen Ostkreuz -- es gibt es ein Beton Ding. Es ist groß und die haben verschiedene Häufungen von Sand und Stein und die haben die Häufen werden scheint mir die aus Beton Beton Stahl. Die Leute haben diese Blockes besprüht und dann werden die Gäste umgestellt und deswegen auf die Gemälde umgestellt.}

[00:33:37] Ja, solche Collage dann. Genau, das ist hinter Treptower Park, richtung Neukölln, eine nette Ort.

[00:33:50] {Generell wie in diesen zehn Jahren mehr. Wenn du sagst dass du schon bekannt ist wie diese. Wie hat eine Lieblingsorte was sich verändert?}

[00:34:19] Früher war ich gerne am Schlesischen Tor und Wrangelkiez, wo mein Bruder gewohnt hat, also ganz früher. Das hat sich komplett ins Gegenteil verkehrt. Inzwischen bin ich da super ungern, weil es einfach komplett überlaufen ist, mir viel zu viel ist, auch viel zu viel Kommerz inzwischen, und das ist so ein Ort, der sich für mich komplett ins Gegenteil verkehrt hat. [30.2] Mitte fand ich früher wiederum nicht so interessant -- finde ich jetzt spannender, weil -- warum es früher nicht so interessant war, weil ich Kreuzberg einfach spannender fand und da oft war. Und Mitte war immer für mich, [00:35:17] auf der gefühlten Karte, [1.5] eher so Künstler und Street Art Gebiet und weniger jetzt so viel Graffiti. Inzwischen ist es aber so dass es hier immer noch viel passiert und viel gemalt wird. Umm, woran man das festmachen kann? also alle Dächer, alle sichert hier, auch bis in die letzten Winkel [00:35:48] sozusagen, je mehr von diesen klassischen Stellen verschwinden desto mehr wird es halt so bis in die letzten Winkel getrieben und wird hier noch im letzten Hinterhof findet man immer noch was. Das finde ich schön, wie es komplett satt wird. Das ist halt wirklich Mitte. Ich meine ist eigentlich eigentliche Zentrum der Stadt, was in jeder anderen Großstadt irgendwie der sauberste, neutrales und langweiligste ist. -- Ist halt hier tatsächlich fühlt immer noch sehr aktiv und viel was gemacht wird. Finde ich eigentlich ganz spannend.

[00:36:18] Und auch viele Leute so. Ich mag das, wenn es halt auch wenn es mit viel interAction, sehr viele -- es passiert einfach viel, und da passt doch Graffiti gut rein so.

[00:36:34] {Die meisten würden sagen bis Mitte total vorbei ist, das es total Yuppy--}

[00:36:46] Kann ich mir vorstellen, aber ich finde Kreuzberg schlimmer. Klar, es nervt trotzdem hast du hier immer noch, finde ich, hier hast du immer noch alte eingesessene Einwohner, ältere Leute. Aber in Prenzlauer Berg ist es nur noch junge Familien, in Kreuzberg nur noch irgendwie Party People. Also wenn es dazu führt, dass man gar keine

richtige Mischung mehr hat, denn es so krass ist, dann stimmt etwas nicht. Sondern das finde ich halt hier in Mitte immer noch ganz nett: es ist eigentlich -- klar, es ist viel verloren gegangen, viele tolle Orte -- aber es ist trotzdem noch eine gewisse Mischung an Leuten hier. Und das finde ich schon ganz schön. Klar wenn man über Potsdamer Platz redet, ist natürlich nichts mehr. Da ist es tot. [107.6] Aber hier finde ich eigentlich ganz schön. Ja, auch die ganze Architektur hier finde ich schön, die ganze n Hinterhöfe und verwinkelten Straßen hier vom Ostteil von Mitte, finde ich es auch sehr schön, irgendwie entspannt. Und sonst, ich weiss nicht. Früher bin ich ...also gab es schon viele Brachen und leere Häuser und so was-- Hauptbahnhof, in der ganzen Ecke. da ist ja inzwischen gar nichts mehr sodass der für mich nicht so ein bisschen auch von der Karte verschwunden, von der Graffiti Karte, weil es einfach nichts mehr geht. Wedding ist neu aufgetaucht, das hatte ich nicht auf dem Schirm bis vor drei Jahren so. Da passiert viel. Ich finde die von hier so Torstraße nach Wedding, dass ist tatsächlich richtig viele junge, junge Graffiti Leute, neue Namen sich wieder richtig aktiven in Stadtbild Reinhämmern. Das finde auch schon wieder auch cool. Das gefällt mir auch. Was in Wedding passiert an Wänden und sonst.

[00:39:09] {Nimmst du auch Teil oder bleibst du hier?}

[00:39:14] Wedding bin ich seltener -- aber nur weil es weit weg ist!

[00:39:19] {Wie habt ihr diese Ringbahn Karte gemacht? Habt ihr das 2008 gemacht?}

[00:39:55] Ja, 2008. Viel hat mein Bruder gemacht. Ich habe ein Teil der Recherche mitgemacht.

