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Graffiti Writing as Creative Activism: Getting Up, Sheeplike Subversion, and Everyday Resistance

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1 Introduction

Graffiti writing is the art of the urban signature. Tags, throw-ups, and pieces – the traditional graffiti styles – have spread globally since their first appearance in the north-eastern metropolises of the United States. From Tokyo to Johannesburg, via London and Moscow, no city appears to be immune to these colorful visual glitches. Despite its ubiquity (or perhaps because of that!), writing is divisive: revered by its practitioners, most outsiders regard it as senseless vandalism. While politically conscious street artists like Banksy have become superstars, spray-can calligraphers are still regarded as compulsive narcissists obsessed with building their underground reputation through their incomprehensible scribbles.

According to this mainstream reading, graffiti appears to have no place among the various forms of creative activism. Its lack of political engagement appears to provide irrefutable evidence in favor of its critics: the crimes of those urban vandals could not even be justified on the basis of militant motives and meanings. Is this, however, the case? Can we reasonably exclude graffiti from creative activism practices? In this paper, I argue against the notion of graffiti as political inert. On the contrary, I maintain that graffiti writing is not mere vandalism, but a creative activist response to spatial injustice.

In discussing graffiti writing as politically charged, this paper calls into question established notions of what creative activism – and activism in general – should look

like. A clear goal and a predetermined agenda are not required conditions for activism. There should be room under that label for what de Certeau calls "sheeplike subversion" (1984, 200). This term refers to forms of everyday resistance carried out through practices that enable participants to appropriate, bend, and reshape social norms while avoiding direct confrontation with authorities and without the aim of structural change. An example of sheeplike subversion is *la perruque*, that is, using work-time for personal gain. Though these practices are often overlooked due to their lack of traditional political engagement, they play an important role in how individuals can break free from oppressive social norms. Then, within the context of a study of creative activism in everyday resistance, my goal is to conceptualize graffiti writing as an artistic practice of sheeplike subversion.

Section 1 presents an argument for graffiti as a type of creative activism responding to spatial injustice. The second section focuses on two consequences of this central claim: first, accounts that reject graffiti's activist status are incorrect, and second, the way graffiti artists challenge the status quo urges us to broaden our understanding of creative activism. Section 3 ties the idea of graffiti as creative activism to de Certeau's broader notion of sheeplike subversion and recent discussion of everyday resistance, suggesting that getting up falls firmly under those concepts. Section 4 has a few qualifications to my account.

2 Graffiti and Spatial Justice

When one considers the notion of creative activism, art forms with political relevance that aim to effect social change spring to mind. Socially engaged art is an example of this. Recent philosophical aesthetics research suggests that the social impact of such

works is what sets them apart (Simoniti 2018). Consider Suzanne Lacy's *Full Circle*, a socially engage artwork featured in Mary Jane Jacob's "Culture in Action." This piece presented a hundred statues dedicated to notable Chicago women who have made contributions to public life in the city. It was a creative response to the injustice of the city's absence of such monuments.

It seems that street art is yet another kind of creative activism. Since street art is "aconsensually produced," as Bacharach (2015, 481) convincingly argues, meaning that it is made without the permission of the property owner, it challenges authority by artistically breaking dominant social norms governing the use of public spaces. She makes it clear that the political significance of street art is not contingent on the subject matter of the pieces themselves. Most street art does not have a clear protest message. Many works are relatively harmless, even simplistic. All of these, however, have political weight once they enter the public sphere, since they "conceptualize alternative ways of thinking about the ubiquity of certain kinds of imagery and cartographic possibilities in representing cities" (Bacharach 2015, 493). It may be argued that street artists seek to subvert the status quo by encouraging a reevaluation of public space through creative interventions.

