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Keeping it real? Subcultural graffiti, street art, heritage and authenticity

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This article considers the implications of framing subcultural graffiti and street art as heritage. Attention is paid to subcultural graffiti's relationship to street art and the incompatibility of its traditions of illegality, illegibility, anti-commercialism and transience with the formalised structures of heritage frameworks. It is argued that the continued integration of street art and subcultural graffiti into formal heritage frameworks will undermine their authenticity and mean that traditional definitions of heritage, vandalism and the historic environment will all need to be revisited. The article contributes to the current re-theorisation of heritage's relationship with erasure by proposing that subcultural graffiti should be perceived as an example of 'alternative heritage' whose authenticity might only be assured by avoiding the application of official heritage frameworks and tolerating loss in the historic environment.

Keywords: subcultural graffiti; street art; alternative heritage; authenticity; Banksy

Introduction

The emergence and continued growth in popularity of graffiti and street art have seen them increasingly exposed to academic analysis across disciplines and yet, until recently, they have rarely been framed as heritage (MacDowall 2006). This article considers the implications of framing them, and specifically subcultural graffiti, as such. First, it defines subcultural graffiti, before discussing its intangible traditions and relationship to street art. It then considers how street art and subcultural graffiti face increasing heritagisation, and highlights the response of graffiti subcultures to these pressures, through reference to various empirical examples surrounding the work of the street artist, Banksy. Next, the potential to integrate subcultural graffiti within international heritage frameworks as prospective tangible but also intangible heritage is considered, along with the possible problems this might imply for the authenticity of its subcultures' traditions. Having introduced the idea of alternative heritage, the article concludes by positioning subcultural graffiti within the wider re-theorisation of heritage's relationship with erasure and by arguing that it indicates that, in certain instances, heritage practitioners may need to tolerate greater levels of loss in the historic environment in the future.

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Subcultural graffiti

The term 'graffiti' has been applied to a wide range of expressions across diverse geographic and chronological contexts. Most often it is defined as an unauthorised act of inscription onto public or private property, and is divided into political, chronological, spatial, social and cultural subcategories that are the result of a range of different motivations (Ellis 1985; Halsey and Young 2002; Keats 2008). It is also categorised differently by various academic disciplines. Criminological studies position it as an ideological form of vandalism (Wilson 1987), while historical and archaeological studies place it in a continuum of human environmental interventions that involve 'mark-making practices' that are analogous to historic and prehistoric phenomena such as rock art (Frederick 2009; Oliver and Neal 2010; Daniell 2011). Gomez distinguishes between 'graffiti art' and 'graffiti vandalism' in order to acknowledge that totally equating graffiti to vandalism negates its creative attributes (Halsey and Young 2002). Furthermore, Daniell uses the term 'calliglyph' to denote writings or drawings that roughly predate the 1960s in order to acknowledge the different regimes of acceptability and executive technologies that surrounded historic examples of graffiti (2011). However, despite a growing terminological repertoire, scholars still struggle to encapsulate the complex, blurred and changing boundaries between the artistic and criminal acts of contemporary and historic graffiti, and thereby demonstrate the need to refine graffiti definitions further (Gomez 1993; Halsey and Young 2002).

This article, therefore, adopts the modifier 'subcultural', following Macdonald (2001), in order to distinguish a particular type of graffiti from both street art and other common forms of graffiti, such as political slogans and the latrinalia that can be found in public toilets. Subcultural graffiti plays a formative role for the groups and individuals that repeatedly use it to establish their identity. Graffiti for these groups is 'an anonymous way to be heard, an act of personal or group empowerment, or a secret language' (Wacławek 2011, 43). Subcultural graffiti evolved from the gang graffiti of 1960s Chicago and Philadelphia (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974) and the Wildstyle graffiti that first emerged in 1970s New York as part of the wider development of the hip-hop subculture (Shapiro 2005). Hip-hop and graffiti subsequently spread to new and diverse cultural and national contexts through a process of global diffusion, which some claim led to their cultural mainstreaming, domestication and commercialisation (Macdonald 2001; Shapiro 2005). Today the hip-hop and graffiti subcultures can be considered as independent – although by no means isolated – from one another, and their connections seen as largely symbolic (Macdonald 2001; Mubi Brighenti 2010; Wacławek 2011). Graffiti subcultures are distinguishable with respect to their cultural and national settings, but collectively they contribute to an international graffiti subculture with a common aesthetic and practice. Given the breadth of the subculture, most scholars maintain that there is no typical demographic to describe its members, although these claims can also depend on national context (Halsey and Young 2002). For example, Macdonald rejects a class- or race-based analysis in favour of a gender analysis that demonstrates that the graffiti subculture is predominantly male, even if more women are beginning to participate in it (2001).

Despite being demographically ambiguous, graffiti subcultures do have a typical style and practice that result in a particular material culture. The majority of subcultural graffiti is signature-based and includes: tags – mostly small (generally ranging

from a few inches to a couple of feet), quickly executed, monochrome, stylised signatures, typically written in marker pen ink or spray-paint; throw-ups – more complex, often bigger (generally a few feet or more) bubble-shaped signatures using two colours of spray-paint; and murals or 'pieces' (masterpieces) – more time-consuming and complicated works that cover the majority of any single surface and involve multiple colours, pictographic elements and aesthetic affects. Added to these expressions can also be the stencils, stickers and wallpaper paste collages that are generally considered more characteristic of street art.