[00:40:01] Es war tatsächlich so dass wir damals diese Seite aufgebaut haben, überdose.de, und dadurch sowieso ganz viele Fotos jeden Tag gemacht haben.

[00:40:11] {Alles Die Fotos auf Ueberdose.de sind von euch?}

[00:40:14] Ja, genau, es gibt drei vier Fotografen aber ist nicht viel mehr. [00:40:17] Und ich hab mir schon ein ziemliches Gefühl für die Ringbahn. Also einfach zu wissen was da ging. Aber mein Bruder ist dann auch mehrmals die Runde gefahren um das noch alles -- wir haben uns ans Fenster gesetzt und mitgeschrieben. Und es wäre eigentlich längst eine Zeit mal etwas Neues zu machen. Ich bin fast der Meinung dass die Sachen die hier draufstehen gibt's wahrscheinlich größtenteils nicht mehr würde ich behaupten auch wenn ich mir die Namen so angucke das sind dann wirklich die die damals gerade aktuell waren. [32.1] Und die Frage ist Was ist davon überhaupt noch zu. Aber sollen wir das dann halt gesammeltes wirklich an den Stellen wo wir noch nicht ich aus dem Kopf wussten was da ist. [00:41:04] Die meisten Stellen wussten was im Kopf was da gefallen ist. [5.3]

[00:41:10] {Ihr wusstet das im Kopf, denn ihr so oft vorbeigefahren seit?}

[00:41:14] Genau. Graffiti Sprüher haben so eine Wahrnehmung für Räume, das wir das wirklich nach Namen sortieren können im Kopf irgendwie. Die sagen dann halt nicht, "ich steigt da Greifswalderstrasse aus sondern ---" Man sagt, sie sortieren die Straße, [00:41:29] dann musst du beim DISNE oder irgendwie rechts rum oder so. Oder da wo das neue LES ist. Dann merkt man sofort was gemeint ist. Und Graffiti Sprüher haben ein unglaubliches bildliches Gedächtnis. Mein Bruder meinte auch wenn er einmal ein Bild gesehen hat, das vergisst er nie wieder. Wenn er sich betrachtet hat, wenn er es allein einmal gesehen hat, er wird immer wieder sagen können, "hab ich mal gesehen." Würde es auch wahrscheinlich von hundert Kilometern wieder erkennen welches Bild da gerade zu sehen ist.

[00:42:03] Natürlich diese ständige Wiederholung dadurch dass man jeden Tag die selben Wege fährt so, dann hat man es halt irgendwann geschnallt was ist wo und welche welche Sachen spielen eine Rolle. [42.5] Ja [00:42:15] und das war damals echt gerade eine richtig aktive Zeit. Es gab das Jazz Style Korner. Die CBS Leute waren super aktiv. Es gab fast jeden Tag was Neues. Das heißt wir sind jeden Tag losgefahren, haben fotografiert. Insofern war das einfach so die Zeit -- das war der Sinn dieses Plans, das mal festzuhalten was alles passiert, was in der Zeit alles passiert ist. Es wäre einfach mal interessant zu gucken was davon noch da ist. [27.6]

[00:42:44] {Also du meinst dass viel weniger passiert heute?}

[00:42:48] Also ja es ist schon weniger auf jeden Fall. Aber die Stellen sind ja auch weg ein Stück weit. Damals war halt auch noch viel Freiraum der dann zum ersten Mal gemacht wurde. Sieht nicht unbedingt daran ist die Szene besonders lahm geworden wären -- doch auch! kann man schon sagen Es gibt im Prinzip ... so was ich wahrnehme, sind Es vielleicht eine Handvoll oder zehn Leute die wirklich auf der Ringbahn irgendwie neue Sachen machen und die auch darauf achten, dass sie an verschiedenen Bahnhöfen überall um die Ringbahn rum präsent sind. Aber nicht mehr so viel wie früher auf jeden Fall. Gerade dieses ganze Crew Graffiti ist eigentlich viel viel weniger geworden ist. Die aktivsten Leute sind für mich im Moment eher einzelne.

[00:43:54] Ja. [Looking at the Ringbahn map.] Aber das DISNE ist tatsächlich noch da das wird auch teilweise noch von einsprühen immer wieder neu gemacht damit sie nicht verschwindet. Hier Pogo ist glaube ich weg. Klar NBD TK ist immer noch da. 247 BAD an der Hermannstraße: Ich weiß nicht, glaube ich nicht mehr da.

[00:44:17] Es gibt schon viele Sachen die nicht mehr zu sehen sind. Gleichzeitig entstehen immer wieder neue Sachen. Ich glaube den Plan voll zu kriegen wäre immer noch kein Problem. Es wäre nur die Frage ob man die Namen noch kennt.

