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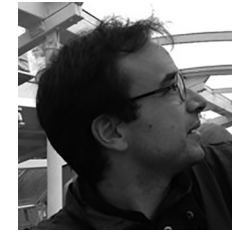
Drawing on the Walls: Graffiti, Street Art or Walls in Time. Analysis of the Torrevieja Experience

This research work is twofold: it tries to reflect on the nature of graffiti and street art, and analyses a specific competition developed in April of 2019 in Torrevieja (Spain) as a case study. Thus, it reflects on the impact of urban tattoos and their elaboration process. It discusses some of the characteristics that graffiti possess when they are understood as a minority's social action or a critical protest, and how they constitute a process of action on the urban built environment that is based and is often spurred by graphic expression.

We also analyse the different specific proposals in the city of Torrevieja understanding the enclaves as supports for this street art, as well as their scope and repercussion, or their graphic nature: their morphological, material and, fundamentally, temporal dimensions. The study of these works includes interviews with the authors as well as with the inhabitants who have ended up incorporating them in their day-to-day work, thus completing the proposed research.

The conclusions will allow us to gauge the possibilities that this graphic format and its apparent lack of rules offer for the recovery and the activation of critical protest in our cities, and how to reflect on them from an architectural point of view considering the integration of image, architecture and meaning. We will also weight the consequences in urban planning as this phenomenon could also be interpreted as a tool of contemporary urbanism if this creativity is conveniently channelled towards street art. The drawings on the walls, first, and the walls themselves in time, may contribute, in certain circumstances, to build a more committed, mature and complex cityscape.

Keywords:
Street art; Graffiti; Graphic expression; Cultural protest; Propaganda language

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INTRODUCTION

Graffiti and *street art* possess an aura of certain admiration within some critical circles. Probably, much of that positive reading of this typically urban manifestation is connected to the idea of individual expression which, when it manages to represent a collective critical outrage, transcends the specificity of whoever made the inscription on the wall to become an icon of a collective aspiration, in most cases as a critical response to a political or social context. Some of these inscriptions are only textual but in many other cases their nature is basically graphic or, at least, hybrid. The support for this expression is necessarily architectural —a wall— and, consequently so is the scale; something especially relevant in the case of those that are properly mural paintings (Zerlenga et al 2019, p.1434).

Drawing, as a representation of an existing or imagined reality, specifically engages reality spatially and temporarily. The graphic symbols with which we trace architectural drawings represent material limits in space in as much as they are considered with regard to their persistence in time. Urban graffiti, although belonging to a different theoretical context and subject to a series of characteristics far from the rules of construction, are inevitably linked to the supports on which they develop, that is, architecture itself and, by extension, the city that is shaped by such architectural limits. Understood in this way as an integral part of the social reality that conforms contemporary cities, these urban tattoos, more or less expected, also represent a symptom: behind these vindicative graffiti, in most of the cases, a critical minority may be veiled.

GOALS

The aims of this research can be organized in two main topics. On the one hand, we will try to critically consider the nature of *graffiti* and *street art* contributing to the debate to discern between both type of manifestations, their artistic quality —or lack of it—, as well as their individual or social dimension. On the other hand, through the analysis of the particularities of a case study in Torrevieja, we will try to shed light discussing what graffiti mean for the people who live in the city and their repercussion in the cityscape itself. On a theoretical plane, we will export the ideas of the experience to think about the spatial and temporal factors involved in graffiti, and most specially the inseparable nature of street art and architecture or its urban context. The hypothesis of understanding street art as part of the city has a direct consequence — *interactiveness* — that we will try to reflect on: graffiti and street art are as much influenced by the citizens themselves as they may impact on them.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the two areas of reflection where the research has been developed, the practical and specific of the case of study in Torrevieja, on the one hand, and the theoretical and generic, on the other, monitoring the experience carried out has been combined with a deeper analysis of the relationship between architecture and graffiti, as well as the repercussion that these interventions have on the city and its inhabitants. The work flow of the research has prompted us to divide the process into several sections that try to structure the different topics and implications derived from such analysis which could be summarized in: theoretical reflection and differentiation of graffiti and street art; architecture, street art and meaning; street art and context; temporality and *interactiveness*; walls in the city and their social dimension.

RETHINKING GRAFFITI AND STREET ART

Graffiti have been with us for almost as long as we can keep track of them back in time. Originally scratched on the walls, as for instance the demotic graffiti we may find in the Temple of Isis on Phiale Island (Pope 2019, p. 73), they evolved in time to gain the aura of art in recent times, often referred to as street art. Obviously, that is if we disregard cave paintings which, in some cases, their appearance might suggest that primitive graffiti could be traced back to those times. However, if we are to establish as a requirement for graffiti or street art their insertion in an urban context, that could well be too daring an assertion to make. So, as it is generally agreed, we could limit their presence as such since the civilized era.