Unlike socially engaged art and street art, graffiti is typically viewed as a narcissistic kind of vandalism rather than a variety of creative activism. For Bacharach, for example, "establishing notoriety rather than raising awareness of some socio-political issue" (Bacharach 2015, 483) is the primary motivation for writers' calligraphic endeavors. Therefore, graffiti would not seek to alter the status quo by critically engaging through

inventive methods with various types of injustice and inequality, as would be the case with other forms of creative activism.

A large segment of the general public as well as many experts in the field share Bacharach's view. Even so, there appears to be a problem with it. Although it may seem like most graffiti artists don't care about politics, that's not always the case (Baldini 2022). Many spray-can calligraphers consider their art to be explicitly political, with the same norm-shifting goals as activism. And contrary to popular belief, some graffiti artists do seek to critically question the status quo, and do so in ways that are not fundamentally different from those found in more traditional varieties of creative activism that I have mentioned.

Consider the nearly twenty-year career of Utah & Ether, two of the most well-known graffiti artists in the world. Through their tags, throw-ups, and pieces, they seek to start a discussion on the nature of public and private property and the rule of law (Zio 2015). In making graffiti "art in authentic environments, outside of the safety of a traditional studio," they aim at challenging conventional opinions on the issues at hand. For instance, the couple's project, *Probation Vacation - Lost in Asia*, aims to do this by posing questions "that hopefully push the viewer to be more than just another passive onlooker at another gallery show" (Zio 2015). Episode 3, filmed in Thailand, features a caption that slams the hypocrisy of the country's repressive government, which reportedly enjoys flexing its muscles against writers while tolerating sex tourism (The Burn 2017). The couple's bombing the metro is a creative approach of challenging those circumstances.

MOSES & TAPS appear to make politically active art as well: with their project INTERNATIONAL TOPSPRAYER, the German collective aimed, among other things, to "change the established law practice in favour of graffiti writers" (Boris 2015). Over a period of 1000 days, they created 1000 pieces with an unknown number of collaborators, breaking one of the "rules" of graffiti, namely the ownership of one's street name. They traded names with one another, and then with their anonymous artistic partners. Because of this precedent, which is documented in one of their books (Topsprayer 2011), courts today generally refuse to accept the use of the same name as evidence when charging for vandalism a writer who was not caught in the act (Boris 2015).

However, one could argue that these are exceptional cases: while writers like Utah & Ether and MOSES & TAPS may be engaged in creative activism, most graffiti is just *mere getting up*, which I define as those instances of graffiti writing in which the artists do not follow or specify an ulterior political goal. This basic form of bombing is conducted out without consideration for a militant aim. Even if one accepts that graffiti can occasionally be called activism, it is unclear whether it can be regarded in general as politically charged.

For reasons other than (lack of) political content or intention, I contend, mere getting up also qualifies as creative activism. Its militant nature is determined by how critically it engages with concerns of *spatial injustice*. If spatial justice "entails the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them" (Soja 2009), then spatial injustice is the absence of such a fair and equitable distribution. Its wrongdoing entails arbitrarily excluding people from taking advantage of certain opportunities (for example, a job downtown if one lives in a suburban area without

access to public transportation) or using certain resources (for example, a park if one works late and it closes before he or she gets home) in the city. Graffiti critically connects with such inequality, as we will see in the remainder of this section.

The variety of spatial injustice that graffiti challenges is one that most city dwellers encounter firsthand when using public spaces (Baldini 2020). Such discrimination has to do with (limitations on) self-expression, and is based on common spatial policing tactics guided by the so-called broken-window hypothesis (Wilson and Kelling 1982). Grounded on the contentious assumption that minor indicators of disorder, such as a broken window or graffiti, lead to more significant crime, this hypothesis found its strongest supporters in then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his tough law and order policies (Harcourt 2009). In attempt to stem crime rates, he launched a trend that resulted in practically all metropolitan regions establishing draconian policies that tightly limit the use and access to public spaces.