[00:44:35] {Und das hab ihr habt das für gemacht.}

[00:44:44] Es war die Idee ein bisschen Werbung für UeberDose zu machen, so ein Flyer. Klar auch mal um festzuhalten was an Namen so da ist rund um die Ringbahn. also ich bin mir sicher wenn man wenn man Leuten das Vorlesen würde, die wissen genau wo sie gerade sind an welcher Stelle. Es ist wie ein innerer Film der vorbeifährt wenn man Ringbahn fährt. Ich war einfach der Gedanke diesen Film aufzuschreiben, was für Namen immer wieder auftaucht. Die besten Größen natürlich längst nicht alle aber die größten Sachen halt mal festzuhalten. [43.9]

[00:45:33] {Also ich muss sagen ich habe wirklich verstanden was Ueberdose ist oder war.}

[00:45:43] Nicht so kompliziert. Es war nur ein Fotoarchiv im Prinzip. Mit ein bisschen ausgreifenden Entwicklungen wie Aktionskunst. Es ist einfach ein Archiv dessen was 2000, in den 2000er Jahren, in Berlin stattgefunden hat. Ziemlich wilde Zeit auf jeden Fall. Und gedacht war eigentlich als erstes Archiv wo Leute selber auch hochladen können. das hat nicht so gut klappt, das hat uns Streetfiles im wesentlichen übernommen. Streetfiles gibt's auch nicht mehr. Aber das war die Seite die das denn wirklich durchgezogen hat, wo Die Leute selber hochladen konnten. Das war bei uns technisch möglich aber technisch nicht möglich weil weil wir es so lange gedauert hat. Es ist ein bisschen eingeschlafen. Aber der Gedanke war schon mal so eine Art Querschnitts. Zeitkapsel irgendwie von dem was derzeit in Berlin stattgefunden hat aufzubewahren und das wollen wir immer noch machen so werden es jetzt auch bei Wikimedia.



[00:46:52] Das heißt es wird dann sozusagen in dieses Archiv rein kommen von der Wikimedia. Theoretisch kann dann immer noch jeder nach den Bildern suchen. Einfach nur weil es sind nur Fotos. Wir haben es auch nicht versucht daraus Bücher zu machen. Wir war auch nur Graffiti Fotos sondern muss jetzt nicht irgendwie eine größere Sache draus gemacht werden. [00:47:17] Aber dass das dann immer noch ein bisschen weiterlebt irgendwie auch auch jenseits dieser Berliner -- Berlin -- das es inzwischen Berlin nicht mehr gibt's. [8.3] und natürlich auch um Vernetzung mit anderen. Viele viele Aktionen -- also jedes jedes Jahr mit Reclaim Your City zusammen so eine Sache. Das heisst ja viel mit vernetzten, kennenlernen. Das war immer einmal ein Jahr, dass wir so Jahresausstellung macht, wo wir einfach 20 Leute eingeladen haben und dann einen Raum gemalt. In Galerien eigentlich meistens in Galerien: Ueberdose / Reclaim Your City zusammen. Und Reclaim Your City hat es eher so fortgesetzt und Ueberdose ist dann eingeschlafen. Aber ich hätte Bock darauf, diesen Plan immer wieder neue zu machen. Das wäre auf jeden Fall interessant. überlegt hätte man ohne Aufwand müsste man echt alle abfahren nochmal komplett neu aufstellen. Das ist glaube ich schon recht interessant was noch da ist und was nicht. Wenn man nicht mehr da ist dann könnte man über Ueberdose nachschauen die ganzen Bilder.

[00:48:56] {Warum habt ihr dass das so gemacht, per Hand? Alles ist mehr und mehr digital digital digital}

[00:49:27] Es war damals genau die Übergangsphase. [00:49:33] Ich glaube es war einfach auch dass wir selber Bock hatten zu schreiben. Jeden Tag immer wieder sondern einfach nur.

[00:49:43] Aber es sollte auch einfach glaubwürdig sein so dass man so eine abstrakte Karte mit den Namen so schnell bei der Graffiti-Szene so ein bisschen so ankommen, "Was soll das jetzt," irgendwie. "Wer ist das überhaupt?" Und so weiter. Ich glaube man ist so ein handgemachtes weil viel viel glaubwürdiger einfach so damals. und teilweise merkt man finde ich teilweise sieht man auch bei den Buchstaben wie das Bild in der aussieht so ist der Vorteil so dass man es mit der Hand macht. so etwas hatte damals glaub ich echt ehrlich den Grund, dass es so technisch nicht möglich war, so viele Namen irgendwie auf einer Karte unterzubringen ohne dass man da hätte Grafik Fähigkeiten, Grafikprogramm können müssen, und deswegen haben wir dass per Hand gemacht, und auch per Hand kopiert und so.. Es war damals einfach noch die Übergangszeit zwischen alles handgemacht und Computerzeitalter. [59.6]

[00:50:34] {Ich finde es grossartig.}

[00:50:42] Danke. Tatsächlich einfach aus der Spaß am Schreiben, die Namen so nebeneinander, die alle so zu taggen, auch eine Rolle gespielt hat.

[00:51:00] {Was war Suburbia Zentral?}

[00:51:15] Gute Frage. Ich weiß nur dass hier diese Geburtstagstorte von CBS. Umm, gute Frage. Kann ich mir auf Ueberdose nachgucken. muss mein Burder fragen.