Peter Keegan (2014) has extensively studied graffiti throughout antiquity pointing out how the common ground for all the different manifestations is the fact that these —and their successive stylisation and conversion into street art, we may add— are done to communicate, in the first instance. Graffiti include texts and drawings alike —or a combination of both—, typically executed in informal contexts. Nevertheless, they were always meant to be read by others, that is the very essence of this kind of inscriptions. They are non-official or informal messages whose authors wanted them to be read while, in many cases, remain anonymous.

Although many of these informal inscriptions made in different supports are considered graffiti, the ones that constitute the focus of our research are the ones written and, most especially, drawn or painted on a wall or any other architectural surface. This implies that these inscriptions or drawings are projected into the public sphere and, therefore, can easily achieve a greater audience. Obviously, there are artistic inscriptions, mural paintings and bas-reliefs that give account of a sophisticated tradition of mural art since ancient Egypt but, as we have already stated, graffiti must have —in principle— an informal character. Graffiti carved on the rock of Hadrian's Wall by the Roman soldiers in the third century, for instance, are a vivid example of this communicative intentionality while remaining informal manifestations. Graffiti, throughout history, have alternated textual and visual images to convey and express what their authors meant to say. Those Roman graffiti, for example, include both kinds of inscriptions; during medieval times we may find this kind of informal inscriptions made by men who relied in drawing as a powerful means of expression. Marcia Kupfer (2011) has written about the role of this

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kind of informal inscriptions unearthed by Michel de Boüard in the late 1960s and found in what could most likely be a dungeon of a Loire Valley fortress at Doué-la-Fontaine, trying to unveil the iconography that these inscriptions embodied. Not only the inscriptions were limited to texts but, most significantly, also to a visual imaginary.

The possibility of writing messages to be read by others and still remain hidden in anonymity has always proved this informal communicative role of graffiti as a resource for political criticism. This is one of the fundamental roles we may find in modern graffiti but, as it usually happens, this is no novelty. Plutarch, for instance, gives account of the following verse carved with nocturnal secrecy on the Concord temple: "A work of mad discord produces a temple of Concord", in reference to the murdering of the people's tribune, Gaius Gracchus, and three other thousand men by consul Opimius who, later on, ordered the restoration of that same temple (Keegan 2014, p. 159). This condition of increased publicity is achieved thanks to the projection of the inscription into the public domain, the main reason to establish a divide between mural paintings or art, and graffiti or street art.

During the twentieth century totalitarian regimes —communist and fascist alike— made extensive use of public advertisement with powerful imaginaries and suggestive visual propaganda, being aware as they were of the potential for conveying their political messages making use of this expressive tools. Well known are the posters for example, of soviet and Nazi propaganda, or the ones in both sides during the Spanish Civil War. Many impressive mosaics with clear propagandistic intentions are still to be seen in cities under the influence of the soviet regime in Russia or Ukraine, or murals featuring Che Guevara in Cuba, for example. Nevertheless, all of these were in fact devised by these regimes to take advantage of the powerful communicative attributes of walls and large surfaces as billboards to project their propaganda into the public spaces in order to gain visibility long before Venturi or Scott Brown addressed this idea in architecture with dubious results (Venturi, Scott Brown 1972). The strategy

Fig. 1 - Fraternal Kiss, Dimitri Vrubel 2009 fully restored (originally painted in 1990). Berlin's wall (East side).

is similar to that of the public exposure sought by graffitists but these, on the contrary, typically use them as a tool for political protest and clandestine dissent as the one referred by Plutarch.

One of the most famous graffiti painted on Berlin's wall is the so-called *Fraternal Kiss* by Russian artist Dimitri Vrubel (Fig. 1). The image is a straightforward colour version of a photographic icon taken in October of 1979 by Régis Bossu depicting the socialist 'fraternal kiss' in the most intimate version [1], as it was the case on this occasion, between Brezhnev and Honecker on the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the GDR. Below the image the text "My God, help me to survive this fatal attraction"

could be read, both in Russian and in German, recalling the outrageous submission of the East German people to the Soviet Union until the fall of the regime in 1989. Vrubel's work —fully 'restored' in 2009 [2]— would unmistakably belong to the political protest type of graffiti although it could only be accomplished after the fall of the communist dictatorship so, to a certain extent, its political criticism was only partially so. The administrative and political divide of the German people as part of the aftermath of WWII, became physically evidenced through the construction of the ominous wall in 1969. During the time prior to its construction between 1961-1962 almost three and a half million of East Germans fled to West

Germany (Dowty 1989, p. 122) despite the increasing difficulties imposed by the communist authorities to allow for such migratory movements; the wall was a desperate strategy to enforce this administrative policy, although in a typical propaganda operation it was theoretically built to 'protect East Germans from a fascist conspiration from the West preventing their free will to constitute themselves as a socialist estate'. Obviously, at the time, the painting of the such piece of street art on the East side would have been unthinkable for obvious reasons: throughout the decades several dozens of people that tried to escape to the West were shot dead, nobody could have ever dared to paint such an image then [3].