An overlap in the authors and techniques of subcultural graffiti and street art make it difficult to distinguish neatly between these actors, but in most cases they are considered as either writers or artists. Graffiti writers, namely those individuals who predominantly express themselves through signature-based works, and graffiti artists, those who in addition create more aesthetically complicated murals and (master) pieces, both belong to the graffiti subculture insofar as they seek recognition primarily from peers within that same subculture. Street artists differ from both graffiti artists and writers due to the wider public audience they aim to engage. Although street art encompasses many more media than those used by the graffiti subculture, those that it shares can subsequently be identified as the publically sanctioned counterpoint to the works of graffiti writers and artists. It should be noted, however, that these designations are problematised by the fact that these actors negotiate multiple subjectivities by participating (at different times or in different places) in each other's activities, styles and techniques (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011).

Each of these actors' street works contributes to an interstitial practice that creates territories and 'spots' through a spatial sociology related to audience, visibility, durability, availability, competition, seriality and accumulation (Ley and Cybriwsky 1974; Ferrell and Weide 2010; Mubi Brighenti 2010). For graffiti writers and artists, this practice is influenced by the intangible traditions of their wider subculture.

The traditions of graffiti subcultures

A number of factors act as constitutive living traditions for graffiti subcultures in determining who identifies or is identified as one of their members. These include, but are not limited to, ideas of illegality, illegibility, anti-commercialism and transience that collectively contribute to the intangible elements of the graffiti subculture.

Illegality is the 'backbone' of a subculture whose members actively identify themselves as social outsiders, and remains central to the subculture's hierarchical membership categories, even if neat distinctions between legal and illegal are problematic (Macdonald 2001). Legal graffiti artists are those that practice legally – usually through the creation of commissioned murals or the production of canvases – without sufficient dedication to illegal activities, or whilst decrying their illegal pasts (Macdonald 2001). The painting of commissioned murals sits contentiously within these distinctions because although it has long been a means by which an individual can profit from their graffiti skills, it can also be considered as an example of the subculture's commercialisation.

The illegibility of graffiti produced by writers serves further to position them 'outside' as members of superior, secret and silent societies (Macdonald 2001). While degrees of legibility vary and are tailored to audiences, the majority of work can only be deciphered by other members of the subculture. This is particularly true of work that uses technically difficult styles such as Wildstyle, which utilises

complicated and interlocking letters linked by various shapes including arrows. Illegibility is ensured through the use of complex typographic variations, textual traditions and complicated lettering forms and is supplemented by an alternative vocabulary of diverse terminologies that can be confusing to those who are not part of the subculture (Macdonald 2001).

The illegality and illegibility of subcultural graffiti position it as a form of aesthetic resistance to the homogenising effect of advertising on the urban environment and the corporate culture it represents (Schacter 2008; Ferrell and Weide 2010). In spite of its own commercialisation within the creative economy (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011), the subculture primarily adopts an anti-commercial stance. This stance is most clearly demonstrated by the subculture's co-option and subversion of the spaces and visual forms of multinational capitalism through strategies known collectively as 'brandalism' and 'subvertising' (Macdonald 2001; Manco 2004; Ferrell and Weide 2010).

The transience of subcultural graffiti is tied to the changing composition and structures of the urban environment and the lifecycles of the city (Wacławek 2011). Therefore, 'the perpetual impermanence of the image (or the forced and enforced fluidity of city surfaces)' is amongst the most important traditions of the graffiti subculture (Halsey and Pederick 2010, 96). The transience and turnover of graffiti are partly conditioned by the hierarchies of space embedded within graffiti's spatial sociology (Schacter 2008). They are also the result of environmental factors, the anti-graffiti strategies of city authorities, and subcultural battles relating to status, territories, and the pursuit of fame and personal feuds. As such, the subculture's material culture is characterised by cycles of temporality, ongoing forms of dialogue embodied in its stratigraphic superimposition and continual erasure (Schacter 2008).

The subculture's contentious relationship with street art can also arguably be considered as one of its traditions. This relationship has particular significance for the discussion at hand insofar as it is usually street art that has its heritage potential emphasised.

Subcultural graffiti and street art

The contested relationship of subcultural graffiti and street art relates to the contrast between the values and expressions that determine the means by which their creators achieve infamy or fame. Graffiti writers seek recognition primarily from their cohort and by achieving public infamy. In general, they attach greater value to productivity, coverage and quantity, and will, especially early in their graffiti career, attempt to establish their name and achieve recognition by 'getting up' (writing their tag) as often as possible. Graffiti and street artists, meanwhile, generally place greater value on traditional conceptions of aesthetic merit and creative development in their attempt to establish fame or recognition. These values are not, however, mutually exclusive or static. They often fluctuate throughout any individual's graffiti career and are complicated by the ambiguous and overlapping identities of those who hold them (Lachmann 1988). The skill set of new graffiti writers means they rely on tagging, whilst those with more experience and skills place greater emphasis on style and aesthetics and may begin to paint murals and become graffiti artists while still maintaining their tags. The ability of graffiti artists to maintain a greater subcultural allegiance than street artists can, therefore, be linked to their earlier careers as taggers and the greater value they placed then on 'getting up'.