[00:51:33] {Was ist Bermudaklatsche, Tal der Stille?}

[00:51:42] Haha. Na, da geht es, es ist dieses Gleisdreieck glaube ich zwischen die nach Pankow die S-Bahn 1. Genau. Da ist so ein grüner, einfach so ein grünes Tal. Ich glaube weil es einfach so ein bisschen aufgreifend ist. Kripo Birds, weiss ich nicht was da für Kripo

Birds sind. Aber ich glaube dass es so etwas wie ein urbanes Valley quasi zwischen den Gleisen liegt und wo nicht so viel passiert.

[00:52:19] {obwohl jetzt das es ein Park ist passiert viel.}

[00:52:25] Klar ist doch dass es schon was gibt's sonst nur unerklärten nahm hauptsächlich das ist so eine Wand wurde es nacheinander geschrieben steht von Waterman. Von diesen Top top ist der Typ der sich auf einen Coup Gust Anderson rankommt also genau das was er nicht sagen warum sonst noch. Ist es nicht mehr. "Bis der Arzt kommt" kennt er das Bild. Er ist schon sehr nah am Original. Was ist das Idee gefallen im Herbst. Da war glaube ich war ein Bild erst aufgetauchtes wenn die Blätter alle weg waren.

[00:53:56] {Ja das merkt man besonders Gesundbrunnen, Weddings. Diese Strecke fiel uns ins Theater Strolche. Doch jetzt gibt es viel zu sehen.}

[00:54:23] Aber es ist gut zu malen in der Zeit wann es besonders grün ist, dann kann man in Ruhe malen und taucht es mal wieder auf. Soll ich mal für den noch herausfinden was da die Links die Leute einfach so

[00:54:44] {Ich habe ein Datei davon gefunden. Der Datei hiesst "Ring of Fire" Warum?}

[00:55:06] Ein kleines Wortspiel. Damals waren wir noch sehr auf Wortspielen. Also klare, wenn Graffiti da ist dann burnt es, und der Ring ist halt die Ringbahn. Aber wahrscheinlich hat es auch irgendwie männlich -- "Ring of Fire" war damals das Lied. {Johnny Cash?} Genau. Das war glaube ich damals gerade in so einer Werbekampagne für Männerdeo total präsent, wurde ständig gesungen, und wir haben das unbewusst wahrscheinlich davon übernommen und eingebaut. [humming the song to himself, pointing at map] Hier ist

wirklich eine Lücke. Hier sind so viele große Hochhäuser und Autobahnen und so was, dort ist nicht viel gemalt. Aber es sind ein paar neue -- am Südkreuz müsste man den ganzen LIFE, 1UP auf jeden Fall ergänzen.

[00:56:38] {Was sind die. Es gibt auch eine Autobahn oder welche Straße dort. Aber es ist nicht sauber. Komischerweise kann sein dass da eine stationäre Nachtzeiten einschränkt}

[00:57:08] Ja ich mal in der gegend auch nicht so gerne weil es so menschenleere Gegenden sind, und wenn man nachts unterwegs mit einem Leiter ist, fällt man sofort auf. [6.8]

[00:57:15] Das ist ein bisschen das Ding. Graffiti Leute lieben solche Orte wo viel los ist, so dass man einfach untertauchen kann. An solche Orte, wo wirklich nur Industrie ist, fällt man auf.

[00:57:35] {Generell was für eine Rolle in dem Stadtbild hat Graffiti oder die Kunst für dich?}

[00:57:47] Also Kunst jetzt weniger... [00:57:49] Graffiti in der Stadt? Für mich persönlich natürlich, so dieses sich vielmehr verbunden fühlen mit der Stadt, also vielmehr darauf zu achten was sich ändert. Für mich ist eine Kommunikation die da stattfindet die natürlich kein Außenstehender versteht. Aber ich sehe wer welche Stellen mit wem zusammen malt. Wer zu Besuch war, wer mit welchem Bild auf wen reagiert. Wer auf Stellen malt wofür jemand anders gemalt hat und den damit ärgert. Das ist für mich schon einfach so eine Novella quasi, die abläuft im Kopf. Wer hat mit wem irgendwie zu tun. Und wenn ich ein Vergleich mit Städten wo das nicht so wo nicht so viel los ist. Dann ist es erst mal auch visuell für mich langweiliger. Es passiert nicht so viel und es ist halt ganz oft so dass es dann ... ich finde es legt halt immer auch ein Stück weit die Schwachstellen offen so. Selbst wenn

es Potsdamer Platz ist wo noch wirklich alles kameraüberwacht ist und alles neu und alles super ist so gibt es immer irgendwie kleine Stellen wo jemand unauffällig ein Bild malen konnte so, und es ist wie Hacking. Es legt die Schwachstellen auf offenen Strukturen die eigentlich perfekt wirken sollen, die ersten auch dazu führen dass niemand etwas Falsches macht. Und das ist für mich ja genau symbolisch derzeit immer noch für abweichendes Verhalten natürlich, für dass du Sachen machen kannst, die andere Leute sich nicht trauen.