Another dreary physical limit [4] built two decades ago to establish a divide between the people of Israel and Palestine has also served as the support for another street art icon by celebrated and elusive British graffitist Bansky. *Rage, the Flower Thrower* (Fig. 2) portrays a rioter concealing his identity wearing a bandana and a baseball cap worn backward in the precise moment of attempting to thrown what anyone would imagine to be a Molotov cocktail but, instead, is a colourful —all the rest is black and white— flower bouquet. Known to be an anti-war and pacifist activist his ironic subversive image is politically charged because of the meanings it conveys in the context where it is placed: the Israeli-Palestine conflict, the very existence of the wall as a divide, the unbalanced arms on both sides and, above all, the very flower bouquet replacing the incendiary artefact. Although some have considered it inappropriate because of the subtle peace message considering the context, we belief it is actually this multiplicity of meanings which can be critically read for both sides what makes of it a street art master piece. It is the complexity of the meanings involved that which adds maturity to the work and avoids the simplistic biased partisan interpretation of the conflict.

Bansky, often referred to as 'guerrilla artist' or 'art terrorist' (Valesi 2014, p.116) has developed a distinctive stencilling technique —typically exploring the possibilities of duotone chiaroscuro effects, eventually nuanced with grayscales in the

Fig. 2 - Rage, the Flower Thrower, Bansky 2005. Wall between Israel and Palestine.

more elaborate ones— and has become a powerful image creator. Undoubtfully, his combination of graphical mastery and strongly charged critical imagery together with his anonymity and a witty irony —a graphic equivalent to Oscar Wilde's fine ironic refinement— has revolutionised street art and contributed to gain artistic credit for this kind of work. The fact that his work is attributed artistic value and that he is now a reputed and demanded artist adds another layer to the intrinsic value of street art considering authorial artistic production, with all the implications that this alone entails.

It is convenient to add a nuance into the difference between graffiti and street art, although both terms have mistakenly tended to be used indistinctly. There is a growing concern about the art-

fulness of this kind of works and their consideration as a "form of creative expression" (Zerlenga et al 2019, p.1436). A distinction between the two is becoming more frequent, especially when conflicts regarding these two different attitudes arise. As Lois Stavsky —long-time curator of the blog StreetArtNYC [5]— states "Graffiti predates street art and street art draws its inspiration from graffiti" (Lu 2018). To a certain extent, street artists are generally commissioned and allowed to produce their works on someone else's property, whereas graffitists typically lack artistic tuition, and produce their work as a protest against the establishment vandalising walls, eventually including those that might have already been colonised by street art (see endnote 2). Yet, much of Bansky's produc-

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tion, for example, defies this theoretical divide: his work on the streets' walls is certainly not commissioned, yet its artistic value is undoubted. This shows that the artistic value of street art does not depend on the time dedicated to the execution of the work itself or its commissioning but rather on its intrinsic graphic qualities and expression, and also to its architectural integration, just as much as it confirms the need to establish a divide between street art and simple graffiti differentiating their specific value.

In fact, many of these famous visual icons produced by street artists are profited by third parties. A notorious scandal of this sort occurred when Walmart decided to commercialise prints of the stencilled work *Ambition* by Eddie Cola (Fig. 3a) in 2013, adding to the outrage its misattribution to Banksy himself. When Cola learned about it he decided to fight back creating a second version of the work replacing the original motto "If you want to achieve greatness stop asking for permission" by a defiant "It's only stealing if you get caught" only to later take legal actions against the company (Carey 2013). Once the image is exposed to the public on a support that does not belong to the artist, its property and potentially its legal copyrights too remain controversial. A similar event took place in 2017 when H&M decided to produce an online advertisement featuring some of Jason 'REVOK' Williams work as a backdrop. When the street artist filed a cease order to stop H&M taking advantage of his work the company sued him on the grounds of his lack of copyrights protection over the image as it had been produced illegally (Mitman 2018). Once this debate was known to the public graffiti writers and protesters started a worldwide spontaneous *graffiti intifada* against the company's storefronts and in social media until the company had to capitulate and was thus forced to drop the lawsuit, which was an ironic turnout considering the boundaries of legality in both cases.

Bansky's preference for stencilling technique is actually based on the fact that it is much faster than free-hand drawing and, consequently, easier to avoid police tracking while illegally painting on the city walls [6]. The fact that graffiti —and

Fig. 3 - (left) Ambition, Eddie Cola, 2009. (right) Parking, Bansky 2005. Los Angeles.

eventually street art itself— are painted without the permission of the property makes of them an illegal practice (Fig. 3a). Nonetheless, Bansky considers graffiti as a criticism to corporate advertising and their impunity to invade the public domain with their ubiquitous advertising around the city or on the public transports, "he turns vandalism laws upside down with his own theory of 'Brandalism', a concept that identifies 'The Advertisers' as the real villains and criminals" (Valesi 2014, p.119) considering their reckless intrusion in the public space.

It is also interesting to note the importance of the combination of text and image to reinforce the expressiveness in many of these street art works. For instance, in the only word of Bansky's Parking (Fig. 3b), the partially purposely fainted 'ING' overwritten with white paint wittily connects the idea of replacing the parking lot for a park that is suggested as the 'PARK' syllable remains bright red painted in connection to the image of the girl on a swing that hangs from the 'A'. A certain kind of readymade, one could argue, if the pre-existing and its own urban contextualisation are to be considered.