The divide between writers and artists was evident in the first blossoming of the subculture and remains at the heart of distinctions between subcultural graffiti, graffiti art and street art. It continues to influence the debate regarding graffiti's contradictory status as art and crime. The conventional artistic worth of certain forms of 'graffiti' is now legitimately established, yet the notion that this is a recent phenomenon is misplaced. As the cover of the March 1973 issue of the *New York Magazine* (Figure 1) illustrates, even as the New York City authorities pursued one of their earliest crackdowns on graffiti, others were already considering it as art. In the early 1970s, the first graffiti artist organisations, exhibitions and galleries started to appear (Wacławek 2011). By the early 1980s, high-profile gallery shows announced graffiti's acceptance into the high art world (Wacławek 2011), whilst academic interest, popular books and documentary films all raised public awareness and contributed to the subculture's international diffusion (e.g. see: Kirchheimer 1981; Castleman 1982; Chalfant and Cooper 1984). Soon galleries began to attach economic value to graffiti and marketed it as a new art form with little regard for its cultural origins and history (Wacławek 2011). This led to the commercial packaging of an eclectic range of artists and practices under titles such as 'post-graffiti', and served to elevate a handful of high-profile artists, of which only a few subscribed to the graffiti subculture's traditions (Wacławek 2011, 63).

Today, the term 'post-graffiti' has been revived to refer to the forms of street art in flux between 'established ideas and new directions' (Manco 2004, 6). Post-graffiti differs qualitatively from subcultural graffiti insofar as it utilises a wide range of new media beyond marker pens and spray cans, and rejects generic lettering styles by favouring new graphic forms – logos rather than tags (Manco 2004; Dickens 2008). The evolution of 'post-graffiti' has rejuvenated and widened public interest in graffiti, but this interest has again primarily focused on a select group of high-profile artists – a new generation of globally famous street artists who feature prominently in large international exhibitions such as Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art's 2011 'Art in the Streets'. Perhaps, the best known of these artists is Banksy, whose 2009 Banksy vs. Bristol Museum exhibition caused international sensation and numerous legacies in the artist's home city, Bristol (Gough 2012). Exhibitions such as these not only illustrate the growing popularity of street art but also demonstrate their headliners' increasing isolation from the wider graffiti subculture and fuel tensions between writers and artists.

Such tensions were exemplified by the 2011 UK criminal conviction of Tox, one of London's most prolific taggers. Court proceedings saw Ben Eine, an internationally prolific British street artist who contributed to 'Art in the Streets', appear as an expert witness. Eine characterised Tox's tags as 'incredibly basic' and deficient in skill, flair and style. The prosecutor, meanwhile, declared, Tox is 'no Banksy. He doesn't have the artistic skills, so he has to get his tag up as much as possible' (quoted in Davies 2011). Tox's subsequent conviction demonstrated that the aesthetic judgement of graffiti against street art could influence the outcome of legal proceedings. Given the close and complicated relationship of subcultural graffiti and street art, the consolidation of the latter within the formalised art world and the continued growth of its commercial worth expose the former to new pressures and challenges. While such developments might serve to protect certain elements of these two phenomena, they can just as easily endanger others. This is demonstrated when the attempts to integrate street art – and in turn subcultural graffiti – into formalised heritage frameworks are considered.
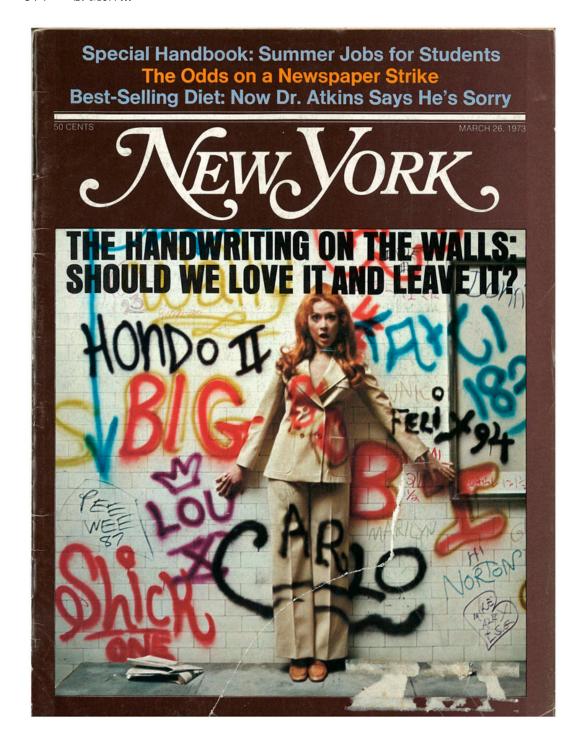
Figure 1.   Cover of New York Magazine March 26, 1973.
Source: Reproduced with the kind permission of New York Magazine. Photograph by Carl Fischer.

Subcultural graffiti and street art as heritage

The archaeological and heritage values of calliglyphs, and more common examples of recent graffiti in specific contexts have been noted for some time (see Baird and

Taylor 2010; Oliver and Neal 2010). Approaches that emphasise the contribution of graffiti to the cultural significance of heritage sites (Merrill 2011) have been pursued in penitentiary (Wilson 2008), domestic (Schofield 2010) and military (Merrill and Hack 2013) settings amongst others. For the most part, however, graffiti's usual interface with heritage sites is as a form of vandalism that detracts from recognised forms of cultural significance, with heritage practice continuing to emphasise legal prosecution and its speedy removal (English Heritage 1999; ICCROM 2006; Merrill 2011). Subcultural graffiti, as such, has rarely been considered as an explicit subject for heritage practice.