Because of these authoritarian public control tactics, possibilities for self-expression in public have grown increasingly unequal and unfair. Corporations and political elites have a monopoly on visual communication in the city within this power system (Baker 2007; Iveson 2012). Commercial and political advertising abounds in cities. But common citizens are prohibited by legislation and dominant social norms from exploiting public space as a creative medium. Exceptions are carefully enforced, and acquiring a permit to express oneself creatively in public space is practically hard for the average individual, as Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works and their never-ending battles to secure permits attest (Wheeler 2020).

Some readers may think that my assertion about a lack of a fair and equitable allocation of possibilities to use urban places is an exaggeration, yet a surprising amount of expressive activities are restricted in most metropolitan contexts, such as children sketching with chalk in a public park (Urist 2012) and a quarantined person singing from a balcony (Brands+ 2020). Corporations and political leaders, on the other hand, are not only permitted but actively encouraged to exploit the urban environment to express their views and convey their messages, for example, through the authorization of specific advertising structures such as billboards. This asymmetry is unjust.

Graffiti is an effective creative tool for people who do not belong to powerful elites to oppose unfair authoritarian control of public areas. In other words, it is a method for addressing spatial inequality through the employment of lettering for individuals who are *de jure* barred from expressing themselves in public. Spray-can calligraphers do not simply make a statement about their ideas on spatial injustice by intruding directly on the urban landscape; rather, they have a practical influence and fight the exclusion of regular citizens from using the urban landscape for self-expression. With their tags, throw-ups, and pieces, writers challenge the city's corporate and political leaders' visual communication monopoly. As a result, graffiti qualifies as creative activism in ways that are similar to socially engaged art and street art.

In fact, all of the examples of creative activism presented previously in this paper address some form of injustice. Lacy's *Full Circle* addresses gender inequality, but socially engaged art can arguably address a wide range of issues. In the literature, street art has been discussed in connection with epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). This type of art, in effect, appears to be an efficient treatment for epistemic wrongs (Bacharach 2018).

It can serve as a creative instrument for marginalized communities to express their point of view and disseminate their values by using freely (i.e., aconsensually) public space.

Graffiti is similar to these activist art forms in that it critically engages with just another type of injustice, spatial injustice, which is rooted in unequal access to public spaces. With their unruled colorful calligraphic designs, as I have argued in this section, writers regain a right to express themselves in public for themselves and all common residents, actively contributing in the creating and remaking of the city's landscape. In the following part, I discuss two implications of my central claim, which states that mere getting up is a variety of creative activism insofar as it fights spatial inequality.

3. Graffiti, Street Art, and Expanding Creative Activism

The first implication of the idea that simply getting up constitutes creative activism in responding to spatial injustice is that perspectives that consider graffiti to be politically inert are mistaken. This is the case for Bacharach's point of view (Bacharach 2015). As previously stated, she believes that graffiti is created solely to establish writers' street credit. According to her, tags, throw-ups, and pieces are not intended to connect with the general public, but rather with a circumscribed group of people, namely "fellow graffiti writers" (Bacharach 2015, 483). This, in turn, would render the practice distinctly esoteric, and hence incapable of inspiring anybody outside the circles of initiates to "engage in political action" (Bacharach 2015, 494).

The idea that inscriptions in public locations that are purposely made to be as obvious as possible are simply esoteric symbols is way too far-fetched to be plausible. This

appears to be especially true given that the ideal spots for graffiti are those where "everyone can see," as I've heard numerous times when hanging out with crews. One would have to presume that writers are irrational individuals who put themselves in risk by creating works in public settings in order to communicate just with their inner circle.

Graffiti arguably targets fellow writers as its privileged audience, but it also has a decidedly public dimension that should not be ignored. A tag, throw-up, or piece targets the whole public as its audience by virtue of its existence in public space. This calls into question Bacharach's stereotypical understanding of graffiti as an impenetrable code understood only by its initiates. At the same time, it opens the door to considering graffiti as a form of creative activism confronting spatial injustice, as argued in the previous section.