GRAFFITI AND ARCHITECTURE

Another aspect of great interest to us is the relation between street art and architecture. In some cases, artists do not exploit the potential that it may produce. However, some of the most striking ones do establish an active relation between the given architectural context, its configuration and the work of art itself. For instance, in both of Bansky's works previously mentioned, the architectural context plays a very effective role in the expressiveness of the whole: the street art transcends then the use of a simple wall to display the painted work engaging the existing architecture in the meaning and, therefore, in the work itself. The position of the *Flower Thrower* attempting to throw the bouquet over the wall expresses the will to surmount the physical barrier just as the suggestion of the replacement of the parking lot for an urban park in his *Parking* benefits from his playing with the words 'parking' and 'park' confronted to the parking lot, on the one hand, and with the existing written sign, on the other [7].

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Fig. 4 - Half hammerhead shark. Bordalo II, ONO'U 2019 (Street art contest). Papeete (Tahiti).

Also, the graffities in "Gallo" mountain, in Palermo (Italy) are especially sensitive to the architectural fact (Garofalo 2020, p.14).

Architecture, in street art properly understood, should be more than merely a support at the artist disposal. In some cases, their pictorial nature and the use of colour, for instance, may engage architecture itself. Such is the case of the *Half hammerhead shark* by Bordalo II (Fig. 4). As it can be observed, Bordalo partially uses his trash recycle collage technique that recalls some of Schwitters' work (McBride 2007, p.258) —despite of the figurative approach in the case of the graffitist— and painting techniques. However, it is noteworthy to mention the role of colour in this work and the way it is freely used. Most especially, the way in which it extends over the different architectural elements to completely colonise architecture; in addition to the obvious plane of the wall, the beams or the pipes are also integrated within the colourful composition. All these previous by Bansky, Bordalo or in "Gallo" mountain illustrate the active role that architecture plays in street art when this media really transcends mural painting and the importance of this symbiotic relation with regard to expression.

GRAFFITI AND THE URBAN PUBLIC REALM

Despite or perhaps thanks to the ideas behind graffiti, the repercussion and the influence of street art goes beyond the imagery itself. Not only the walls are part of the changing process of the city, just as any architectural intervention, graffiti too modify the context where they colonize those walls. To identify and analyse the real scope of the intervention that street art works entails we need to reflect about the concept of the city boundaries. That´s it to say: where does the city really end or what does *exiting* a city really mean? The complexity that a city implies leads us to think that the parts that integrate it are more than only its physical limits. Our ideas, social relationships or actions, for example, are also related to what a city is even though these boundaries are ethereal but, nonetheless, real. We cannot physically visit cities from home but, if the city is more than the fabric generated by its buildings —fluxes, ideas, atmospheres, culture, traditions, people, religions, etc.— we can experiment parts of this complexity we call *city* without necessarily being there: with the help of books, other people's narratives, food, internet, virtual reality or even our own recollections of previous visits. Of course, this experience will never be complete but the point for our research is that street art really in-teracts with the urban fact at all levels. Occasionally, the pertinence or suitability of the message it conveys can be ubiquitous and, in some cases, almost universal.

Street art modifies places twofold, physically as much as conceptually. Cities are subject to perpetual and constant changes with every single intervention under their natural growth processes, their planning, their social and cultural trends and in so many other ways. Graffiti are not an exception regarding this everchanging urban nature. Every single second there is a new reference in the urban public space, a new signifier, a new starting point coded in the form of a graffiti. As we can observe in the Figure 5, the urban intervention attributed to Banksy in Venice will always be different from what we may see in both photographs. It is explicit: the water transforms the space and, also, the meaning of the intervention: once again, the context has an effective role to play. It draws an ephemeral plane of movement and it will draw too, through its absence, a new mark on the wall. This imprint reconfigures the image produced by the author and, simultaneously, the construction of a meaning for the citizen.

Fig. 5 - Without title by Banksy. Before and during a flood. Venice (Italy). 2019.

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GRAFFITI IN TIME

Cities and urban experiences are also a temporal concept. It is difficult to imagine an urban frozen scene: always, everywhere, something is happening [8]. Graffiti and street art are part of this temporal reality that implies change: this condition is added to their graphical nature to create a polyhedral complexity. On the one hand, graffiti are part of the city, a social fact; on the other hand, street art works are art themselves.