Street art, by contrast, has been heritagised to a far greater extent in a process that might be identified as a recent phase of its ongoing commercialisation. This is not to say that subcultural graffiti has not also become heavily commercialised. It has, and now often features in advertising material, popular media, numerous magazines and picture books, and on clothing and furniture – not to mention the market it generates for graffiti equipment (McAuliffe and Iveson 2011). Street art's wider public appeal has, however, allowed it to be more thoroughly assimilated by prevalent economic forces and therefore the works of a new generation of street artists are more likely to feature in gallery exhibitions than those of graffiti writers'. Whilst museum, gallery and private collection patronage contribute and connect to the heritagisation of street art by providing a parallel programme of protection, in the majority of instances it relates to tangible works designed explicitly for such platforms, namely, the prints, painted canvases, sculptures and installations that differ significantly in medium, if not in style, from the street-based works that are the focus of this article.

Outside the galleries, the increased heritagisation and commercialisation of street art is demonstrated by the decision to invite street artists to temporarily repaint the nationally listed Kelburn Castle in Fairlie, Scotland, the Bierpinsel in Berlin, Germany (www.kelburnestate.com; www.turmkunst.de) and recently parts of the Malaysian World Heritage City of George Town, in order to activate social values and draw tourists. Similarly, the works of locally, nationally and internationally famous street artists are increasingly considered as potential subjects for heritage protection schemes. Leading the way in this respect are heritage institutions in Australia and Germany. In Melbourne, murals by both Mike Brown and Keith Haring sit on the state and national heritage registers, respectively (MacDowall 2006). In Aachen, works by Klaus Paier have federal protection, while similar measures were recently considered for Blek le Rat's works in Leipzig (Schilling 2012). The decision to list these pieces as tangible cultural heritage mostly reflects their age and survival value, as they are all at least 20 years old. In the UK, however, comparable decisions, both private and institutional, surrounding the work of Banksy have led to oppositional responses from graffiti subcultures, which illustrate their perception of heritage protection.

The graffiti subculture vs. Banksy

The public treatment of Banksy's illegal street art stands in strong contrast to that of subcultural graffiti. The growth in the public appetite for Banksy's particular aesthetic style and ironic, humorous and often political subject matter has been made evident by a number of high-profile auctions of his legally produced prints and canvases, which have in turn emphasised the financial value of his illegal street artworks. As a result the private owners of the buildings on which these illegal works

appear have often tried to sell them. There have also been a number of thefts where angle-grinders have been used to remove Banksy works from their walls. These attempts, however, have been partially stymied by Banksy's handling service, Pest Control, who do not authenticate works that have been removed from the street, in accordance with the artist's wish that they stay *in situ*, and with his reluctance to incriminate himself (Corbett 2011). The removal of street art – Banksy's or otherwise – from the street can have negative consequences for its integrity, erode the cultural significance attached to its particular setting and, in certain instances, trigger debates that are reminiscent of the illegal trade of antiquities.

British local authorities have been inconsistent in their response to Banksy's work. Some draw a distinction between it and other graffiti and allow it to remain or – in some cases even restore it. Others have either accidentally or intentionally removed it. The heritage status of Banksy's work, and by extension its permissibility, continue to be pushed further by those who see it as potentially exempt from legal claims of criminal damage or as capable of fulfilling listing consent requirements (Edwards 2009; Webster 2011, 2012). Webster, for example, suggests that there is strong case for listing Banksy's street artworks as heritage, especially when supported by a local community that attaches value to their artistic qualities and political and social commentary (2012). The newness of Banksy's works, he claims, is outweighed by the threats they face, including those that come from graffiti subcultures (2012).

Besides numerous websites and zines, Banksy's illegal works have become a primary locus where local graffiti artists and writers can enter directly into dialogue with the artist and demonstrate their claim that Banksy is the personification of graffiti's commercialisation and the erosion of its traditions. In 2009, Sutton Council, in London, invited the public to vote on whether or not to protect an illegal Banksy piece (Gabbatt 2009). The stencilled artwork spoke directly to the theme of graffiti's commercialisation in showing a punk youth reading the assembly instructions for a mass-produced flat-pack graffiti slogan kit. Alongside him, scrawled political slogans spilled up out of a cardboard box onto the white wall behind. By the time 90% of those who voted expressed that they favoured the artwork's protection, it had fallen prey to the acts of the local graffiti subculture. First, it was adorned with a slogan that read 'real graffiti', and after this it was repeatedly tagged until its owner and two Banksy fans decided to remove the wall in order to restore and protect the artwork from further attacks, in the hope of selling it on (Fender 2009).[1]

In the same year, two Banksy works were 'vandalised' in Bristol. The first, a 2006 painting of a naked man hanging from a window in which a jealous husband and unfaithful wife stand, was hit by paintballs after having been allowed to adorn a listed building in front of the Bristol City Council for three years, following a public vote on its retention (Byrne 2012). Two days later an anti-street art group covered the Mild Mild West mural, which showed a teddy bear throwing a Molotov cocktail, in red paint (Bauer 2012). Although subcultural graffiti writers might not have been responsible for the attacks, some have speculated that they represented the subculture's claims that Banksy had 'sold out' (Byrne 2012). Eventually both were restored, the first by a local councillor and the second by a community interest company with the mission to realise a flourishing cultural quarter in the area containing the artworks (Morris 2011; Bauer 2012).