[00:59:38] Und dafür steht für mich halt immer noch so die Hoffnung dass das nicht verschwindet so. ist schon für mich Graffiti immer noch sehr wichtig in der Stadt. Wenn ich jetzt zusammen mit anderen Leuten noch mal ein bisschen durch die Brille der anderen irgendwie gucken sollte -- was es für die ist -- Dann nehmen Sie das tatsächlich ganz selten nur wahr, aber es stört auch keinen. Man gewöhnt sich irgendwie dran. Das ist auf keinen Fall mehr ein Skandal. Und was viele Leute überhaupt nicht gesehen haben ist zum Beispiel die Umstellung von Silber auf bunt. Das hier sind ja viele Sachen sind ja noch so Silberbinder, große Silbernamen gewesen. Was heutzutage an den Lines halt los ist, sind ja ganz viele aufwendige Buntbilder und ganz viel mit Charakter auch ganz viel gestrichen. Das einfach eine Qualitätssprung einfach nochmal passiert, den viele Leute normalerweise gar nicht wahrnehmen, aber den ich auch gut finde. Berlin war früher mal so Schwarz-Chrom, Schwarz-Chrom, Schwarz-Chrom so runder. Inzwischen ist ein bisschen mehr los. Gibt's halt ein bisschen andere Sachen. Ja das finde ich einfach gut wenn man überrascht wird, wenn man herumfährt und man guckt ja nicht unter auf seiner Zeitung sonder man guckt raus und dann passiert etwas. Gibt's was Neues, man achtet drauf wie sich das ändert. Es gibt aber das Gefühl dass man hier das man verbunden ist mit der Stadt. [196.1]

[01:01:10] Und [01:01:11] noch ein Punkt: es sorgt dafür dass ich ständig neue Orte entdecke immer noch so. Ich wäre nie an Orte gekommen die ich gesehen habe so ohne

Graffiti weil man auf dem Weg zu irgendeiner Stelle oder weg oder an irgendeiner Stelle Orte kennengelernt hat. [16.6]

[01:01:28] Man sieht halt sozusagen die ganze Ringbahn, die jeden Tag Millionen Leute durchs Fenster nur sehen, sieht man mal von hinten zum Beispiel oder von der Seite, wenn man saß mal da im Bush, oder man hat diese Orte wirklich mal [01:01:38] erlebt, [0.4] die normalerweise kein Mensch betritt. Das ist glaube ich auch ganz cool -- dass vielleicht auch der Grund warum die Ringbahn damals genommen haben weil das wirklich so, da sind tendenziell wenig Menschen unterwegs, auf diesen ganzen Strecken links und rechts der Ringbahn. Das ist alles sehr sehr -- da ist Platz zwischen den Häusern und da sind wenig Leute. Und wenn man da nachts unterwegs ist, dann ist das wirklich ein eigenes Gelände. Da kennt man sich ja nur aus wenn man ein Experte ist dann kann man da unterwegs sein. Das macht den Reiz auch aus von so einer. Wenn wir zum Beispiel die Stadtbahn [S7/75] ist immer viel los oder immer da ist kein Platz neben links und rechts. Da ist so was nicht. Aber die Ringbahn ist ein bisschen wie ein kleiner Dschungel, wie ein kleines Tal vielleicht auch so durch die Stadt durch wo Sprüher halt unter sich bewegen können. Und wo Sie wirklich unter sich sind, weil es sind nicht mehr Penner! Penner hängen an den schlimmsten Orten, an Kreuzungen, und es gibt so schöne grüne Flächen wo sie schlafen könnten, aber die nehmen das nicht auf dem Schirm oder es ist ihnen zu unsicher, keine Ahnung. Denn tatsächlich ist die Ringbahn ja wirklich so ein Graffiti Sprüher eigenes Gebiet gewesen.

[01:02:59] {Graf und SA wird mehr und mehr in der Politik aufgenommen. Und was würde es wünschen für eine offizielle Wahrnehmung oder Auseinandersetzung?}

[01:03:45] Tendenziell würde ich natürlich so etwas erträumen wie in Brasilien wo öffentlicher Raum wirklich öffentlich ist das heißt er wird von denen genutzt die jeden Tag in ihm unterwegs sind nicht von irgendwelchen Leuten die diesen öffentlichen Raum