As fragments of the city, graffiti and street art belong to a particular place. They contribute to build the reality around them and, for this reason they cannot be separated from this cultural and contextual existence: where does their repercussion conclude? For instance, this sense of belonging that relate graffiti to a particular social context and to their authors is easily understood if we think of the very many that are overwritten when they lack the ability to represent or to give voice to others living there (see note 2). Occasionally, graffiti may transcend their physicality to actually become part of an intellectual discourse. We can understand graffiti as theoretical artifices embodying the cultural and social consciousness of certain cohorts of citizens; a social context where we can enter and remain, interact with or feel represented by. It is with regard to this understanding that we may think of a certain bi-directionally or *interactiveness*. The fact that street art is painted on walls projecting onto the public space —streets or plazas— make of them part of this urban realm and therefore, they never belong to a single person, not even to their authors. In fact, the meaning of this fragments of the cityscape are composed and layered by the diversity of people which relate to them; therefore, street art works cannot be reduced to a single interpretation.

As drawings or paintings, street art also shares the double nature we may find in any creative work: on the first place, the irreversibility of the hand that writes or draws and, on the second place, the reversibility of the eye that reads. As important as the artist who triggers the dialogue, the reader —the citizen— is probed by the work itself as

a signifier which he must interpret it to bestow a meaning to it. Reversibility means that the system of references with which the drawing is connected to is changing constantly: it will always possess a contemporary meaning and, because of that, it will be an open one. This is the way in which the hand of the graffitist and the eye of the citizen are connected through this sense of interactiveness (Fig.6). These permanent changes are part of this process through which the wall is transformed into a cultural fact that is produced by a single person in most cases [9] but receives the gazes of hundreds of people that build an opinion out of it.

Additionally, graffiti are, above all, cast into the temporality in which we dwell. This continuous changing nature we have been reflecting on is the reason to suggest that, especially in this kind of artistic expression, the eye of the citizen and the hand of the writer are intersecting each other. A graffiti is always building itself, always changing,

Fig. 6 - Las Etnias (Mural for Rio 2016 Olympics), Eduardo Kobra. Rio de Janeiro 2016.

subject to decay produced by its external exposure. From the very moment in which the author decides to initiate the process which from the world of the non-existent makes the graffiti appear into our contemporaneity, the expression of urban art is projected into reality and never stops to reshape itself. Unlike a piece of art, carefully kept and looked after in a museum or a particular collection to endure in time —that is: to be preserved and meticulously spared from the Heideggerian 'being cast into temporality' (Heidegger 1927)—, street art is exposed on the walls for time to consistently forge its decay, something which may also include vandalic overwriting of these art pieces by other graffitists. Graffiti have an expiration date from the moment in which they are painted on a previously existing surface, sooner or later they will end up being overwritten or destroyed: that is what we may refer to as the ephemeral nature of street art. And this is an interesting finding of this research:

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Fig. 7 - Graffiti on the Torrevieja walls. "La historia odia al hombre, él escribe horrores varios en sus páginas" by M33.

their collective and cultural dimension in connection with the author's intention contribute to conform a social imaginary that interferes in a kaleidoscopic way with the irreversibility of the process that configure them.

These are the reasons why mural paintings that have been created indoors cannot be properly considered street art. Their main characteristic, contrary to popular belief, has not only to do with their illegal condition but with the fact that they are projected into the urban public sphere (Fig. 7). The relation between the artist and the spectator regarding a piece of art in a museum is always a one-to-one relationship regardless of the implications it may acquire if it becomes famous and known to many: we, individually, have to pay a visit to the museum to experience it. It is true that mass media have achieved to project those renown works into the social imaginary to attain their iconic condition in some cases. However, graffiti are, by definition, projected into the public space, exposed to the scrutiny of every citizen passing by, whether he likes them or not: he is confronted to them needing

not to pay to observe these pieces as they are part of the cityscape. The conditions to create street art or graffiti cannot be artificially recreated: without the city —and probably without their vindication—, there is little room for graffiti; yet, there is room for them without their illegal condition, especially in street art. That is why this artistic expression is so unique and so especial: it belongs to our public realm. They often give voice to a minority: a result of our lifestyle, concerns and inequalities critically addressed by graffitists. A remainder of the inequity and disparity that triggers their own existence. It could be argued that their dialog spurs within the physical reality and is carried out in several conceptual levels; for instance, people's activities or actions can be influenced through their presence and most especially through their meaningfulness. People stop to watch and talk about them when this urban art works manage to move their political or social consciousness, and, eventually, to appeal to their own emotions. The colours of the neighbourhood may be modified (Figs. 7, 8, 9); teenagers might imagine new ways of creation; even some of the old neighbours may like to see the youngsters living in their city quarter giving ruined walls a second life. Additionally, the neces-

Fig. 8 - The typography of the artist Desher. 2020. Callosa del Segura (Alicante).