Given these threats, numerous private owners of Banksy's illegal street art have attempted to protect their assets *in situ* by covering them in Perspex (Figure 2). In a

well-publicised case, such measures proved incapable of protecting a Banksy art-work in Melbourne when someone, commonly assumed to be a local rival, poured silver paint between the privately installed screen and the wall. The result was that the Perspex, for a time, ironically served to frame the competitive and ephemeral processes, inherent in graffiti's production, which it originally sought to prevent (Figure 3).

The nexus of subcultural graffiti, street art and heritage was demonstrated again late in 2009, when Banksy adapted a 25-year-old mural named 'Robbo Inc' that, in its isolated position on the Regents Canal in London, remained visible beneath a patina of accumulated tags. In doing so, he demonstrated a lack of subcultural knowledge and etiquette by disrespecting the mural's creator, King Robbo, a found-ing father of the London graffiti scene (Figure 4). This triggered a graffiti battle that brought King Robbo out of retirement in response to what many saw as Banksy's transgression against an historical example of subcultural graffiti and a tangible trace of the local graffiti subculture's heritage. The battle was initially focused solely on the site of the mural as King Robbo and his supporters, Team Robbo, and then Banksy took turns in amending and adapting Banksy's new mural. Then King and Team Robbo pursued a wider graffiti war against Banksy through interventions that questioned the credibility and originality of his work. Public awareness of the graffiti

Figure 2.   A privately protected Banksy in Brighton, UK.
Source: Author (2010).

Figure 3.   Banksy's 'Little Diver' protected and 'vandalised' in Melbourne, Australia. Source: Author (2009).

war peaked with the screening of a television documentary about it in August 2011. Even after King Robbo suffered an accidental fall and was left in a coma, Team Robbo continued to target Banksy's works (Morris 2011). In November 2011, a black and white tracing of the original 1985 mural returned to the site with the addition of a crown and a stencilled spray-can in front of a 'flammable materials' warning sign. Rumours circulated that this was the work of Banksy and symbolised his desire to bring an end to his confrontation with King and Team Robbo by acknowledging the former's status and lighting a 'spray-can' candle to his good health. A month later Team Robbo repainted the mural in its original style, amended only to read 'Robbo Think', but after six months this restoration itself yielded to the restoration of Banksy's earlier tribute (Figure 5).[2]

Whilst it might be speculated that this graffiti war was one of the elaborate hoaxes that are part and parcel of the street art culture – and, in particular, Banky's work – the exchange remains illustrative of the interrelationship of and blurred boundaries between street artists and graffiti writers. Banksy's transgression stimulated responses by numerous writers (on the streets and in online forums) who identified more with King Robbo's position of authenticity and the wider traditions of subcultural graffiti than with the objectives of street art and its commercialised undertones. Furthermore, it demonstrated that graffiti subcultures have their own

Figure 4.   The 'Robbo Inc.' mural ca. 1985.
Source: Reproduced with the kind permission of Mister Merc. http://farm5.staticflickr.com/4058/4205276029_57e37d47d4_o.jpg

Figure 5.   Selected highlights of the Banksy vs. King Robbo Regent Canal Battle December 2009–2011.
Source: Reproduced with the kind permission of LDNGraffiti.co.uk

unwritten heritage and conservation frameworks, in which processes of restoration are integrated into the dynamics of a graffiti battle. This example raises questions as to who should be responsible for and what conservation strategies and selection criteria should be applied to heritage decisions relating to tangible subcultural graffiti. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider whether the application of heritage

frameworks might be more destructive than protective of the authenticity of subcultural graffiti.

Subcultural graffiti, heritage frameworks and authenticity

Subcultural graffiti involves the production of prospective tangible and intangible heritage. In the terms of Australia ICOMOS' 1999 Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter), which fosters co-existing and pluralistic cultural values, subcultural graffiti creates tangible places of cultural significance by contributing aesthetic, historic, social and potentially scientific values (Australia ICOMOS 1999). Subcultural graffiti also fulfils the definition of intangible heritage provided by the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, as it involves 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills … and cultural spaces' that are constantly recreated by groups in response to their environment and history, whilst providing 'a sense of identity and continuity' (UNESCO 2003, 2). The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (The Faro Convention) asserts 'the need to involve everyone in society in the on-going process of defining and managing cultural heritage' (COE 2005, 2). Adherence to this further necessitates that graffiti subcultures should be integrated into heritage frameworks. Paradoxically, however, the use of each of these frameworks may have implications which question the established notions of authenticity that remain fundamental to modern heritage practice, and lie 'at the base of all modern doctrine on the conservation and restoration of historical monuments' (Lemaire cited by Starn 2002, 2).

Despite authenticity's deep philosophical genealogy (Jokilehto 1995) it was not explicitly connected to the preservation movement until the early twentieth century (Starn 2002), and only became a decisive factor for heritage practice in 1964, when the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter) recognised a duty to preserve monuments 'in the full richness of their authenticity' (ICOMOS 1964). For the Venice Charter, authenticity was vested in the physical fabric of monuments and sites, and it therefore emphasised conservation on a permanent basis, guided by the principles of interventional transparency and the use of traditional techniques. Such an evocation of authenticity, however, was critiqued for failing to expand sufficiently on preceding conservation principles and for suffering from a Eurocentric bias (Jokilehto 1998a).