hauptsächlich als abseits Markt für ihre Produkte sehen. Und [22.0] das genau das Leute natürlich selber entscheiden können was an ihrem Haus dran ist oder nicht. Das finde ich. Das finde ich schön. Das sind so Träume die ich habe. Die werden nie wahr werden, nicht in Deutschland. aber das wäre natürlich toll wenn es wenn es da eine gewisse Bereitschaft gebe und auch einfach -- Aber es müsste sich alles ändern. Das Ordnungsamt müsste sie sich raushalten. Es müsste möglich sein dass jeder Hausbesitzer überhaupt sein Haus in der Farbe anmalt, wie er will. Es geht ja auch schon nicht -- es gibt lauter Regeln die das verhindern sollen. Ich glaube nicht dass irgendwas stattfindet. Aber das wäre das Maximum. Und da drunter finde ich, wäre eigentlich Zeit dafür darüber nachzudenken ob man nicht so etwas wie eine Billboard Tax, also eine Steuer auf Werbung auf Werbetafeln machen sollte. Weil viele Reden über Sexismus an Werbetafeln und so weiter. Aber das ist für mich ehrlich gesagt ein ziemliches RandProblem. Viel wichtiger finde ich dass solche Werbung hier in der Stadt stehen und ein riesen ProzentTeil unserer Aufmerksamkeit absorbieren, und die die Öffentlichkeit und die Gesellschaft davon nichts hat. Und ich fände es angemessen wenn man -- es gibt ein Modell in Montreal zum Beispiel: eine Billboard Tax , dass wirklich wer Werbung machen will der muss davon 20 Prozent an Steuern zahlen und diese Steuern wird benutzt um lokal Urban Kultur und Kunstprojekten zu helfen. Das finde ich eine gute Idee. Da gibt es einen Ausgleich zwischen den verschiedenen Parteien. Das wäre eine politische Forderung die ich vertreten würde. Sehr, sehr pragmatisch irgendwie aber.

[01:05:47] Aber wenn dann so was. Das es irgendeine Art von Kompensation gibt dafür wenn es schon immer mehr Werbung gibt das ist dann auch die anderen Sachen auch mal mehr geben sollte dass die auch gefördert werden und nicht immer nur die eine Seite sich durchsetzt.

[01:06:04] Natürlich muss Graffiti weiter illegal sein. Es muss auch weiter provozieren. Sonst macht es keinen Spaß mehr. Aber genau irgendwo irgendwo muss es natürlich auch Inseln geben wo Leute sich treffen können. Die Sachen dass es halt früher Korner gab wo Graffiti Sprüher sich tagsüber treffen konnten und Züge angeguckt haben oder so.. Gibt's ja heute nicht mehr. Solche Treffpunkte müssen aber irgendwie sein und da meine ich ja mit KulturProjekten die dann gefördert werden müssen von so einer Steuer. Zum Beispiel irgendwie nicht so etwas wie The Haus sein muss, sondern eher so was wie Backjumps. {Oder das Archiv?} Vielleicht aber das ist auch eher was für Akademiker.

[01:06:55] {Waren Corners für dich wichtig?}

[01:07:06] Persönlich da war ich schon da war ich zu jung, als es die noch wirklich gab. Das war die Generationen vor mir. Aber ich weiß dadurch dass heutzutage so was es nicht mehr gibt geht viel verloren. Heute sind die Sprüher leben im Prinzip die Korner geworden und da wird wenig kommuniziert da wird wenig weitergegeben. Und natürlich machen die Jüngeren werden lauter komische Sachen. [28.5] Finde ich nicht so cool, die ich gar nicht so cool finde. Aber das gehört dazu.

[01:07:52] {Was meinst du?}

[01:07:52] Also wir sind halt eigentlich darüber hinaus irgendwie, dass man immer fette Chrom Riesen Buchstaben machen muss, wird aber immer noch gerne von vielen Leuten gemacht. Ich finde dass die Zeit dafür vorbei ist. Aber das ist Geschmackssache. Stückweit. Eigentlich finde ich es geil was alles passiert. Ich will das gar nicht schlechtreden. Aber wenn mich irgendwas stört, dann Sind vor allem die langweiligen klassischen Graffitis, die immer noch viel gemacht werden, wo Leute unglaublich viel Farbe rein investieren in ein total totes Bild, Meiner Meinung nach -- so wirklich clean, und sauber und perfekt. So war

ist für mich nur Tod ist. Ich stehe eher auf spontane Sachen und die kann nochmal auch dreckig sein.

[01:08:56] {Deswegen Feuerlöscher?}

[01:08:58] Genau. Das darf halt nicht so geplant alles aussehen. Dass gerade diese super geplanten Sachen finde ich eigentlich eher langweilig.

[01:09:08] {Das heißt du hast keine Black Book?}

[01:09:13] Ne, keine Skizzen. Großer Vorteil! Man kann Keine BeweisMittelding gegen mich haben. Ich mag es lieber spontan .

[01:09:23] {und gehst du dann alleine?}

[01:09:25] Ne, immer mit Freunden. einfach weil es angenehmer ist, macht mehr Spaß. Ist immer schwierig sich zu verabreden, alle haben was zu tun, alle haben Job aber trotzdem funktioniert es schon noch regelmäßig.