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Fig. 9 - Graffiti on the Torrevieja walls (or written walls). Pez plástico by Nego.

sity of communication that graffitists have is, once their work is accomplished, in some way, satisfied. The creative impulse hidden behind every graffiti is crystallized in the form of spots, colours, lines, codes and texts; once completed, a certain sense of belonging to the city is to be expected especially when the message is shared by the people who inhabit it.
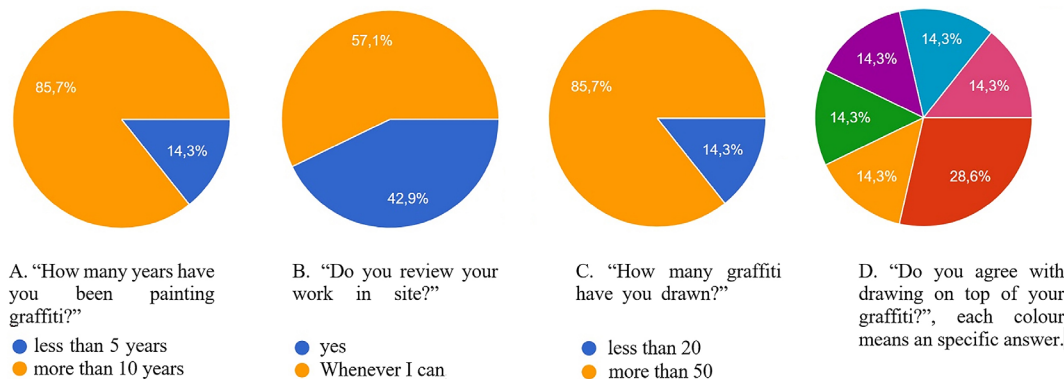
WALLS IN THE CITY OF TORREVIEJA

Any city houses the buildings which delimit streets and plazas that serve as the stage where every public activity takes place. Its atmosphere will be determined by the elements that shape this urban built environment. Columns, beams, walls, streets, plazas, limits, different materials, colours, rhythms, sequences, relationships and a long list of others are part of this aspect of the city related to its physical reality. In theory, all these aspects must be appropriately articulated. A dialogue is presupposed not only inside the same construction but, also, between different ones. The city —the *polis*— is a physical realm where this rich and interesting conversation occurs. Some of the more interesting spaces for it to happen, the elements in which a certain dose of randomness is more evident, are the interstitial ones. For this reason, there are more likely to become the context for surprise and enhanced
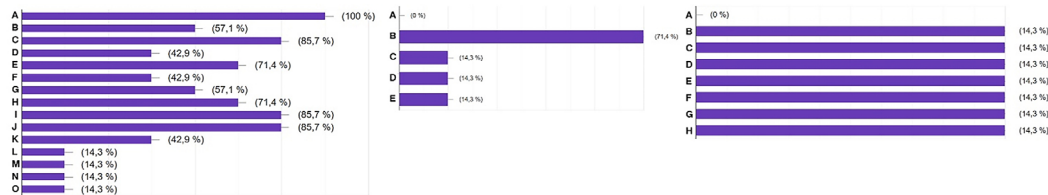
possibilities for expression. Street art, as a form of communication, find in these interstices the perfect pretext to work on.

As we can see in the following graphic examples, the chosen walls of Torrevieja are suggestive spaces to interact with for invited artists: it is them who should enlighten these city dull spaces. It is in these non-designed interstitial urban spaces where the city allows —or should we say, requires? — the boldest interventions. The urban fabric is, here, unfinished: the shapes, the materials, the uses are intrinsically related with the rest of the planned city but, at the same time and like *terrain vagues* (Solà-Morales 2002), they have not been thought from a practical point of view, nor have they been consciously designed. In the case of study in Torrevieja this was no exception. The city council of Torrevieja chose a series of these places and then selected artists who were proposed to insert their work in them (Figures 7, 9, 12, 13). Obviously, the spontaneity and the level of cultural protest we may find in the cases where these graffiti writers or painters undertake their task without legal permission is something than we cannot expect in this kind of initiatives; this is, in fact, one of the greatest differences we may find between *wild* and the *tamed* graffiti or street art.

CRITICAL MINORITY

The interviews, that various media conducted [10] with the artists that worked during this competition in the summer of 2019, were held at the end of the whole process, when the walls had been graffitied and the street artwork began to root its belonging to the city that housed them. In order to analyse the experience and the characteristics of the people who had been selected to intervene — only 10 artists were given the opportunity to work out of an initial selection of around 40— a series of google forms were proposed. Most of the artists (Figure 12) were experienced and well-known local street artists. Each of them had a different idea of what street art really is; this was crystal clear from the beginning: the graffitists had a heterogeneous mix of ideas, concepts and ways of understanding drawing and graffiti. That is the reason why the specific answers (the last of figure 10 and all the ones in figure 11) have been so diverse. The statistics of these figures also show us that most of the selected artists had extensive experience in the world of graffiti, which makes us ponder street art as an artistic discipline itself.

The idea of interaction between the artists and their urban public is another the interesting find-

Fig. 10 - First part of the questionnaire: generic answers.

A. "How many years have you been painting graffiti?"

● less than 5 years
● more than 10 years

B. "Do you review your work in site?"

● yes
● Whenever I can

C. "How many graffiti have you drawn?"

● less than 20
● more than 50

D. "Do you agree with drawing on top of your graffiti?", each colour means an specific answer.

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E. "How would you explain your graffiti?"
A: Figurative, B: Abstract, C: Urban,
D. Vindicative, E: Colourful,
F: Breaker, G: Illegal, H: Art,
I: An extension of myself,
J: A way of expressing,
K: An urban tattoo,
L: Ephemeral,
M: A public work of art,
N and O: Other,

F. "How does the time affect your work?"
A: Negative way, B: Positive way,
C: Positive but unexpected,
D: Unexpected,
E: Our work plays with time;

G. "Is your work in some digital repository?"
A: No,
B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I…: different ones (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Dropbox, iCloud, …)

Fig. 11 - Second part of the questionnaire: specific answers.