UNESCO's Nara Document on Authenticity consolidated the central significance of authenticity to heritage practice 30 years later, in 1994. In that year, 'authenticity's continual flux' (Lowenthal 1995, 123) came to the fore within an international heritage community that was widening its criteria 'from "monuments" to "sites", "districts" and "landscapes", from high to vernacular culture, from the West to much of the rest of the world' (Starn 2002, 8). In this moment, the prevalent emphasis on the universal and tangible manifestation of authenticity enshrined in the Venice Charter was critiqued in favour of variant understandings that made room for the recognition of a plethora of more intangible vectors of authenticity, including functions, techniques, traditions, spirit and feelings (UNESCO 1994). Authenticity was confirmed as an 'essential qualifying factor concerning values' whose understanding played a fundamental role in all studies of cultural heritage (UNESCO 1994). The Nara Document as such fostered a pluralistic and culturally sensitive approach that placed responsibility for cultural heritage with, in the first place, those communities that

had generated and subsequently cared for it (UNESCO 1994). In its sensitivity to cultural diversity and specificity, the Nara Document also highlighted a shift in heritage concerns 'from ancient monuments to living cultures' (Jokilehto 1998b, 17).

The tension between the Venice Charter's appreciation of tangible authenticity and the Nara Document's focus on intangible authenticity, however, remains rooted in contemporary heritage debates and can be connected to the fluctuating popularity of conservation and restoration as notionally binary heritage procedures (Starn 2002). This tension is significant when considering subcultural graffiti's potential to represent heritage. The application of the Venice Charter in this context would prioritise the graffiti subculture's tangible material culture, namely its tags, throw-ups and pieces, but their consequential conservation could be detrimental to the authenticity of the intangible ephemeral traditions that gave rise to them. While the Venice Charter would foster a singular, so-called 'expert', perspective concerned primarily with subcultural graffiti's materially embodied historic and aesthetic value, applying the Nara Document would emphasise a plurality of values in ways sensitive to the subculture's living traditions.

The Nara Document provides the notion of authenticity enshrined in UNESCO's primary legislative tool for managing tangible heritage, its Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage or World Heritage Convention (1972) through the convention's regularly revised operational guidelines (2012). It was, however, not drafted with the explicit intention to address the management of intangible heritage. Likewise, its criteria – or any, for that matter – for judging authenticity are not referred to by the operational directives or the main text of UNESCO's 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention, which suggests that the issues of authenticity raised by the management of intangible heritage are yet to be fully grappled with. Those who have attempted to address such issues have primarily focused on the impact of tourism on the intangible rituals and performances of living cultures, and the 'authentic illusion' of heritage practitioners who hope to protect such phenomena as timeless authentic local expressions through strategies that often simultaneously result in their standardisation and increased touristic consumption (Skounti 2009). Given these difficulties, Skounti has gone so far as to characterise intangible heritage as without authenticity, noting as this article does the potential of its dynamism to be 'at odds with a notion of authenticity conceived as rootedness, faithfulness or fixedness' (2009, 78). Dismissing the authenticity of intangible heritage altogether, however, is too convenient a solution, especially given its prevalence within the values attached to both intangible and tangible heritage by multiple stakeholders. Such reasoning also fails to appreciate how shifting understandings of the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage can contribute to both the reformulation of ideas about authenticity and broader paradigm shifts within the heritage profession. Araoz, for example, demonstrates how the shifting ideas of authenticity have contributed to a wider dematerialisation of heritage evident in contemporary concern for intangible heritage (2009, 2011). In turn, he highlights the need for a new heritage paradigm that tolerates, more than manages, change at heritage places in order to protect and preserve their associated values (Araoz 2009 2011). In other words, tolerating tangible change may in fact ensure the maintenance of heritage values connected to intangible ideas of authenticity.

The consideration of subcultural graffiti in this context can be instructive insofar as many of the values held by graffiti subcultures relate directly to ideas of

authenticity. The protection of these values, in turn, is complicated by the tension between the subculture's tangible and intangible heritage. These tensions became evident in Australia, where recent debate regarding the heritage listing of Melbourne's laneways, an epicentre for subcultural graffiti, street art and public art programmes, coalesced with ongoing debates about the city's graffiti policy and resulted in heritage authorities acknowledging that the long-term listing of graffiti and street art was problematic due to their ephemeral nature (see ABC 2008; Avery 2009; Young 2010). A National Trust of Australia representative tellingly noted that 'different perceptions of the validity of graffiti and street art has made even legal street art difficult to formally recognise as heritage' and 'while heritage bodies may consider the long-term viability of listing sites of street art, neither supporters nor detractors of the practice seek such recognition' (Avery 2009, 143, 149). Thus, it can be seen that the application of heritage frameworks may have negative consequences for the authenticity of the traditions of graffiti subcultures and provoke a critical re-questioning of the role that heritage practitioners and institutions should play in their maintenance and preservation.

The problems of keeping it real

The integration of street art into heritage frameworks, whether on a tangible or intangible basis, integrates subcultural graffiti, however peripherally, into legal frameworks, which fundamentally questions the most important measure of its authenticity – its illegality. Signs of the continued expansion of street art's heritagisation to affect subcultural graffiti are already becoming evident. In Berlin, for example, politicians in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg recently requested that subcultural graffiti associated with their local area's history of house squatting be placed under heritage protection (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2014). Therefore, sensitivity is needed to understand 'what is lost (and gained) when graffiti is pushed through the machinery of bureaucracy' (Halsey and Pederick 2010, 94–95). Might heritage legislation in cases such as this overrule other legislation? To what extent might this also reinforce distinctions between street art and subcultural graffiti? Will the former's increasing official cultural and legal integration lead to greater public dissatisfaction with the latter, insofar as it might provide a legitimate expression against which to compare subcultural graffiti in order to demonstrate its perceived lack of value, or status as unsightly vandalism?

