

## Graffiti Art

Graffiti art is generally produced at “non-places”, with the “non-place” defined as a space of transience where human beings remain anonymous and do not hold enough significance to be regarded as “places” in their anthropological definition. Such non-places do not build common references to a group, and the temporality associated with such sites tends toward a flattening sense of time, or time that’s out of joint. The MTA infrastructure is one of those places of transience that points to the present and future tenses. Perhaps it’s exactly its disassociation with fixed human relationships that invites the possibility of a “code-switching” in the form of graffiti art---manifestos that’s located at the old ruins of representation.

Graffiti art belongs to the category of “counter-production” art whose expression does not crystalize into a unifying form but is instead a proliferation of different lines of growth, living and thriving wildly outside gallery systems, museums systems and competition systems, abandoning traditional forms of productions, and seeking to escape a certain-world where the precious things in life are fixed properties ruled by production. The term “counter-production” dates from the early 1970s, or more precisely, 1972, when Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt articulated such concepts, aiming to address “how the art world’s normative structures might be inhabited and resisted internally to their own normative logic by holding to the fragile utopianism of artistic practice as a different type of work while acknowledging that this promise is traversed and parodied by the ‘creativity’ of capitalism’s new spirit.” It’s doubtful that the graffiti artists had

such meta-conceptions before their creation, yet their work -both in content and format, aligns with the spirit of counter-production.

The very word “grassroot art” itself resonates with plant metaphors such as “roots”, rootedness”, “groundedness”, “rhizomes”. In fact, the form of graffiti art, with their paradoxically controlled and wild, amateurish, and artistic lines and markings, resembles a bewildering multiplicity of stems and roots which may cross at any point to form a variety of connections or potentialities.

The archive and documentation of graffiti art is also a crucial point of investigation. Like a palimpsest, the graffiti could easily be rewritten, replaced, painted over by new artists. Haunted by the past, the graffiti also calls forth a new group of audience, and a new community. An example in the article would be how Henry Chalfant, the sculptor and subway commuter who was so taken with the graffiti-covered trains that he eventually befriended many writers and facilitated the movement’s growth by giving the artists access to his own collection of well-organized images. Preserving such art is preserving a communal space for dispersed, neglected, and isolated creative individuals to be united. Such communal space is a haven for “living poetic and visual exchanges”, more than the sum of their parts. The greatest irony is when the criminal documentation of graffiti art serves the purpose of a crucial visual archive. It reminds me of how in Roberto Bolano’s novels, the detectives’ investigation would correspond with the unveiling of certain literary trajectories. The political history (or the actuality) is never severed from a literary or artistic history (the potentiality).

In terms of technology and the internet circulation of graffiti art, it's interesting to think about how the digital photos of such artworks could become more widely dispersed and viewed than the object itself. In fact, many of the graffiti artwork that we could potentially gain access to are the ones circulating online, which leads to the question --- does it matter that the source object can no longer be regarded as inherently greater than any of its copies, since we are already used to how objects are instantiated in ways that deny the necessity of the original. Does the "aura" of the original graffiti art matter?