Fig. 12 - From left to right: Kike, Desher, Nego, Jacobo Palos, Carlos (Antoñito) graffiting on the walls.

ing we find in this research. Graffitists, in many cases, are aware of a certain message of which they are only heralds, a message that transcends their particular action and is intended for others. Something which makes us understand that the signifiers in the street art are not empty, they are rather based on strongly rooted ideas. At the end, the writing process, as Desher defines the fact of intervening in the city walls (Figure 12), confronts the artist and his technique to achieve an expressive final result. Either by brush, spray, sponges or any other tools or techniques used, the enlivening of the previous wall is made while the author is working on it. Street art may be an act of rebellion or violence against the support where it is are graffitied, a surface that has its own consistence, materiality and appearance previous to the intervention. It is in this way that graffiti respond to the context —the walls— which support them with a clear and universal message: the need to change their nature, regardless of their previous state, be it an immaculate white painted surface or a decaying brick facade. This change will mean, for every author, a completely different thing: improvement, reaction, evolution, revolution, highlight, camouflage, and a long etcetera.

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Fig. 13 - Graffiti on the walls (or written walls). (left) Studies for Pájaros and (right) Pájaros on site by Kike.

Although graffiti artists seem to be alone during the process of creation, it is undeniable that once the work has been created, it is part of the city and, in some way, despite its authorship, the work loses its belonging. That is an eternal dilemma with regard to authorship, intellectual property and street art that these graffitists have to face. The fact that they paint over a support whose property is not theirs questions the authorial traditional relationship of ownership. In this way we can say that the interferences in the result —however un-intentional— allow generating a theoretical body of reflection. The mirror feeling that the different solitudes produce creates the context where street art works are compared to each other, helping to understand and relate in opposition to society, but just as much, thanks to it.

The support —in the Torrevieja case mainly walls— has its own history and its own meaning; its own rules and its own void in the neighbour-hood that uses it or rather tends to neglect. Street artists are somewhat operating like architects, even more precisely, like urban planners: as sur-geons helping to dissect the critical minority un-certainties and helping this minority to express itself through their own work.

RESULTS

This research shows several interesting interpre-tations of street art: on one hand, graffiti are not only creative works but also part of a process in which the critical intellectual positioning of author has a fundamental role and, on the other hand, graffiti cannot be created indoors, being their pub-lic and urban conditions necessary (Fig.13). Even if initially, the action takes place in the solitude of a vacant lot, in a concealed wall or executed in the secrecy of the night because of the subversive condition of these actions, they are ultimately in-tended to be projected into the public urban do-main. They represent a critical outcry of the many impersonated by a few: if the message fails to give voice to others street art will be quickly replaced or overwritten. For instance, those in figures 7, 9, and 13 represent a critical position with regard to social issues: be it the dreary and gloomy image of the human fate by M33, the critical environmental consciousness of the effect of plastics accumulat-ing in the seas by Nego or the violence allegory of the birds fight by Kike.

Underground culture is the cause and the context, the reality that triggers graffiti's very existence and with regard to which they are measured. Like a mirror, all the meanings, issues and influence that graffiti contribute to raise are reflections on the surface of a subculture that, invisible or off-track the mainstream as it may be, irremediably exists (Figure 14). The domains of the territory of this people that we refer to as a critical minority is overlapped with our public space and embodied in these urban tattoos (García-Mayor 2017). This un-derground culture exists on our walls, in our cities, within our neighbourhoods. Just as a coin has two sides, the rebellion against the mainstream is also part of the *status quo*. All efforts to officially dis-sect, explain and analyse the essence of graffiti are part of an impossible task: graffiti cannot be eas-ily dissected, they have too many sides; cannot be fully explained through photography, they are per-petually changing and cropped by a photographic framing that detaches them from their meaningful contextualisation; nor can they genuinely be for-mal, as they are born against the establishment.

Fig. 14 - (Left) graffiti pioneers in Spain (Berti 2009), (Right) Without title by Juan Carlos Argüello Garzo AKA Muelle. 1980. Calle de la Montera, Madrid (España).

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CONCLUSIONS

We can briefly summarize the main conclusions of this research work that could well serve as the trigger for subsequent research:

Graffiti and street art are, as part of the cityscape, subject to its everchanging nature, and in contrast to formal art works, their life is ephemeral as much as it is publicly interactive. Furthermore, the difference between street art and vandalism is not determined by the technique used: the result has more to do with synchronization with the author's creativity and the intrinsic artistic value of his endeavours than with a perfectly defined field of legality. Interactiveness between the hand of the writer and the eyes of the observers has emerged in this research like one of the most powerful tools that street art has to prevail in time.