The preservation by record of graffiti through photography or the collection of oral testimonies might be commendable, but whether or not heritage practitioners and academics should be involved in these processes is debatable. Academic interest in subcultural graffiti can often evolve from an initial interest in street art just as the heritagisation of the former may follow that of the latter (Schacter 2008). Both academic investigations and heritage framings of graffiti subcultures and their practices have the potential to erode the subculture's traditions of illegibility and thus affect the very core of the intangible heritage they represent. Although the promises of increased social understanding that these approaches might bring are seductive, they may ultimately prove destructive to the traditional means by which graffiti subcultures distinguish themselves as 'outsiders', by teaching societal 'insiders' their subcultural language.

The authenticity of subcultural graffiti has also been threatened by its exposure to the commercial forces of the art industry since the 1970s, and it continues to be

exposed to ever-increasing degrees of cultural mainstreaming through its association with street art. The fact that for a time Tox could sell his 'incredibly basic' tags for £75 each (Davey 2009) demonstrates how highly marketable subcultural graffiti has become. Simultaneously, the increasingly prevalent appearance of corporate and sponsored graffiti and commissioned murals in the same physical spaces of subcultural graffiti undermines the latter as it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish graffiti advertisements from authentic graffiti expressions (Alvelos 2004). The further commodification of subcultural graffiti and street art within the heritage industry would represent a deepening of these market-orientated pressures and the further erosion of subcultural graffiti's original anti-commercialist remit. The threats of assimilation and 'erasure via misrepresentation' will likely lead to increasing claims of authenticity in order to protect and distinguish the subculture from inauthentic expressions (McLeod 1999, 148).

Finally, the further heritagisation of either street art or subcultural graffiti could have significant repercussions for the notions of authenticity attached to the transience of its expression. The preservation and restoration practices that are sometimes applied to murals (see Mccormick and Jarman 2005), which usually involve their wholesale repainting in accordance with their original design accompanied occasionally with the application of anti-graffiti or weathering coatings, could be argued to be compatible with the dynamic processes that ensure the turnover and transience of graffiti. But such strategies would run the risk of freezing the dynamic dialogue that graffiti and street art, as living traditions, rely upon in order to maintain subcultural hierarchies and encourage the development of individual styles and abilities. Indeed, while greater participatory research with graffiti subcultures is required on this subject, cursory investigations into the opinions they hold of the potential longevity that heritage protection might grant their tangible expressions suggest that many would consider such protection negative (see Orsini 2012). As one graffiti writer put it, 'you can't have a piece that just sits there for years and goes stale … you need fresh stuff' (quoted in Halsey and Pederick 2010, 94).

As noted above and elsewhere, graffiti subcultures have their own informal systems of heritage preservation suited to the traditions surrounding the production of graffiti, which mostly rely on photographic documentation (Avery 2009). Traditionally, individual writers and artists documented their works in black books and photo albums, but developments in digital and Internet technologies have seen such records supplemented by a host of graffiti-related websites, online galleries and blogs (e.g. see grafarc.org). Many of these archives represent an authentic form of grassroots heritage production and curation that should not be overlooked. Whilst heritage organisations might compile similar records or connect with these existing informal systems, it should not be assumed that their means and motivations will be compatible with those of graffiti subcultures. If heritage authorities wish to pursue such aims they would likely benefit from the advice and participation of graffiti subcultures, but might ultimately need to be willing to acknowledge that formal heritage frameworks might only have a limited role to play in this sector of (sub)cultural life. As a founding father of the New York graffiti subculture, Phase 2, once put it;

> this is our community, this is our nation, our contribution to the world, it's our job to preserve it, insure it and nurture it – not someone else's. (in Vibe Magazine October 1994 cited by Macdonald 2001, 176)

Who then – if anyone – should be responsible for the heritage management of sub-cultural graffiti? Paragraph eight of the Nara Document states;

> Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it … Balancing their own requirements with those of other cultural communities is, for each community, highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not under-mine their fundamental cultural values. (UNESCO 1994)

In the case of subcultural graffiti and street artists, the Faro Convention sheds further light on 'those other cultural communities' by defining a heritage community as consisting 'of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations', regardless of whether they have generated it or not (COE 2005, 3). As this article has aimed to demonstrate, problems arise because often these communities, productive and consumptive, value different aspects of subcultural graffiti and street art as heritage.

Given the value tendencies of these different communities of 'outsiders' and 'insiders', these problems are likely to continue to arise in the future. The graffiti subcultures (or the 'outsiders') prioritised by the Nara Document as the generators of heritage emphasise the value of the notions of authenticity attached to their living intangible traditions. Meanwhile the rights of the wider public (or the 'insiders') to sustain and transmit the heritage that it wishes to, as codified by the Faro Convention, are most often exercised in relation to the aesthetic and historic value of tangible examples of subcultural graffiti and street art. The attempts, therefore, of the 'outsiders' to maintain authentic allegiance to their traditions means that the works valued by the 'insiders' are destined to remain ephemeral. In turn, attempts by 'insiders' to combat this ephemerality will undermine the 'fundamental cultural values' of the 'outsiders' in ways that question the latter's, namely the graffiti subcultures', rights to self-determination in matters related to their heritage. These rights must be heeded by heritage practitioners through participatory procedures; and depending on how and whether graffiti subcultures choose to activate them, the same practitioners might be required to limit their involvement, intervention and application of heritage frameworks.