Perhaps, Bacharach's analysis dismisses the notion of spatial injustice as a significant form of injustice. That, however, is unreasonable and, in any case, she does not give an argument in support of that claim. This type of injustice deserves attention in scholarly discussion as well as practices of creative activism. Since Lefebvre (2003)'s foundational contributions on the right to the city, scholars contend convincingly that geographically uneven development is a significant component in developing and replicating individual and social inequality (Soja 2010). Asymmetries in access to adequate education and healthy food are just two of many possible examples of spatial injustice. Another issue is unequal access to public expression, which graffiti, as a form of creative activism, effectively addresses by seizing areas of the city landscape for personal creation.

If my view is correct, then Bacharach's distinction between street art and graffiti is also mistaken. In effect, she believes that the former's activist aspect distinguishes it from the latter. However, if graffiti has that quality by challenging spatial injustice, she would appear to have to accept that graffiti is street art. Fully exploring this claim would deviate the study from its central topic, and yet I wish to signal that, if a difference separating street art from graffiti exists, it may very well be more nuanced than previously argued. In section 5, I shall return to this topic.

In considering graffiti as creative activism, as I have, I am also calling for broadening such a notion. This is the second implication of my account that I wish to address in this section. Both in everyday and scholarly discourse, we tend to regard just a subset of expressive practices as genuine forms of creative activism. Those are generally explicitly political. A clear example of that kind is, again, socially engaged art, in which pieces are consciously intended and produced to address some form of injustice or societal issue. As previously said, Lacy's *Full Circle* expressly addresses gender discrimination, whereas Jeanne van Heeswijk's *The Blue House* deals with community development – or the lack thereof.

If this common definition of creative activism is accepted, it becomes hard to categorize graffiti as such. Merely getting up is by definition done without any clear political motif in mind, and the intentions that drive the execution of a tag, throw-up, or artwork are not openly defined as planned to give a corrective to some injustice or societal issue. However, the discussion above signals that such a perspective appears to be overly

limited: in the lack of political understanding, people might still react to oppressive standards or oppose forms of injustice, as the example of mere getting up clearly shows.

I propose to develop a broader characterization of creative activism. I suggest that, subsumed under such a label, we should also make room – together with traditional explicitly political ones – for practices and actions that, while not following a particular agenda, use creativity to challenge the status quo and, more specifically, the (structure of) power that permits it. Let me address the two key elements that ground my account of creative activism, namely creativity and power, in turn.

I describe creativity as the ability to come up with novel and valuable ideas (Boden 2010). Some artistic practices, of course, are key examples of how to utilize this ability, but they are not the only ones. Creativity is in effect a far broader concept that what we find in the arts, and certainly does not necessitate mastery or deployment of traditional artistic skills or media. Organizing a picnic, for example, could be said to require at least some degree of creativity, despite the fact that such a practice does not fall under the purview of traditional art forms or genres: envisioning an exciting arrangement of picnicwares, as well as selecting an interesting location and menu, could all call for coming up with some novel and valuable ideas.

When considering power, I characterize it as the ability to limit people's choices (e.g., gender identities, ways of behaving, uses of time and space, etc.) through various surveillance, control, and punishment tactics, in ways that affect how human existence and society work (Foucault 1995; Agamben 1998). Power is more than just selecting how to allocate resources and resolving conflicts between opposing interest groups. Power is

about regulating how we live our lives: it has an impact on both the public and private spheres, affecting our daily deeds to the slightest detail at times.

Returning to the picnic example, by employing the above-mentioned notion of power, we can explain how, occasionally, that practice can be creative activism in the broader sense explained above. For instance, as pandemic rules began to restrict access to restaurants and other public spaces in Hong Kong, residents flocked to picnics in droves ("Hong Kongers Picnic to Avoid Covid-Tracing App" 2022). Food and drinks neatly put in unusual settings such as playgrounds or river banks enabled these residents to circumvent movement tracking or restrictions on having meals with non-family members. In other words, these picnics were a novel opportunity for people to engage critically with the status quo by questioning authoritarian control over their daily lives.