[01:09:40] {Das heißt dass ihr ale schon einander kennt, ihr bruacht kein Corner?}

[01:09:50] Ja Aber das ist eine Micro Szene, ein kleiner Kreis von Leuten die sich kennen, wo man etwas miteinander macht, aber Man lernt aber nicht mehr die anderen kennen. Es ist schwierig wenn ich jetzt mit bestimmten Leuten Kontakt haben wollte so, musste man wahrscheinlich erst mal rumfragen irgendwie, dass dann man rausfindet wer das ist. Aber früher hat man sich zufällig getroffen. Das gibt's heute nicht mehr so einfach. Weil es viel zu Gefährlich wäre, auf einer SBhanhof und Züge fotografieren -- würde man auffallen. Es

vielleicht auch eine allgemeine Entwicklung dass Jugend im öffentlichen Raum nicht mehr geduldet wird. Gerade Orte wo sich regelmäßig Jugendliche treffen stehen sofort unter Überwachung. Es ist auch so dass es einfach so gut organisiert inzwischen alle Räume für Jugendliche wo sich treffen können. Für die Spieler macht es keinen Sinn Jugendklub zu haben. oder auch nicht mehr das Alter mit dem was noch vor der eigentlichen Sportklubs leben und welche Jams sind die Treffpunkte.

[01:10:59] Aber auf Jams gehe ich selten weil ich das nicht so richtig anspricht. Sprüher Laeden bin ich rein raus beim Umhängen.

[01:11:23] {Wir könnten also auf jeden Fall. Aber du musst es ja auch noch hören. Danke. Ja ich wurde auch fragen ob du ob du Freunde oder Bekannte hast. Auch in der ersten Zeit. BILD spricht alles hier. Also ich bleibe durch den Sommer wenigstens wahrscheinlich im Sommer aber noch ein paar Monate. Das heißt nicht dass ich morgen sein kann. Also ich würde gerne mit so ein Projekt wie diese entvölkerte sich durch das Jahr. Ich hatte einmal viel mehr machen aber nicht dass sie so waren. Und so ist diese ganze Ja. Das heißt Ich mache diese Tiefe längere Interviews. Statt einfach eine schnelle Fragebogen. Aber ich wurde ja nicht noch zehn oder nervös machen könnte dann wäre das super.}

Ich kann mir sofort einfallen würde der Fotograf der hier mal gemalt hat und eigentlich noch bester Fotograf ist. Auge für Stellen hat hier das von Edelstein auf Tumblr gucken. Der Edelstein was ist der Edelstein zusammengeschrieben der auf der Berlinale zu gibt's auf jeden Fall Gambler und der der hat ein krasses Auge für Stellen und ist selber auch so ein Instrument. Er läuft total gerne auf Lehrens wer kennt hier unglaublich gut aus mit allen möglichen Ruinen und verlassenen Orten in Berlin Tunnel Kanäle sonst läuft halt einfach total gerne rum macht Fotos auf dem Weg. Er könnte ja einen Überblick über die letzten Jahre er selber gut sagt jubelt Geschreibsel meine Arbeit aber wahrscheinlich ist es ja das

ist immer noch eine Chance dass ich hier bleibe aber ich werde wahrscheinlich und ich bin auch nicht weg.

[01:15:06] Aber das ist auch so teuer. Drei von vier Städten kommen auf Fotos oder auf jeden Fall. Ja also ich. Ich nehme also wenn ich herumspazieren so wenig Fotos von mir aufwirft. Aber die Fotos sind ja die Stelle und die Gemälde die Stücke zusammen fassen. Ja ich mache ich mach. Mit dem her aber ich hab auch ein ernstes Wort. Also ich hab viel. Ich habe einige Aufsätze schon geschrieben und ich war sehr froh dass du diese Form benutzt hatte. Das ist wie eine Novelle denn ich finde auch dass sich verschiedene Modi Bilder okay wirken. Wir konnten versuchen die einzelnen Bilder zu arrangieren und so weiter. Aber die Kunst ist historisch. Wir machen das sicher. Aber was das Interessante ist ist dass sie miteinander reden und auch reden und auch mit den Passanten reden. Dadurch entsteht eine Dorna. Und es ist diese diese Träume in der Stadt dass total interessant finde. Es ist einfach nicht möglich ihn zu fassen. Aber ich als ich hierherkam.

## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE SURVEY OF GRAFFITI SHOP OWNER

## Survey with Graffitibox, Page 1

## Fragebogen für Graffiti Läden

Fragebogen für Graffiti-Laden

Danke für die Hilfe und Teilnahmebereitschaft! Mein Projekt geht um **die Geographie von Graffiti in Berlin** und die Entwicklung deren als **Teil der Stadtgestaltung**. Die Fragen sollen von einem Chef bzw. Manager oder erfahrenen Mitarbeiter beantwortet werden -- allein oder zusammen als Team. Wenn Sie meinen, dass eine Frage blöd oder egal ist, kein Problem -- lassen Sie es es. Ich hoffe, dass es Spaß macht! Bitte wenden Sie weiter Fragen oder Kommentare an: [evanhc@uw.edu](mailto:evanhc@uw.edu).