Graves-Brown and Schofield exemplify this when they acknowledge that in certain comparable contexts a 'DIY approach to heritage management' might be more advantageous than the application of formal heritage frameworks and procedures (2011, 1400). In doing so they introduce the term 'anti-heritage' to denote that which 'contradicts what agencies and heritage practitioners typically value or wish to keep' (2011, 1399). They also highlight the dilemmas that heritage practitioners and agencies might face in recognising the heritage value of graffiti without destroying the intangible spirit of rebellion behind its production (2011). Whilst this DIY approach is broadly synonymous with the informal heritage management practices of graffiti subcultures, and although the graffiti subculture broadly shares the anti-establishment attitude that seemingly lies at the heart of the 'anti-heritage' label, this term cannot be applied to graffiti subcultures without problems. The iconoclastic tendencies that exist in graffiti subcultures do not render them devoid of heritage or indeed heritage frameworks, however informal they may be, as the prefix 'anti' might suggest. Instead, the notion of alternative heritage has greater utility in relation to the heritage of subcultural communities that are maintained by their own

informal practices, and whose integration into formal heritage frameworks might be considered more disadvantageous than beneficial to their safeguarding, and in particular the maintenance of their authenticity. The alternative heritage of graffiti subcultures might be interpreted as an example of the subaltern heritage discourse that highlights how subaltern groups are predominantly positioned outside the official authorised heritage discourse and are restricted in their autonomy to conceive of heritage in ways outside the dominant framework (Smith 2006). The major difference here is that, unlike some other subaltern groups, graffiti subcultures might not actually be seeking representation within the authorised heritage discourse.

Conclusion

Respecting the alternative heritages of graffiti subcultures can contribute to the wider critical turn in heritage studies, and in particular the attempt to re-evaluate the relationship of heritage, preservation and destruction. The recognition that 'heritage professionals are theoretically and mentally unprepared to deal with "negative curation" and "heritage erasure"' (Holtorf 2006, 108), and the acknowledgement that the 'exponential growth of heritage in the modern world' may necessitate the decisions related to the curtailment of heritage preservation measures (Harrison 2013, 579) are claims that are partially supported by this article's consideration of subcultural graffiti. In this context, the resistance that subcultural graffiti displays towards institutionalised heritage frameworks – despite embodying varying heritage values to its creators and a growing wider public – highlights its potential to act as a watermark in demonstrating that not all facets of cultural life can or should necessarily be formally designated as heritage. Subcultural graffiti, then, not only emphasises the need for greater critical reflection when cultural formations and manifestations are reframed as heritage, but may also represent a limit of heritage's exponential expansion, insofar as it illustrates that some objects, sites and cultures are best left untouched by formal heritage frameworks, despite representing valuable heritage to various communities.

To conclude, the preceding discussion has demonstrated that subcultural graffiti's complex relationship with its more publicly palatable counterpart, street art, along with the complications it poses for the perceived dichotomy of tangible and intangible heritage that continues to afflict much heritage legislation, prevents the easy application of existing heritage strategies and frameworks. This has been achieved by reference to the provisions of various international heritage frameworks, and highlighted through the brief consideration of national-, regional- and local-level case studies. In sum, prioritising one element of graffiti subcultures' heritage will result in the erosion of the other. Respect the living traditions of graffiti subcultures and their physical traces will mostly remain transient and short-lived. Protect their material culture and their living traditions will be undermined.

This paper has also highlighted the prospective dangers that the continued integration of street art and subcultural graffiti into official heritage frameworks may pose for the authenticity of their traditions related to illegality, illegibility, anti-commercialism and transience. Should demand for the integration of street art and, in turn, subcultural graffiti into heritage frameworks continue to grow, then traditional definitions of heritage, vandalism and the historic environment will all need to be revisited. In such a scenario, and if continued emphasis is placed on authenticity as embodied by the spirit of the Nara Document, heritage practitioners will need to acknowledge that the values of graffiti subcultures must be respected

even if they rely on the subversion of established legal and social codes. Likewise, appreciation must be given to the fact that, for some, the authenticity of subcultural graffiti lies to a greater extent in fidelity to its intangible aspects rather than in the traditional materialist claims of authenticity formally associated with the heritage institutions of the pre-Nara era. Respect for the Nara document's application of authenticity, and its approach to heritage management, necessitates that even if the legitimate claims and interests of wider local communities mean that graffiti subcultures cannot expect full managerial responsibility over their graffiti, they are still best placed to determine the criteria against which its authenticity can be judged. In turn, upholding their criteria of authenticity for this example of 'alternative heritage' and its constituent informal practices and intangible traditions will require heritage practitioners and academics to critically acknowledge and limit their own involvement and influence, while tolerating levels of erasure and obliteration within a new historic environment that they may not formerly have been accustomed to. Subcultural graffiti and street art, therefore, could be illustrative of the need in specific instances for further paradigm shifts within the heritage community, beyond those previously highlighted (Araoz 2009, 2011), to encompass perspectives that not only tolerate change but also, potentially, loss and erasure.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The IKEA Punk as it became known eventually ended up for sale in the Keszler gallery (Corbett 2011).
2. A full photographic timeline of the Banksy–King Robbo battle can be viewed at http://www.ldngraffiti.co.uk/blog/banksyvsrobbo/timeline.html. [Last accessed 10 June 2014].

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