I should clarify that no explicit political intention or agenda influenced the actions of those who attended these picnics. On the contrary, the plan was to avoid any discourse of resistance in connection with their outdoor events ("Hong Kongers Picnic to Avoid Covid-Tracing App" 2022). However, viewing these actions as politically inert or innocuous socializing would be inaccurate. Gathering to enjoy not only the companionship of people, but also beautifully placed bright designs, good food, and cool drinks in circumstances where free movement and assembly are banned is, I suggest, creative activism. These actions use novel and valuable ideas to challenge the status quo.

This perspective on the nature of political action clearly relates with de Certeau's study of tactics of subversion as well as with more recent developments in debates about

everyday resistance, both of which appear to encapsulate my understanding of mere getting up and graffiti as creative activism. In the following section, I will discuss just that.

4. Graffiti, De Certeau, and Everyday Resistance

De Certeau (1984) was one of the first scholars to be interested in alternative and more mundane forms of political action that, while not meeting criteria of traditional activism such as displaying political consciousness and having public goals, appear capable of disrupting established power dynamics. He refers to them as "sheeplike subversion" (de Certeau 1984, 200). This type of rebellion, while far "from being a local, and thus classifiable revolt, it is a common and silent" disturbance of social control (de Certeau 1984, 200). Rather than actions looking for structural societal reforms, these are micro adjustments that still have a significant impact on transgressors' personal lives while still carrying (traces of) social change.

One examples of sheeplike subversion is what de Certeau (1984) calls the wig, or "la perruque" (25). This expression is used to identify employees performing their own work while pretending to be on their regular job. This can take the form of secretaries writing love letters during business hours or cabinetmakers using scrap material to make a piece of furniture for their house. In these cases, workers are diverting time and resources away from generating revenue for the employer, and use them for private enjoyment, for activities that are "free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (de Certeau 1984, 25). These tactics also function as a kind of resistance, undermining a system designed to exploit and punish the worker.

A further consideration about the example of the wig can help sharpen the distinction between conventional activism and sheeplike subversion. When comparing it to traditional activism, let's say labor movements across the world, we notice that the latter seek a "de jure" (Scott 1990, 34) recognition of social changes improving workers' living conditions. To put it another way, labor movements look for policy shifts that would bring down the line benefits to workers. Wiggers, as one could call those involved in practices of la perruque, on the other hand, are not interested in the formal recognition of certain rights, but on "de facto gains" deriving from their actions (Scott 1990, 34). But their activities are still expressions – though sui generis – of resistance and political opposition. Of course, the social change brought about by sheeplike subversion is, by definition, localized and fleeting: the secretary and cabinetmaker continue to be exploited for most of their workdays, as do other workers in similar roles. However, this does not diminish the importance of those small changes, especially given the position of subjugation that these actors occupy.

As a result of a long-term investigation of the ideas suggested by de Certeau in his discussion of sheeplike subversion, a new academic area has emerged: *everyday resistance studies* (Johansson and Vinthagen 2019). Combing insights from de Certeau with the work of other theorists interested in oppositional tactics to power such as Agamben (1998), Foucault (1995), Gramsci (2021), and Scott (1990; 1989), this research field aims at "exploring how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power" (Johansson and Vinthagen 2019, 18).

When speaking of everyday resistance, one should not think of oppositional actions that are simply carried out daily. Though "done routinely (as patterns of acts)" (Johansson

and Vinthagen 2019, 30), such a resistance comes at ordinary times, and thus differs from states of exceptions such as "rebellions, riots, demonstrations, revolutions, civil war" (Johansson and Vinthagen 2019, 19). These actors' identities are then ambiguous because they perform opposition from within the humdrum of their lives. They are not militant members of a specific group, but rather "in-between" (Johansson and Vinthagen 2019, 111) resistance and subordination: the cabinetmaker may at times be a model employee striving to impress the boss, and at other times a wigger. This ambiguity, reinforced by actors' lack of explicit ideological commitment, is one of the main reasons why these tactics are perceived as non-political.