1. Wann hat der Laden an diesem Ort erst geöffnet?  
2009 (Schwefelbeiner Str.) (Graffiti-Box seit 2000)
2. Wie viele Dosen (ugf.) verkauft der Laden im Monat (oder Jahr)?  
April durch Sept (Kaiserslautern) 800 Dosen/Tag 75% online
- 3a. Wie viele aktive Sprüher gibt es derzeit in Berlin?  
harter Kern: 500 8.000 - 10.000 8-15 Dose/Bild
- 3b. Diese Zahl hat in den letzten Jahren...  
Höchst 3.000 - 5.000 (self assessment) Stylefile und Overkill
- [ ] abgenommen Wir sind im Wandel... Will Fachhandeln bleiben  
[ ] zugenommen die Thema ist in der Schule  
[X] gleich geblieben es ist mehr oder weniger abgeplant. Viel Nachwuchs. Aber  
Style Writing und illegale Sprüher nehmen ab weil Malen  
wollen sich ausdrücken. Jeder  
will Aufmerksamkeit - entweder für  
sich oder anderen. Mit Graffiti  
bleibt man nur in der Szene.
- 3c. Was ist das durchschnittliche Alter von Sprüher in Berlin?  
20-21 (10-12 fängt man an, früher  
wollen sich ausdrücken. Jeder  
will Aufmerksamkeit - entweder für  
sich oder anderen. Mit Graffiti  
bleibt man nur in der Szene.
- 3d. Welches Anteil männlich- weiblich?  
95% M männlich, da es wird besser  
Der Buchstabe ist begrenzt  
→ Graf. ist ein Wettbewerb in einer  
Szene. - Frauen denken viel blauer.  
Wollen etwas erreichen, was nicht  
möglich mit Graf. ist... F. machen  
mehr Technik + Message aber  
wollen nicht mit illegales  
zu tun.
4. Was sind die wichtigste Stadtteile für Graffiti in Berlin?  
Jede Bezirk hat etwas (klassisch:  
früher in Zehlendorf/Steigitz (Dark America  
influence) Zehlendorf, Prenzlauer Berg, Has IV,  
er → die Public Crew)
5. Was sind die wichtigsten Orte für Graffiti in Berlin? (Seien Sie so spezifisch wie möglich!)  
Viele die G. machen sind irgendwo gestohlet,  
und finden etwas in G. Sie haben Haltung,  
in G. gefunden. Quendenken. Vielleicht gab  
F'ham, X.berg (less in mitte b/c of \$)  
→ Mauerpark. But kein Corner - Internet hat  
alles übernommen
6. Was sind wichtige Orte, die es nicht mehr gibt (z. B. wegen Versperrung, Abzug, Nachverdichtung)?  
Das Beste was der Mensch  
haben kann, das Leute über  
Buchstaben und nicht  
Gewalt schreiben
- Es geht was Blödsinn verloren,  
wenn der Kommerz einzieht. Obwohl  
das notwendig ist.
- Friedrich Str Corner → Mittelpunkt  
- generell viele Brachen



## Survey with Graffitibox, Page 2

7a. Ihr Laden befindet sich in Prenzlauer Berg [Stadtteil oder Kiez]. In den letzten Jahren in dem Kiez....

...hat die Menge an Graffiti ...

- ☒ abgenommen  
☐ zugenommen  
☐ gleich geblieben

Verkauft ein:

7b. ...hat die Qualität der Graffiti

- ☒ abgenommen  
☐ zugenommen  
☐ gleich geblieben

was auf der Straße man sieht ist viel schlimmer →  
 was passiert überall. Aber die Leute werden  
 schnell besser.

7c. ...gibt es \_\_\_\_ Raum für Graffiti

- ☐ mehr  
☒ weniger  
☐ genau so viel

8a. Veranstaltet der Laden "Jams"? Wie oft und wo?

YAMM (alte YAMM) 2006 - 2013. Wenn es professionell wird,  
 kommen Probleme. Geld geht vom  
 Prinzip von Hip/Hop weg.

8b. Wie kriegen Sie den Platz dafür?

YAMM just cooperated - They're hard back.  
 ↳ general hip-hop event, lots of ppl

9a. Braucht Berlin mehr legale Wände?

(No permit req'd for Mauerpark Battle) Hei, Jung net a/ Bezirke  
 Bürgermeister, he had the permit declaring Mauerpark legal - in  
 Bereich.

9b. Wenn es mehr legale Wände in Berlin geben würde, wo sollten sie sein? (Seien Sie so  
 spezifisch wie möglich!)

Rückseite der East Side Gallery  
 "Ich brauche nun 150k-200k \$ um eine geile Wand selbst zu  
 sanieren und Event, danach verdient die Stadt etwas."  
 Es soll Flächen für Anfänger, Spezialflächen (nach Codex),  
 Flächen mit "Pisse" wo Sachen bleiben eine Woche.

10. Welche Rolle spielt Graffiti im Stadtbild Berlins?

"Unfassbar wichtig!" Touris + Nachbarn + Industrie + Wirtschaft +  
 Wahrnehmung von Berlin

"Kreative Stadt"

"Vielfalt in der Kultur u. Kunst"

Wenn ich 6 sehen, glaube ich, es geht der Geldmarkt gut.  
 Dass wir so ein Lager haben, durch Kunst zu beschäftigen...  
 6 ist eine geile Therapie.

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