Street art at is best, achieves to intertwine writing, graphic expression and urban space: the three variables are interconnected to improve the meaningfulness of the message to convey. Most interestingly, street art may colonise architecture and urban spaces in such an intimate way that it could not be understood without such context: in that way we can understand its truly architectural dimension and its rooting in a specific place.

Graffitists give voice to others making visible the invisible process of cultural contemporary reaction. The individuality of the authors of the Torrevieja graffiti competition, their independence, freedom and disconnection is precisely the quality that best identifies their work, particularly, as a critical work group, and, also, as the voice of the critical minority that, day by day, draws our walls within a urban subculture.

NOTE

[1] This protocolised ritual greeting amongst communist leaders during the soviet era tried to show a especial closeness amongst comrades. Typically, a ritual salute of three consecutive kisses on the cheeks—originally associated with Orthodox cultures as a greeting between family or close friends—. It could eventually be replaced by a literal kiss on the mouth to show exceptional proximity and close affection between communist leaders.

[2] In addition to the normal decay produced in time, the graffiti progressively underwent a process of vandalic overwriting on different occasions — maybe part of a disrespectful behaviour by other graffitist, perhaps a further dissent on the side of left wing activists trying to selectively conceal a part of history or simply a lack of appeal of the importance of what it represented together with the oblivion of its symbolic value—; by 2005 the original image was hardly recognizable. In 2009 the local authorities decided to remove it together with many others to invite their authors to redo all their graffiti in a restored concrete surface with proper paints and a protective varnish to preserve them; they have become a touristic attraction in Berlin. Vrubel, who did not agree to such drastic procedure and raged against it, finally redid it however arguing that it wasn't properly speaking a restoration but, rather, a new painting. The second version is indeed more realistic than the first and, we may add, more academicist and polished than the original graffiti. (https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/kiss-of-death-officials-erase-historic-berlin-wall-mural-a-615900.html).

Unfortunately, by 2013 the graffiti had been intensively vandalised by reckless graffitists again.

[3] The pop song Libre popularised by Spanish singer Nino Bravo in 1972 was inspired by the first victim that attempted to surmount the wall and was shot by the East German guards, Peter Fechter, a decade before (https://www.abc.es/tecnologia/abci-origen-cancion-libre-nino-201109200000_noticia.html). The song became an icon of Spanish pop during the last years of Franco's regime and was due to the motivation of its inspiration that it became, amongst some, as an anticommunism hymn and, eventually, was prohibited in Cuba. Ironically, the lyrics could also be a metaphor for the craving of freedom during the death rattle of the Spanish dictatorship.

[4] Due to the strongly politically charged nature of the physical barrier built by the Israeli government against the will of the Palestinian people during the Second Intifada uprising in 2000, the first refer to it as a security barrier against terrorism —the alleged reason for its construction by the Israelis— while the second call it the apartheid wall —arguing racist reasons for its construction—. Although the barrier —10% of its stretch is a concrete wall and 90% a strongly secured fence— has proven to be effective as a protective strategy to secure the boundary minimising terrorist attacks ever since, it has certainly undermined the Palestinian potential to develop and hindered their people to move freely between the West Bank and Gaza or simply to commute to Israel, were many of them work.

[5] The Street Art NYC blog is a well-known website curating works of the Bushwick Collective

and other New York based street artists (https://streetartnyc.org/).

[6]   http://art.web.unc.edu/public-art/rage-flower-thrower-2/

[7] It is interesting to note how during the construction of a building on the former plot of the parking some time later, the developers took the necessary precautions to preserve it, something which speaks about the value of the piece itself. However, the meaning was doubly perverted: instead of a park, the developers built a block; as it is now only seen in a narrow alley between the two buildings the art piece has been completely decontextualized and, because of it, its meaning totally distorted (https://forthmagazine.com/visual-art/2019/03/find-the-hidden-banksy-in-los-angeles/).

[8] The sensation of deadliness and forlorn abandonment in some of the most populous and liveliest cities in the world during the 'stay at home' policies caused by the COVID-19 health crisis that we are now experiencing shows, by contrast, how very ineffective the idea of stasis is to depict the city's nature. Cities are the great stage for the social nature of humankind to manifest, gathering and thriving within their architectural material limits even if these are, to some extent, static. It is us, the inhabitants, the ones who make up the scenes with our daily activities.

[9] Obviously, there are also collectively painted graffiti such as the ones that graffiti gangs produce in the end-to-end graffiti typically on trains that are graffitied in a short period of time as it is an illegal practice. Something which is actually very disruptive generating great expenses to the public budget and should, therefore, be

strongly condemned. For instance, RENFE —the Spanish public railway company— had to spend 15.000.000€ to clean this kind of graffiti in the year 2018 (https://elpais.com/ccaa/2018/11/16/madrid/1542384629_025724.html).

[10]   https://www.ivoox.com/entrevista-jacobo-palos-wey-manuel-antonito-concurso-audios-mp3_rf_35170105_1.html.

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