Everyday resistance is also often not regarded as "political" because we tend to identify its domain with public matters (Rancière 2004). Nevertheless, if one acknowledges that power extends to private matters as well, as I have suggested, then one can also refer to the personal as sometimes political. Consider for instance veganism. It is generally not regarded as a political movement, but rather as a "lifestyle" or "way of life," insofar as what one eats is considered a personal choice. However, refusing hegemonic discourse about eating habits has sometimes an oppositional quality that may call into question social norms about school menus or lunch counters (Kwan and Roth 2011; Brueck 2017) – and, in a sense, it is therefore political.

Introducing the concept of everyday resistance was intended to provide an alternative way of conceptualizing politically significant action and activism. Conventionally, we think of power as affecting only a part of our lives. Instead, as I have previously suggested, power exercises control over every aspect of existence, both public and private. In this sense, (political) agency need not be something extraordinary that we

only exercise during historic moments of revolution and reform, but can be also mundane when performed within the cracks of humdrum daily routines. Such an agency need not seek structural social change (de jure recognition of gains), but can be concerned with temporary interruptions of oppressive practices (de facto gains).

Mere getting up fits neatly into the description of everyday resistance and sheeplike subversion outlined above. Connecting graffiti to these debates aids in better placing my perspective on creative activism and detailing such an account, while also clarifying some characteristics of that artistic practice. Let me begin by demonstrating how and why graffiti writing is an everyday activity for writers rather than an extraordinary feat. Again, this does not imply that they must paint daily. Similar to the majority of routine activities such as cooking, ironing, and taking out the garbage, painting graffiti may occur every few days, weeks, or months. The frequency of writers' bombing excursions must be balanced against other commitments and contingencies such as work and family. This is a consequence of their ambiguous position, which is typical of subjects engaged in everyday resistance and differs from the commitment found in members of traditional activist groups. Simple things like illness or injury can put a writer on hold for a while (SBAM 2021), and age will most likely slow one down (Jacobson 2020).

However, graffiti painting is a standard activity for writers, much like going to work, paying taxes, and dining out on weekends is for the bulk of us. Going out at night to paint on trains or walls gets engrained in writers' routines, accompanying their lives for years or even decades. SBAM, a famed graffiti writer who has bombed internationally, gives some preliminary evidence in support of this allegation in a zine he self-published to honor the 20th anniversary of his crew, RSG:

> To make a long, insane journey short twenty years have passed, and now we all live in different corners of the world. My brother AUSY, the president, quit graffiti, focused on his career, and became a father. Me, BEAST, and FRA32, on the other side, are unable to grow up, and we keep painting at an age when people are usually halfway to get their retirement benefits. (SBAM 2021)

In this quick account of his crew's last two decades, SBAM draws an interesting parallel between the normal lives of most people his age (work, parenting, and retirement) and that of writers. Graffiti does not appear to be a deviation from their normal routine or an act conducted at a special event such as a protest, march, or revolution. Painting appears to be as much a part of a spray-can calligrapher's life as eating at McDonald's or taking the bus.

When contemplating how graffiti painting challenges (structures of) power, that is, how it is creative activism, the theoretical framework built in discussions about sheeplike subversion and everyday resistance is helpful. When painting tags, throw-ups, and pieces, writers are not focused in de jure benefits: their activities may be ineffective on a global scale. And structural transformation does not appear to be their goal. Spray-can calligraphers' efforts can be thought of more accurately as pursuing de facto gains. They get oppositional agency that they would not have otherwise, allowing them to freely express themselves even when they are legally prohibited from doing so.

Though additional empirical research into writers' pursuit for *de facto* benefits is clearly needed, investigations that have already been conducted show at least some evidence in support of that hypothesis. Campos (2013), for example, reveals in his ethnographic inquiry that mere getting up provides writers with an alternate identity and kind of

agency affording ways of “escaping the disciplinary control of social norms and worldly habits" (160). One discovers evidence of writers describing graffiti as, among other things, a way to fulfill a desire to express oneself freely in public in Halsey and Young (2006) and Brighenti (2010). Though this craving is rarely conceptualized as political action, as we can expect in cases of everyday resistance and sheeplike subversion, it can be well articulated in terms of a challenge to authoritarian control over public space. In the section that follows, I highlight certain qualifications of my interpretation of graffiti as everyday resistance.

5 Some Qualifications

When viewing graffiti through the lens of everyday resistance, one question that emerges is how to separate that artistic practice from related ones such as culture jamming, guerrilla gardening, and ad busting. All of these appear to employ creativity to oppose oppressive norms, achieving a type of activist value. Focusing on differences at the level of medium profile of each is a simple way to distinguish between them (Lopes 2014). A medium profile is a non-empty set of media, which are in turn technical resources. These comprise a wide range of features, including materials such as paper, paint, and marble. However, they can also be tokens of symbolic systems such as words, occurrences such as an E-flat sound, or acts such as a pirouette. Such resources are utilized in certain ways through the use of specific techniques.

Graffiti is distinguished from those other practices by a distinct medium profile, which includes special technical resources such as spray paint, urban surfaces, fat-cap, and so forth. Guerrilla gardening would have a different medium profile, containing resources such as seeds, plants, and flowers not found in the set specific to graffiti – and arguably

also in those associated to other forms of everyday resistance. Culture jamming's medium profile may contain irony, satire, and consumer cultures, but ad busting's specific technical resources include tokens of advertising and collage. Naturally, their respective profiles would share some technical resources, just as different recipes can share some ingredients (Mitchell 2005). However, as long as they are not identical, medium profiles can serve as a criterion for distinguishing between them.

It is reasonable to assume borderline cases in real life, where categorization may very well be contested. The "liquidated logos" by French artist Zevs are a good example here. These pieces consist of spray-painted luxury brand logos whose designs appear to be melting (Vidar 2011) through the use of dripping color. They use technical resources that are hallmark of graffiti aesthetics, but they also experiment with materials and procedures that are typical of the respective medium profile of culture jamming and ad busting.

Cases like Zevs's "liquidated logos" suggest that these everyday resistance acts may be best understood as part of a continuum rather than phenomena belonging to discrete categories. I take as a positive aspect of my account the ability to appreciate and to account for such a continuity. These practices of urban subversion have shared histories and often practitioners switch from one to the other at will. Zevs, for instance, was a legendary graffiti writer before branching out into culture jamming, ad busting, and other styles of urban creativity. Ignoring or overlooking such connections would be mistaken and a model that highlights them is pointing in the right direction.

From this, we can draw an insight that can assist me qualify another aspect of my account of mere getting up as everyday resistance, namely the distinction between graffiti and street art. One plausible strategy is to see street art as a broader category, in which graffiti – along with culture jamming, guerrilla gardening, ad busting, and so on – is a subset or style. Its medium profile is nested in the medium profile of street art, sharing some technical resources while also introducing new ones.

By drawing on Baldini (2022, 7), one could suggest that the medium profile of street art includes the use of public space as technical resource. In addition, each subcategory or style may comprise further materials or techniques. In effect, despite their medium profiles range substantially, all styles commonly associated with street art, such as stencil graffiti (Banksy's signature choice), street sculpture, yarn bombing, and arguably also culture jamming, guerrilla gardening, and ad busting, employ public space to challenge oppressive social norms. Once it is recognized that graffiti has an activist aspect in virtue of its contesting spatial injustice, there appears to be no need for an essentially distinct category: graffiti is just another style of street art among the others that subverts the status quo by employing public space as a technical resource.

The account just sketched out provides some preliminary to a promising taxonomy of street art, which betters account for the relationship between this art form and what I consider one of its styles, that is, graffiti. Such a proposal is useful in that it enables for non-arbitrary drawing of similarities and distinctions between different creative activities that are hierarchically related. However, the approach is adaptable enough to deal with tough cases that do not fall into any categorization. As Lopes (2014) suggests, "in principle, it is possible to participate in a broad practice in which several more

specific practices are nested without participating in any of the nested practices" (152). Perhaps that is true of street art, and, possibly, the best way to look at Zevs' "liquidated logos" is to see them as examples of street art that do not fit into any of its known styles.

Finally, I'd like to address a question concerning the values – if any – that ordinary forms of social opposition favor or promote. This clarification enables me to better define the nature of everyday resistance and, by extension, of mere getting up. Consider the following scenario. Frank is a climate change sceptic who aims to undermine the societal norms of good behavior that environmental campaigners uphold. To accomplish this, he litters, refuses to recycle, and unlawfully dumps the waste that he generates. In such instances, what should my account of everyday resistance say? Is Frank performing everyday resistance?

The difficulty here is that some among those who disagree with Frank's opinions and values may want to reject his acts as an instance of resistance. This response could be influenced by their inclination to romanticize resistance. Some people, in effect, believe that all forms of resistance are intrinsically and unambiguously progressive, positive, and liberating of oppressed people. Because Frank, of course, does not embrace progressive values, but rather some that would be considered conservative or right-wing, his acts appear to his adversaries as a phony sort of resistance, if they would speak of resistance at all in this case.

That tendency, however, should be avoided. Everyday resistance simply refers to ordinary strategies that aim at challenging (structures of) power. Such a characterization says nothing about the moral status of those norms whereby authority

influences people's lives. We tend to identify power with injustice, but that it is far from necessary. One might say that laws guaranteeing racial equality – for instance, those about affirmative action – are morally just, and yet, they are still an expression of power that exercise coercion on those who are subject to that law. People who challenge those laws through ordinary deeds may very well qualify as practicing everyday resistance.

Scholars, for example, have addressed so-called white power activists as engaging in actions of everyday resistance (Simi and Futrell 2009). These individuals have been described as suppressing their Aryan identity in the face of strong cultural standards against extreme racism in order to avoid the incessant ire, indignation, and conflict they experience from others. However, suppressing that aspect of their identity creates tension, which they alleviate by taking advantage of opportunities to selectively reveal aspects of their exclusionary persona. Explicitly revealing portions of their Aryan self while concealing more severe features generates some expressive balance, which activists interpret as resistance to perceived social limits on identity and self-expression – in spite of how morally questionable one finds their positions.

My discussion of graffiti as creative activism was clearly not neutral. I contended that this practic addresses a form of injustice, which has to do with a lack of adequate access to public space for self-expression. That, I believe, is unfair, and correcting it would be beneficial for society at large. However, in this paper, I have placed such a study within the larger context of an examination of forms of resistance to power that go beyond the boundaries of traditional political protest and activist movements. My purpose in doing so was to show that politically relevant actions, like mere getting up, are frequently hidden in places that appear to be far removed from traditional politics. However, such

activities are significant in understanding how people can resist power, whatever moral status that may have.

Conclusion

Even before the pandemic, public space was in jeopardy. In the last forty years or so, national and local governments have implemented authoritarian programs of spatial control that have drastically altered the nature of our urban areas. Increasingly exclusive policies have granted corporations and political elites a de jure monopoly over urban communication. We should understand the potential of graffiti writing as creative activism in light of this context. In the battle against the unequal distribution of access to urban surfaces for self-expression, tags, throw-ups, and pieces constitute de facto gains. In this sense, writing is a practice of everyday resistance and sheeplike subversion, a form of creative activism that, through the invention of calligraphic elements, combats spatial injustice by offering to people an effective tool for self-expression. Perhaps this is the most significant lesson the spray-can rebels can teach us: (You gotta) fight for your right (to the city)!

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